



# **CAREGIVERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN ADULT CARE HOME FACILITIES IN DIPOLOG CITY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rapid growth of the aging population worldwide, including in the Philippines, has increased the demand for skilled and compassionate caregiving services, particularly in resource-limited communities. This study explored the lived experiences of caregivers in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City, focusing on the challenges they encounter, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the sources of fulfillment they derive from their work. Guided by Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring, the Caregiver Dynamics Theory, and the Stress Process Model, the study utilized a phenomenological research design. The study was completed in May 2025 during the Academic Year 2024–2025. Fifteen (15) purposively selected caregivers with at least three months of caregiving experience participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework. Four major themes emerged: (1) Challenges Faced by Caregivers, including physical strain, emotional exhaustion, financial difficulties, and limited institutional support; (2) Coping Mechanisms, such as spiritual practices, family and peer support, leisure activities, and problem-focused strategies; (3) Nurturing Deep Attachment, characterized by family-like bonds with residents that brought both fulfillment and grief; and (4) Caregiving as a Path to Growth and Purpose, highlighting resilience, personal development, and professional commitment despite adversity. The findings revealed that caregiving is both demanding and rewarding, with strong emotional connections enhancing the caregiving experience while also increasing vulnerability to stress and loss. Limited staffing, inadequate resources, and insufficient organizational support further

intensified caregiver challenges. The study recommends policy reforms that promote fair compensation, adequate staffing, mental health support, and continuous professional development to strengthen caregiver well-being and improve the quality of eldercare services. Future research should explore sustainable caregiver support models in other underserved communities.

**Keywords:** *caregiving, adult care home facilities, lived experiences, phenomenology, eldercare, caregiver well-being, Dipolog City, Sustainable Development Goal 3.*

## INTRODUCTION

Caregivers constitute a vital component of the global healthcare system, particularly in adult care home facilities that provide long-term care and support for older adults with chronic illnesses, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. Beyond attending to residents' physical needs, caregivers contribute significantly to their emotional well-being, social engagement, and overall quality of life. As populations continue to age worldwide, the demand for competent and compassionate caregiving services has increased substantially. According to the World Health Organization (2024), the global population aged 60 years and above is projected to rise from 1.1 billion in 2023 to 1.4 billion by 2030 and further expand to 2.1 billion by 2050, reflecting one of the most significant demographic transformations of the twenty-first century. This unprecedented growth in the elderly population places increasing pressure on healthcare systems and underscores the critical role of caregivers in ensuring sustainable, person-centered, and high-quality eldercare services.

The Philippines is experiencing a similar demographic transition. Older persons accounted for 8.5% of the country's population in 2020 and are expected to comprise approximately 14% of the total population by 2030–2035 (Pamintuan, 2024). In Zamboanga del Norte, senior citizens represented 9.32% of the provincial population in 2020 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021), indicating a growing need for accessible and effective long-term care services. However, many caregiving institutions, particularly those located in regional and underserved areas, continue to face significant challenges, including inadequate staffing levels, limited resources, insufficient training opportunities, and constrained institutional support systems. Reports from adult care homes in Dipolog City indicate caregiver-to-resident ratios that exceed recommended standards for residents with moderate to high care needs, resulting in increased workloads, physical fatigue, emotional stress, and heightened risks of caregiver burnout (Felipe-Dimog et al., 2023). These conditions may adversely affect both caregiver well-being and the quality of care provided to elderly residents.

Although a substantial body of international literature has examined caregiver burden, occupational stress, and burnout among formal caregivers, existing studies have largely focused on hospital settings, family caregivers, and urban healthcare environments. In the Philippine context, particularly in smaller cities and resource-constrained communities, there remains a paucity of research exploring the lived

experiences of caregivers working in adult care home facilities. Moreover, limited attention has been given to understanding how caregivers navigate daily challenges, develop coping mechanisms, build meaningful relationships with residents, and derive personal and professional fulfillment from their roles within these unique care settings. This lack of localized and context-specific evidence represents a significant gap in the literature.

To address this gap, the present study explored the lived experiences of caregivers in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City using a phenomenological approach. By examining their challenges, coping strategies, emotional attachments, and sources of fulfillment, the study sought to generate a deeper understanding of caregiving realities within a regional Philippine context. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-based and context-sensitive policies, programs, and support mechanisms that promote caregiver well-being, strengthen workforce sustainability, and enhance the quality of eldercare services in underserved communities.

## **Research Question**

Caregivers play a pivotal role in ensuring the health, safety, and overall well-being of older adults residing in adult care home facilities. However, the demands of caregiving often expose them to a multitude of personal and professional challenges that can significantly affect their physical, emotional, psychological, and financial well-being, as well as the quality of care they provide. These challenges include emotional distress, physical exhaustion, financial constraints, heavy workloads, compassion fatigue, and limited institutional support and resources (Subramaniam & Mehta, 2024). In adult care home settings, caregivers are tasked with addressing the complex and evolