

Life Behind the Line: Understanding the Lived Experiences, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of Crisis Line Volunteers

Keith Morgan D. Olazo¹, Dennisse Q. Dator²,
Chrissy Mae Lucky S. Lozada³, Shairajon R. Villaluz⁴

Author Information:

¹⁻⁴College of Arts and Sciences Education,
University of Mindanao, Davao City,
Philippines

Correspondence:

k.olazo.542185@umindanao.edu.ph

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Abstract. As the demand for mental health services increases, the need for immediate psychological support, such as crisis hotlines, has intensified. However, local research focusing on the unique experiences of crisis line volunteers remains under researched, with existing studies primarily emphasizing service users. Hence, this study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of crisis line volunteers. Utilizing a descriptive phenomenological research design, eight participants were selected through purposive sampling and virtually underwent audio-recorded in-depth interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed both rewarding and challenging aspects of crisis line volunteering. Volunteers experienced personal growth, emotional resilience, and enhanced social and emotional awareness, while also encountering occupational stressors and barriers to the effective delivery of psychological support. Despite these challenges, they maintained their well-being through self-care practices, effective time management, social support from family, peers, and fellow volunteers, and the utilization of organizational resources. Furthermore, volunteers viewed crisis line work as inherently rewarding, emphasizing the importance of compassionate communication and the lessons gained from diverse human experiences. At the same time, they recognized the limitations of crisis support and highlighted the need for enhanced organizational and external resources to better address the demands of crisis intervention. Overall, this study highlights the essential role of crisis line volunteers and contributes to the limited local literature on their unique experiences. The findings suggest that strengthening volunteers' coping resources, organizational support systems, and workforce capacity is vital to sustaining volunteer well-being and ensuring effective and accessible crisis intervention services.

Keywords: Crisis Hotlines; Crisis Line Volunteers; Lived Experiences; Phenomenology; Philippines

Introduction

As mental health continues to obtain recognition in today's society, the demand for accessible and immediate support has crucially increased. In connection, the intensified awareness and growing cases of mental health dilemmas experienced by people led to the emergence of crisis line responders. According to Willems et al. (2021), crisis line volunteers are trained volunteers who provide round-the-clock emotional support at no charge through telephone, chat, or email. In addition, they have been proven effective in mitigating psychological distress and averting suicidality (Willems et al., 2021; Gould et al., 2021). However, despite their indispensable contributions, these responders are not exempt from the possible toll that comes with the mode of work they have. Most volunteers often have insufficient time for a break due to the high volume of calls they receive throughout the day (Willems et al., 2021).

Global studies on crisis line volunteers highlight both the challenges and benefits of the role. Volunteers often experience emotional strain, social isolation, moderate stress, and attrition, but they also report supportive volunteer communities, personal growth, improved coping skills, motivation, and peer support (Cooney & McCashin, 2023; Vattøe et al., 2020; Kalgren, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of supporting the well-being of mental health workers (Sweileh, 2020; Cosgrove et al., 2020; Ortiz-Fune et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, research has largely focused on hotline users rather than crisis line volunteers. Casquejo et al. (2023) found that callers viewed responders as empathic listeners who provide a safe space for support. However, limited local research has examined the well-being, lived experiences, and coping strategies of volunteers. As a result, there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding the unique experiences, coping mechanisms, and support needs of crisis line volunteers. This gap highlights the need for further studies to better understand and support this group.

This study is anchored on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory of Bakker and Demerouti (2014) and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory of Hobfoll (1989). The JD-R Theory explains how the demands associated with a role may affect an individual's well-being, while available resources can help reduce strain and promote motivation and personal growth. Although crisis line volunteers are not formally employed, the theory remains applicable in understanding the challenges and support systems present in their volunteer work. The COR Theory further explains how individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect resources to cope with stress and prevent resource loss. Together, these theories provide a useful framework for examining the lived experiences, coping strategies, and well-being of crisis line volunteers.

Understanding the lived experiences of crisis line volunteers may benefit various people and institutions. Specifically, the results benefit the following: Crisis line volunteers may gain insights into managing challenges and develop personal interventions to support their well-being. Moreover, this may help them improve their coping mechanisms and assist them in dealing with the intricacies of their work. Mental health institutions and crisis line organizations can also benefit from this study by addressing organizational difficulties, restructuring training programs, and developing a more effective policy. Focusing on the well-being of the volunteers, they can improve the overall response efficiency, mitigate burnout, and promote a more effective and sustainable environment. Lastly, future researchers may use this study as a reference to study related topics concerning the lived experiences of crisis line volunteering.

Research Questions

Crisis hotlines are open to everyone, offering immediate support to clients with respect for diversity regardless of political, religious, or socioeconomic backgrounds. However, volunteering on a crisis line can be challenging, as responders frequently face complexities. With this, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of crisis line volunteers?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of crisis line volunteers?
3. What are the insights of crisis line volunteers?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of crisis line volunteers in handling crisis calls. The participants gathered were eight (8) crisis line volunteers from a mental health organization in Metro Manila, Philippines, selected through purposive sampling. Eligible participants were at least 18 years old, had completed responder training, had volunteered for at least one month, and had experience handling crisis calls. Volunteers from other organizations, those without responder training or crisis call experience, and individuals legally incapable of providing consent were excluded. The study was limited to volunteers from a single organization and focused solely on their perspectives. As a qualitative study with a small purposively selected sample, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all crisis line volunteers in the Philippines and may be influenced by participants' self-reported experiences and personal interpretations.

Literature Review

International Context

International literature has increasingly examined the well-being of crisis line volunteers, recognizing the emotional demands associated with crisis intervention work. Studies have identified challenges such as emotional strain, social isolation, stress, heavy workloads, and volunteer attrition, which may affect volunteers' ability to sustain their roles over time (Cooney & McCashin, 2023; Vattøe et al., 2020; Willems et al., 2021). At the same time, research emphasizes several protective factors, including supportive volunteer communities, peer support, personal growth, improved coping skills, and a sense of purpose derived from helping others (Cooney & McCashin, 2023; Kalgren, 2023; Vattøe et al., 2020). These findings suggest that crisis line volunteering involves both challenges and rewards, highlighting the importance of organizational support in promoting volunteer well-being and retention.

Local Context

In the Philippine setting, research on mental health hotlines has primarily focused on the experiences and perceptions of service users. Casquejo et al. (2023) found that callers generally viewed hotline responders as empathic listeners who provide a safe and supportive environment during times of distress. While these findings demonstrate the value of crisis hotline services, they offer limited insight into the experiences of the volunteers themselves. Consequently, there remains a scarcity of local studies examining the well-being, challenges, and coping strategies of crisis line volunteers. This gap highlights the need for further research to better understand the realities of crisis line volunteering and to inform support mechanisms for volunteers in the Philippine context (Sweileh, 2020 & Ortiz-Fune et al., 2020).

Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory of Bakker and Demerouti (2014) explains how job demands and job resources influence an individual's well-being. Job demands refer to aspects of a role that require sustained effort and may lead to strain, while job resources help individuals manage demands, achieve goals, and promote personal growth. Although crisis line volunteers are not formally employed, the theory remains relevant in understanding how the demands and resources associated with crisis intervention shape their experiences and well-being.

Conservation of Resources Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory of Hobfoll (1989) posits that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valuable resources, as resource loss can negatively affect well-being. In the context of crisis line volunteering, the theory helps explain how volunteers utilize and preserve personal and organizational resources to cope with the emotional demands of their role. Together with the JD-R Theory, it provides a framework for understanding the coping strategies and well-being of crisis line volunteers.

Gaps in Literature

While international studies have explored the well-being of crisis line volunteers, local research in the Philippines has primarily focused on hotline users rather than volunteers. As a result, there is limited understanding of the lived experiences, coping strategies, and well-being of crisis line volunteers in the Philippine context. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the experiences of crisis line volunteers and the factors that support their well-being.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-phenomenological research design. According to Johnson (2025), descriptive phenomenology presents themes closely tied to participants' accounts. The narrative culminates in an "essence statement" that offers an unbiased and pure description of the phenomenon shared by the participants. This approach involved collecting free descriptions of volunteers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights through structured interviews. The design was deemed appropriate for the study, as it enabled the identification of significant statements that reveal the essence of the phenomenon, their clustering into meaningful units, and their condensation into overarching themes.

Sampling Design

The study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, which intentionally selects participants based on their particular experiences and knowledge of a phenomenon (Robinson, 2024). This sampling method was utilized to generate rich and relevant data aligned with the study's objectives and purpose by selecting participants based on a predetermined set of criteria.

Research Locale

The study data were virtually collected from an established mental health organization, situated in Metro Manila, Philippines. The organization provides professional services such as counseling, trainings, seminars, and workshops. More importantly, the locale was selected due to its 24/7 crisis hotline with trained volunteers who provide immediate emotional support that is free and anonymous to anyone in need.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were eight (8) crisis line volunteers, which were selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria. The criteria were the following: 18 years of age or above, have undergone training to be a responder, have volunteered for at least a month, and have taken or responded

to crisis calls. Volunteers from other organizations, those with no training experience, those who have not taken crisis calls, and those legally incapable of participating were excluded from this study.

Research Instrument

This study used a researcher-developed structured interview guide. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives to gather in-depth data on the volunteers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights. Probing questions were also included to clarify and justify the participants' responses. For content validation, two validators, one an Institutional Research Head and the other a Registered Psychologist, validated the guide based on ethics, artistry, and rigor.

Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, the researchers first submitted a proposal letter outlining the study's objectives, methodology, and significance to the crisis line manager to obtain permission to conduct the study involving their organization. After approval, the researchers secured the list of crisis line volunteers who served as the pool of participants. Next, the virtual informed consent form was distributed via Google Forms, which included the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation. Following this, a brief qualifying interview was conducted to verify that prospective participants met the study's inclusion criteria. Data were collected through video interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes, with audio recording obtained with participants' consent. After collection, the data were securely stored, and the files were accessible only to the researchers. The data were then transcribed verbatim and translated with software assistance, and transcripts were systematically coded to ensure that no personal identifiers were included. Finally, the extracted data were analyzed using thematic analysis by a Data Analyst, who compared participants' accounts to identify recurring descriptions and patterns and synthesized them into major themes. This approach enabled the researchers to clearly present the participants' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of crisis line volunteers?

Personal Growth and Emotional Resilience. Crisis line volunteers highlighted positive experiences amid its challenges, contributing to their growth and resilience. While the role can be anxiety-inducing, scary, and intimidating, volunteers found it fulfilling and rewarding, allowing them to acquire valuable experiences from their callers.

"...I would say there are like two sides talaga. So, the first side is, of course, fulfilling siya because especially when you get a call na, you feel na you were able to help the person who called...yung other side naman. It is more. Sometimes I can get anxious or scared because the people who called naman diba would not be calling if it was not their last resort." (I would say there are two sides. The first side is, of course, that it is fulfilling—especially when you get a call where you feel like you were able to help the caller. However, I sometimes feel anxious or scared. After all, the people who call would not be reaching out if it was not their last resort – P3)

"Actually, sa una, intimidating siya, parang takot ako talaga mag-volunteer or takot ako mag-responder... masaya na minsan nakakatakot, parang ganon, pero I can say na it's fulfilling naman kasi parang nakaka-proud din siya kasi parang I don't think lahat kaya mag-responder." (Actually, at first, it was intimidating, I was really scared to volunteer or to be a responder. You experience a mix of emotions—sometimes it's fulfilling, sometimes it's scary. But I can say that it's rewarding because it makes me feel proud. I don't think everyone has the ability to be a responder – P4)

"So first it is tough. It is very eye-opening, realizing just the different demographic backgrounds of the people who call us." (At first, it was tough. It is very eye-opening, realizing just the different demographic backgrounds of the people who call us – P5)

Social Intelligence and Emotional Awareness. Crisis line volunteers emphasized how shared experiences foster stronger connections with fellow responders. The role enhanced their empathy, awareness, and listening skills, making them more supportive of their callers and personal relationships.

"...parang mas naging connected pa ako dun sa mga co-volunteers ko. Kasi, sinashare ko sa kanila kung ano yung nangyari. Tapos, parang, sinasabi ko kung ano yung mga feeling kong nagawa ko. Tapos,

parang, nagkakaroon kami ng connection as a team kasi hinihelp namin yung isa't isa." (I feel even more connected to my fellow volunteers because I share my experiences with them. I tell them what happened during my shifts and what I felt I did well. This creates a strong bond within our team since we support each other – P4)

"Well, it honestly makes me feel more connected to, let us say, humanity or to other people in general. Because we hear people at their vulnerable moments." (Well, it honestly makes me feel more connected to, let us say, humanity or to other people in general because we hear people at their most vulnerable moments – P5)

"...and then, like, emotional boundary. Like balancing empathy and compassion. However, at the same time, I do not let it spill into my personal life. If you hear someone going through a difficult time, you feel bad, right? And then, after the call, it is not magic. You cannot just snap your fingers and all the sadness goes away. It does not work as well. However, you have to find ways to regulate your emotions. Moreover, say, okay, you empathize, but the call is done. It is beyond your control." (And then, there are emotional boundaries, like balancing empathy and compassion, but at the same time, not letting them spill into my personal life. Because if you hear someone going through a difficult time, you feel bad, right? And then, after the call, it is not magic. You cannot just snap your fingers and all the sadness goes away. It does not work like that. However, you must find ways to regulate your emotions and say, "Okay, you empathize, but the call is done. It is beyond your control" – P7)

Occupational Stressors in Crisis Line Work. Crisis line volunteers shared emotional and physical strain from their line of work. They dealt with stress and anxiety due to the uncertainty and heaviness of the types of calls they receive, and experienced disrupted sleep patterns, back pain, and fatigue due to late-night shifts and long periods of sitting.

"...very emotional yung caller as in the way she cried, sobrang, as in hagulhol talaga. And, parang, ano yan, parang nadadala mo yung energy niya, parang, sobrang you feel bad because of nangyari sa kanya." (The caller was very emotional—as in, the way she cried, it was intense. And it is like, you absorb her energy, and you feel so bad because of what happened to her – P1)

"...it is draining, and you feel overloaded eh, after the call, no? Yun siguro yung pinakamahirap doon kasi parang you are absorbing that kind of energies, siyempre." (It is draining, and you feel overloaded after a call, right? I guess that is the most challenging part because it feels like you are absorbing those kinds of energies, of course – P2)

"Hindi mo alam kung ang itong number na tumatawag na to ay something na life-threatening ba? or parang chill lang? Gusto lang talaga makipag-usap. So, ayun. So, talagang may kaba kang mararamdaman." (You never know if the next caller has a life-threatening situation or if they just want to have a casual conversation. So, there's always a sense of anxiety – P6)

"...lagi kaming nakaupo lalo pag mga challenging calls as in matagal yung calls namin 30 minutes to 1-hour minsan namalagpas pa ng 1 hour so masakit sa likod, masakit sa paa, tapos after nun ano na parang wala nakakapagod, nakakapagod mentally, physically." (we're always sitting especially during challenging calls, they last long—30 minutes to 1 hour, sometimes even beyond that. So, my back and legs hurt. And after that, I feel exhausted—physically and mentally – P1)

"...sira na rin yung sleep pattern ba, yung circadian rhythm. So, isa rin siya sa nakakadagdag ng stress, ng pagkakasakit din. So, ayun, aside sa physical fatigue, tipong pagod na yung likod mo, or ano, yan, possibility din kasi sa shifting hours na nakaka-apekto din siya." (Your sleep pattern—your circadian rhythm—gets messed up. That adds to the stress and even increases the risk of getting sick. Aside from physical fatigue, like having back pain from sitting too long, the irregular shifts also take a toll – P6)

Barriers in Crisis Line Practice and Psychological Support. Crisis line volunteers encountered challenges that hindered the effective delivery of support to clients including uncooperative callers, referral disputation, mental health stigma, and misinterpretation of the role of volunteers as that of license counselors.

"Mental health responders kami, may mga callers na sometimes ayaw nila kumusap sa amin kasi we are not counselors. So, medyo challenging yun sa amin because as much as we wanted to help them kahit na through ano lang, basically expressing their feelings, mas gusto nila kumusap sa counselors which is

naiintindihan din naman namin." (We are just mental health responders; some callers refuse to talk to us because we are not counselors. It is challenging because as much as we want to help, they prefer talking to counselors, even just by listening to them. We understand that – P1)

"Part of our roles as responders is to promote getting counseling with us, in our organization or with other organizations. We also even try to help them find something that's near to them or that is affordable or the organizations that provide free access or more affordable access... provide more psychoeducation... I have introduced the difference between a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and even us, as responders." (So, part of our role as responders is to promote counseling, whether with our organization or others. We even try to help callers find services... provide psychoeducation... explain the differences between a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a crisis line responder – P7)

"Sometimes they hesitate because they want to keep their anonymity. So, they hesitate when we try to refer them, to help them by referring them to a counselor or something. They do not want; they just want to limit it to the crisis line." (Sometimes callers hesitate because they want to keep their anonymity. They do not want to be referred. So, they hesitate when we try to help by referring them to a counselor or something. They do not want that. They just want to limit it to the crisis line – P8)

"...may parang trend na rin kasi ng mental health awareness lately. Parang, nagiging aware na yung mga tao na, ah, totoo pala, may depression, may anxiety, and other medical or mental health condition, no? Pero, andyan pa rin kasi yung stigma. Yes. Tapos, ayun nga, mahal din ng pa therapy sessions dito sa Pilipinas. So, ayun, siyempre, hanap ka ng paraan, at dito sila dadagsa." (There has been a growing trend in mental health awareness lately. People are becoming more aware that conditions like depression and anxiety are really medical and psychological issues. But despite this awareness, the stigma still exists. On top of that, therapy sessions in the Philippines are expensive, so people look for alternative ways to seek help—and that's why many turn to the Crisis Line – P6)

Studies have shown that volunteers experience satisfaction, inspiration, and personal growth as they recognize the impact they make, gain insights from their callers, and are pushed beyond their comfort zones (Willems et al., 2021; Faletahan et al., 2021; Turk et al., 2022). In terms of emotional difficulties, individuals demonstrate resilience by overcoming negative emotions with positive ones (Yi et al., 2020). Resilience is an essential factor in upholding the well-being of mental health advocates, fostering personal growth and emotional strength as they manage the challenges of the job (Cummins, 2022). Similarly, participants in the study emphasized how their roles as crisis line volunteers, despite being challenging, immensely contributed to their personal growth and emotional resilience. The fulfillment expressed by the participants stemmed from providing meaningful support, which served as a manifestation of their emotional resilience and strengthened their motivation and ability to continue supporting their callers.

Besides personal gains, volunteering also shaped the participants' interpersonal functioning and relationships with others. Social and emotional intelligence facilitate positive outcomes for personal and social well-being by enabling mental health workers to recognize their emotions and manage social relationships effectively (Azañedo et al., 2020). Furthermore, Nichol et al. (2024) emphasized that volunteering enriches volunteers' social interconnectedness and support, improving their relationships with fellow volunteers, friends, and neighbors. Clark (2023) stated that emotional awareness is vital for mental health workers. This was also observed by Adiong and Angeles (2019), who found that mental health care providers exhibited high emotional intelligence, allowing them to perceive, express, and navigate emotions appropriately. However, their adversity quotient was found to be below average to low, suggesting that they sometimes perceived challenges as beyond their control. Likewise, participants in the present study experienced stronger connections with their fellow volunteers as they supported one another through the experiences they shared with their callers. Their social intelligence was shaped through their work, enabling them to become more empathetic toward their loved ones and humanity in general. Participants also acknowledged their boundaries as volunteers, recognizing their professional limitations while maintaining emotional sensitivity toward their callers.

Despite these positive outcomes, crisis line volunteering also entails considerable emotional and physical demands. Vural (2020) highlighted that emotional strain among crisis line responders arises from enduring exposure to emotionally charged situations. For instance, calls involving high risk and uncertainty, including psychiatric problems and suicidal motives, significantly contributed to volunteers' anxiousness to handle calls (Willems et al., 2021). Similarly, Allen and Augustin (2021) also reported that volunteers experience emotional exhaustion as the work require them to constantly regulate their emotion and to keep their composure. Moreover, healthcare professionals encounter physical challenges and multiple stressors that negatively impact their mental and emotional well-being (Søvold et al., 2021). In complimentary, a study

revealed that high workload and irregular shifts strongly correlate with fatigue and poor sleep quality (Fan et al., 2021). In the field of crisis line, volunteers experience insufficient time for breaks, as the nature of work involves high volume of calls, time, and urgency. In the study, participants expressed that taking various calls in different situations consumed their energy and often left them feeling overwhelmed. Moreover, they disclosed having overthinking tendencies and internalizing anxiety from the callers' conditions. The participants also experienced body pain, disturbed sleep patterns, and exhaustion because of long-duration calls and unconventional shifts. The need to remain on standby around the clock, sitting for hours to respond to callers who are in distress, also exacerbates their fatigue.

Apart from these internal demands, crisis line volunteers also encountered challenges arising from external and systemic factors. Previous studies highlighted numerous barriers to effective delivery of crisis line and psychological support. In general, stigma served as a significant barrier to seeking mental health services causing treatment avoidance and a wide intervention gap for mental health problems (Gallimore et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2020). Locally, stigma also made Filipinos reluctant to seek mental health support (Martinez et al., 2020). In the field of crisis lines, callers' expectation to provide psychological intervention and the perceived impersonality and difficulty of anonymity in crisis hotlines hinder the callers' openness (Dela Cerna et al., 2022; Strand et al., 2020). In relation, participants in the study expressed the insufficiency of awareness when it comes to the importance of mental health, particularly in the rural areas, where most of the callers were still uneducated about the different roles and scope of mental health professionals. Callers who rejected help, prefers to speak with counselors, and are hesitant to open or accept referral due to fears of anonymity and being identified as part of the mental health minority, where among the difficulties experienced by the crisis line volunteers.

Research Question 2: What are the coping mechanisms of crisis line volunteers?

Balanced Self-Care and Time Management. Crisis line volunteers emphasized the importance of holistic self-care covering mental, emotional, and physical health. By scheduling time around work commitments, having hobbies or distractions, setting personal boundaries, and proactively handling stress, they manage the challenges of their work.

"...currently having a job takes much time. Actually, wala pa akong ginagawa at the moment, no, but siguro yung plan ko na lang is little by little, siguro po when my load lightens up, start muna sa mga weekends when wala talagang work, parang mga two hours, two hours per day..." (Currently, having a job takes much time; I do not have any activities right now. However, my plan is little by little. When my load lightens up, I will start on weekends when there is no work, probably two hours per day – P3)

"Yung scheduling nung day mo. Kung kailan ka magsishift, ano lang yung kaya mong i-take na shift." (I think scheduling is critical—planning your day, deciding when you will take a shift, and figuring out what shifts you can realistically handle – P4)

"Mahalaga na may mga activities ka, distractions or hobbies, parang practice what you preach ba? Kasi yun din naman yung nababanggit namin sa mga callers namin. So, mahalaga rin na meron ka pang distress..." (It is crucial to have activities, distractions, or hobbies—basically, practicing what we preach. After all, that is what we often tell our callers. Having ways to de-stress and release negative emotions – P6)

"...meron akong mantra na sinasabi sa sarili ko na this is about the caller, not you." (I always have a mantra that I say to myself: "This is about the caller, not you – P1)

"...when you are in it, when you are working, when you are volunteering, you can get lost from the busyness of it all. So being proactive about taking care of yourself can be a game changer in tackling these challenges." (When you are in it—when you are working, when you are volunteering—you can get lost in the busyness of it all – P6)

Relational Support and Shared Responsibility. Crisis line volunteers highlighted that support from internal connections, such as co-volunteers and superiors, and external relationships, including partners, family, and friends, provide emotional stability. This support network helps them navigate the challenges of their work, allowing them to manage stress and sustain their commitment to volunteering.

"...yung partner ko, yung mga tao dito sa bahay, my dogs, yan sila yung nakaka help mag manage nang challenge." (So, my partner, the people here in the house, my dogs, they help me manage the challenges – P1)

"I do live with my family so after the call, parang, I cannot necessarily tell them, naman, about the caller, ganun, pero being in their presence and knowing that there are people around me, parang, it makes me feel better kasi it also helps me release, parang, the thoughts that I might have carried from the calls since we also try to empathize with the caller so we can sometimes absorb that..." (I do live with my family, so after the call, I cannot necessarily tell them about the caller. However, being in their presence and knowing that people are around me makes me feel better because it helps me release the thoughts I might have carried from the calls. Since we also try to empathize with the caller, we sometimes absorb their feelings – P3)

"...mahalaga na may nakakausap ka na someone na nakaka-relate sa'yo. Alam yung trabaho bilang isang crisis line volunteer. Kasi syempre, mas naiintindihan nila yung struggles, someone na mas makaka-relate sa'yo. So, may nakukuha kang support lalo na sa mga difficult and challenging calls na na-receive. Kasi baka may past experience na sila at pwedeng mabigay sa'yo na advice." (It's important to have someone to talk to who can relate to your experiences, someone who understands what it's like to be a crisis line volunteer. They can better understand the struggles and challenges that come with the job. Having their support is really helpful, especially after handling difficult and challenging calls. They might have past experiences and advice that could help – P5)

"...people I work with and our volunteers and interns also they are beneficial in keeping the lines open and available, and whenever we encounter whatever one person encounters a tough call, they need advice on how to handle such a call, our team is very available in providing that help and providing that advice..." (People I work with—as well as our volunteers and interns. They are beneficial in keeping the lines open and available. Whenever one person encounters a tough call and needs advice – P8)

Utilization of Organizational Resources. Crisis line volunteers found organizational resources helpful, such as training, peer support meetings, learning sessions, and psychological support helpful and easily accessible in managing their challenges.

"The training that we have at the beginning of our journeys is also great because we are affirmed of our skills right at the start. We are affirmed of what we can do for the people who will call the line." (The training that we have at the beginning of our journeys is also very significant because, right at the start, we are affirmed in our skills. We are affirmed in what we can do for the people who will call the line – P7)

"...yung mga training, seminars na inooffer ng company, siyempre, malaking bagay yun, it helps siyempre, sa akin, tapos, with that, kung merong criteria or characteristics or whatever requirements na kailangan ng isang responder, nai-enhance, kumbaga yung skills, nai-enhance through the training and seminars..." (the training and seminars offered by the company are really important, it helps, at least for me. And with that, it enhances the skills required of a responder. The skills are enhanced through the trainings and seminars – P2)

"...yung mga peer meetings namin. Kumbaga, lahat ng volunteer, lahat ng supervisors, magsasama-sama sa isang Zoom meeting, for example. Tapos, ayon, magdi-discuss kami, call sharing, kung ano yung mga difficult calls or interesting calls na na-receive nila, pag-uusapan doon. And then, magpa-provide kami na feedback or mga tips and techniques na kung paano siya mas maha-handle na maayos..." (We have peer meetings where all volunteers and supervisors come together in a Zoom meeting, for example. During these meetings, we discuss call sharing, where volunteers talk about difficult or interesting calls they have received. We then ask for feedback, tips, and techniques on how to handle similar situations more effectively – P6)

"...debriefing after you take a heavy call, you can just private message the one of the two staff that are on shift anytime and as for the resources like the questions, the flowchart, we do have like a google classroom where we all of the resources we had during the training are there..." (For debriefing after taking a heavy call, you can private message one of the two staff members on shift anytime. As for resources, like the questions and the flowchart, we have a Google Classroom where all the resources from the training are stored – P3)

"...for our counseling, we can just easily set that up with someone from other people from our team who would arrange that for us. So, yeah, it is very easy just to email that person we need to reach out to." (For our counseling, we can easily set that up with someone from our team; they would arrange that for us. So, it is very easy to just shoot an email to the person we need to reach out to – P7)

Studies highlighted that mental health practitioners engage in self-care practices which promote and alleviate adverse effects of compassion fatigue, especially those working with trauma (Posluns & Gall, 2020; La Mott & Marin, 2019). Additionally, Young et al. (2024) stated that effective time management interventions support employees' mental well-being by aiding the adverse effects of time poverty and work intensification. This aligns with the participants' narratives, as they maintain self-care through leisure activities, self-help talks, setting boundaries between work and personal life, and accepting the limitations of their role. Also, volunteering at a crisis line creates a sense of having too little time given the shifts and outside responsibilities (time poverty), and the fluctuating volume of traumatic calls intensifies it (work intensification), making effective time management interventions vital.

Aside from the individual coping strategies, support from others also emerged as an important protective factor for volunteers. Social support have various benefits, including enhanced individual performance and mitigating the adverse effects of stressful demands (Jolly et al., 2021). Meanwhile, professional networks, including colleagues, supervisors, and the organization itself, significantly mitigate stress and burnout (Mensah, 2021; Willems et al., 2020). In the present study, participants found that maintaining relational support essential in sustaining their mental health. Being surrounded by loved ones, even just their mere presence, provides them with a sense of community, reassurance, and emotional relief. Volunteers also found that shared responsibility with their co-volunteers and superiors was an essential source of support. Connecting with people inside the crisis line made them feel related, especially during tough calls. The exchange of experiences and ideas in handling challenging calls also helped manage the common problems they encountered.

In addition, organizational support was likewise perceived as essential in fostering resilience among crisis line volunteers. Studies indicate that one way to bolster resilience in first responder groups is through operational training programs, and that being prepared was strongly linked to lower secondary traumatic stress in crisis line volunteers (Wild et al., 2020; Spafford et al., 2023). Moreover, American Psychological Association (2024) revealed that having mental health resources available is important, but ensuring their accessibility is equally essential. Participants echoed this, emphasizing that regular training alongside organizational resources such as learning sessions, peer meetings, and webinars was practical in helping them navigate challenges and that the skills acquired during training are sharpened or reinforced over time through relearning. In addition, they also highlighted the importance of having immediate access to debriefing sessions, therapy or counseling, ready-made manuals, and the ability to reach out to superiors whenever needed. These resources help them handle their emotions and provide reassurance and guidance, strengthening their confidence in managing distressing situations.

Research Question 3: What are the insights of crisis line volunteers?

The Rewarding Nature of Crisis Line Volunteering. Crisis line volunteers shared that the work is fulfilling and is driven by intrinsic motivation. It allows them to help others in distress remotely, gaining valuable experience.

"...kahit na nasa bahay ka lang meron pang natutulungan and marami ka natutulungan dahil sa dami nang tumatawag. So, yun talaga yung parang pinaka nagmumotivate sa akin, nakakahelp ako ng people while I am here sa bahay..." (Even though you're at home, you're still able to help people, and you're able to help many due to the number of callers. That's really what motivates me: being able to help people while I'm here at home – P1)

"Personally, para sa akin kasi it is an act of good deeds. Parang, di ba, parang isang bagay yun na kusan loob, ako rin na, yeah, that you are doing good for others, no, parang, yan, ganun, act of good deeds." (Personally, for me, it is an act of good deeds. It is something done from the heart, doing good for others. That is how I see it—an act of good deeds – P2)

"Siguro, we can encourage others to be crisis line volunteers by siguro starting with awareness and that there are many people across the country that might not be like us who might have an immediate support system and just sharing maybe if they have extra time, they can also take the time to just listen to others share their stories unload what they are feeling so overall even though if you just help one person that can also have a ripple effect on the people around them and just knowing that you help someone even during your free time you just took one call you do not know how much of a positive effect you had on that person." (Maybe we can encourage others to become crisis line volunteers by starting with awareness. Many people nationwide might not have an immediate support system like we do. Just share with them that if they have extra time, they can take a moment to listen to others, share their stories, and unload their feelings. Even if

you help just one person, it can have a ripple effect on the people around them. Knowing that you helped someone, even if it is just one call – P3)

The Power of Compassionate Communication. Crisis line volunteers emphasized that through their experiences, they have learned practical counseling skills such as active listening and empathy. They also highlighted the importance of engaging with individuals nonjudgmentally, and the importance of kindness, patience, and compassion in all interactions.

“...micro skills. Micro skills sa counseling. Madami. Active listening.” (Another key takeaway was developing micro-skills in counseling—I learned so much. Active listening – P4)

“...gusto ko lang din talaga malaman paano yung tamang way, paano yung hindi judgmental way kasi yun din yung isa sa pumipigil sa mga tao na mag-look ng help.” (I wanted to understand the right way to help, the non-judgmental approach, because that’s one of the reasons people hesitate to seek help – P6)

“...una is maging considerate sa feelings nang tao maging patient and talagang lawakan yung pag-iisip pa and stop judging people lalo kung hindi mo naman talaga alam lahat...” (First, is to be considerate of other people’s feelings, be patient, and really broaden your perspective. Stop judging people, especially when you don’t really know everything about them – P1)

“I think I shared earlier, patience, compassion, more compassion, because to take time and just slowdown from day to day sometimes, and see the person around you, the people around you, is a journey. Moreover, we are all on this journey. So, it is a small quantity of kindness. Even in my interaction, I mean outside crisis line” (I shared earlier, patience, compassion, more compassion, because to take time and slowdown from day to day sometimes and see the person that is around you, the people around you, it is a journey. Moreover, we are all on this journey. So, it is a small quantity of kindness. Even in my interaction, I mean outside the crisis line, being able to provide support is not limited to just being on, I mean, the crisis line – P8)

The Insights into Human Struggles and Crisis Support Limitations. Crisis line volunteers highlighted that their exposure to diverse callers has expanded their understanding and perspective on human issues. These repeated encounters reveal the emotional toll and limitations of crisis support.

“...it just taught me a new perspective na to widen my worldview, kasi di ba sometimes, oftentimes when we are thinking about ourselves lang, we forget that other people also have problems, and not to diminish my problems or our problems because you know it is different per person pero it is in the crisis line talaga when I saw na or I felt na others, other people do have it more difficult... at the same time it taught me to be there more for others, kasi you never really know what people are going through.” (It gave me a new perspective on how to widen my worldview. When thinking only about our own issues, we often forget that other people have problems, too. This does not diminish my problems or anyone else’s, but in the crisis line, I realized that others might have it more difficult... to be there for others because you never really know what people are going through – P3)

“...sa ganitong klaseng helping profession, kahit na mahaba yung pasensya mo, may passion ka to help, at, sige, it feels good to do something like this. Pero, kailangan mo rin protektahan yung sarili mo. May limitation ka rin. Again, tao lang tayo. At, ayun nga, hindi naman masama na mag-set ka ng boundaries, no? Kasi, ikaw yung mauubos, ikaw rin yung magsasuffer.” (...in this kind of helping profession, even if you have a lot of patience and a passion for helping others—and yes, it does feel good to do this kind of work—you still need to protect yourself. You have limits too. At the end of the day, we’re only human. And setting boundaries isn’t a bad thing, right? Because if you don’t, you’ll be the one who ends up exhausted and suffering – P5)

“Pero, we can only do so much. At siya lang din talaga. Yung caller lang din talaga makakagawa ng something para sa sitwasyon nila. Kasi sila yung nandoon eh. Kami, on the other end of the line lang, no? Ano, hanggang advice na kami, hanggang bigay lang ng mga protocols. Pero at the end of the day, siya pa rin talaga ang kailangan kumilos dito.” (But we can only do so much. In the end, only the caller can take action in their situation. We are just on the other end of the line. We can only give advice and protocols – P6)

The Optimization of Organizational Resources and External Support. Crisis line volunteers expressed the need for additional training and seminars, a more flexible schedule, better technological support, and more volunteers and external resources for referral purposes.

"...sana flexible yung time ng shifts ung nag-make sense yun. Parang sana flexible yung time ng shift na hindi saktong-sakto." (Having flexible shift times would also make sense—like not having a rigid time slot – P4)

"...the technology infrastructure, sometimes our calls get limited due to people's mobile plans or load ... if our lines were somehow free or something like that, maybe that would also help everyone. Sometimes, it is distressing if, for example, we are in the middle of a call and it gets cut, and we are not sure why. So, I guess that would also add to efficiency." (That could benefit everyone as well as technology infrastructure. Sometimes our calls get limited due to people's mobile plans or access to mobile load. So maybe if our lines were somehow free or something like that, it would also help everyone. Sometimes it can also be distressing if, for example, we are in the middle of a call and it gets cut, and we are not sure why. So, I guess that would also add to efficiency so that we can manage our calls better – P5)

"...mahalaga na may mga trainings and workshops din para sa mga volunteers na ano, hindi, aside lang doon sa crisis line training, so parang mga pandagdag lang din na resources kasi, ayan nga, iba-ibang tao yung nire-receive at hindi mo talaga alam kung ano yung makukuha mo. So, maganda kung mapalawak pa yung knowledge or your skill set na meron tayo." (I think it's important to have additional training and workshops for volunteers, not just the standard crisis line training, but also supplementary resources. Since we deal with different kinds of people, and we never really know what type of calls we'll get, it would be beneficial to expand our knowledge and skill set – P2)

"...kailangan din talaga namin na mas maraming volunteers or mas maraming mag-take ng shift kasi, lalo na pag peak season, naalala namin last year, grabe yung buong September kasi suicide prevention month siya, diba? Oo. Talagang, kada minuto, kada oras, sunod-sunod yung calls to the point na hindi na namin makatch up." (...we really need more volunteers or more people taking shifts, especially during peak seasons. I remember last year—September was extremely tough because it's Suicide Prevention Month, right? Every minute, every hour, calls kept coming in one after another to the point that we couldn't keep up – P6)

"I think more is better. More, I guess, psychologists, psychiatrists, that we can refer people to. Or more, let us say, rehab centers we can refer people to." (I think more is better. More, I guess, psychologists, psychiatrists, that we can refer people to. Or more, let us say, rehab centers we can refer people to – P8)

Studies implied that volunteering is externally and internally rewarding. Correspondingly, Willems et al. (2020) stated that self-oriented factors such as finding purpose and gaining new perspectives, and other-oriented factors such as helping others and contributing to society, are motivations for crisis line volunteering. Similarly, other studies also indicated that sense of fulfillment in helping others influence volunteer behaviors and that volunteers found significance in their service (Ainsworth, 2020; Jiang et al., 2019). Consistent with these literatures, study participants describe and see their efforts as acts of kindness, feeling fulfilled in helping others. They claimed that even a simple call creates an impact that fuels their motivation to continue, as it makes a difference. Furthermore, crisis line volunteering offers flexibility, where they can provide support remotely. According to Nichol et al. (2024), this is due to digitalization, which made crisis lines more accessible, and has expended volunteering opportunities.

Beyond these sources of fulfillment, volunteers also acquired interpersonal skills and values that shaped the way they approached helping others. Ricks and Brannon (2023) explained that when dealing with clients who have experienced past trauma, the utility of active listening along with empathy is apparent. He also noted that active listening goes beyond hearing the client; it includes mental and emotional investment in their stories. Additionally, Ricks and Brannon (2023) emphasized that it is more than just hearing; it takes effort, time, and attention to be concerned about what is not said when sharing their context. Active listening, empathy, and a nonjudgemental attitude are what the crisis line volunteers have learned through their experiences, and they highlight the role of kindness, patience, and compassion in all interactions.

However, alongside these meaningful experiences and acquired values, volunteers also developed an awareness of the limitations inherent in crisis line work. Despite the vital role of crisis lines, their effectiveness has limitations, particularly in providing long-term solutions. Zabelski et al. (2023) emphasized that the impact of crisis intervention is short-lived, primarily focusing on current distress and that volunteers must acknowledge that they are only to provide immediate emotional support and not to take full responsibility for

a caller's well-being. Willems et al. (2021) further noted that it demands significant resilience and adaptability when switching between complex cases while handling uncooperative callers. In the study, while the volunteers' perspectives were widened upon exposure to different cases, they also emphasized the importance of knowing what they can and can't do when responding to crisis calls. They also realized that at the end of it all, the client has the utmost responsibility to decide for themselves.

Participants to identify areas where organizational and external support could be strengthened. Willems et al. (2021) highlighted that organization-related resources play a critical role in sustaining volunteer performance. Moreover, Zabelski et al. (2023) emphasize that expanding crisis-related resources can increase call volume, necessitating having enough trained staff to address callers' needs effectively. In the same way, study participants suggested the need to improve organizational resources. This includes introducing flexible shifts, improving technological infrastructure like making the lines free or unlimited for efficiency, and providing learning opportunities like training or workshops that could enhance or broaden their skills in handling unpredictable call, and recruiting more volunteers to handle more cases especially during peak seasons. Beyond internal resources, participants also emphasized the need for more mental health professionals to provide effective referrals and support. Unfortunately, despite the growing number of mentally diagnosed Filipinos, there is a scarcity of mental health experts (Alibudbud, 2023). This further implies the need to increase the number of mental health professionals to accommodate the rising demand for professional support.

Theoretical Interpretation

Relating to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), crisis line volunteers demonstrate the interplay between job demands and the sustaining influence of job resources. The volunteers regularly encounter emotionally challenging situations in their line of work, resulting in psychological and physical strain. Nevertheless, they gain a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and growth, in addition to the utilization of organizational resources that help them manage difficult calls. These experiences affirm both the health impairment and motivational processes of the JD-R Theory, wherein job resources buffer the effects of job demands and sustain volunteers' motivation and commitment to their roles.

Additionally, crisis line volunteers also illustrate the protection and acquisition of resources in their field of work, consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The volunteers reported various struggles, including physical fatigue, mental and emotional exhaustion, and stigma. Consequently, the volunteers highlight occupational and personal strategies, all of which function as protective resources that help reduce resource depletion, enabling them to handle demanding situations and sustain their well-being. These findings highlight how the protection and acquisition of resources are essential in coping with the high emotional demands of crisis line volunteering.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical standards to ensure the rights, safety, and welfare of the participants. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the institutional research office prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, significance, and their rights to voluntary participation and withdrawal at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Interview transcripts and recordings were systematically coded to remove personal identifiers and protect participants' identities, including the organization's name. Risk minimization was observed throughout the data collection process through the use of open-ended questions, which allowed participants to share their experiences freely while minimizing potential emotional distress. The ethical principles of honesty and integrity were upheld to ensure an accurate, respectful, and truthful representation of the volunteers lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of crisis line volunteers, revealing that while the role is emotionally demanding, it also fosters personal growth, resilience, and meaningful service to others. The findings highlight how volunteers navigate various job demands through effective coping strategies, social support, and organizational resources that sustain their well-being and commitment to crisis intervention. The study further underscores the importance of trust-building, continuous training, and accessible support systems in maintaining the quality and effectiveness of crisis hotline services. In the Philippine context, the findings draw attention to persistent challenges such as mental health stigma, limited resources, and the growing demand for accessible crisis support. By amplifying the perspectives of crisis line volunteers, this study contributes to the limited local literature on crisis intervention work and provides insights that may guide volunteer support programs, training initiatives, and mental health service development. Overall, the study emphasizes the need to strengthen both volunteer

welfare and crisis response systems to ensure sustainable and effective mental health support for individuals in crisis.

Recommendations

Crisis line work, which involves emotionally intense calls, places significant pressure on volunteers to deliver immediate, high-quality crisis support, potentially negatively affecting their overall well-being. In response, crisis line volunteers should strengthen their coping mechanisms by consistently practicing self-care, maintaining clear boundaries between volunteer and personal life, and actively engaging with supportive social networks. They should also make use of organizational resources, such as counseling and debriefing sessions, to process emotional experiences and reduce the accumulation of stress. At the organizational level, mental health institutions and crisis line services should enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of support systems by providing regular and comprehensive training, structured learning sessions, and continuous skills development for volunteers. Furthermore, organizations are encouraged to implement workload-supportive policies, such as incentive programs, flexible scheduling, and additional rest days, and to improve technological infrastructure and expand volunteer recruitment to ensure manageable workloads and uninterrupted service delivery. Finally, future research should consider a larger, more diverse sample across multiple crisis line organizations, utilize varied research instruments, or adopt alternative research designs to further deepen and broaden the understanding of crisis line volunteering experiences.

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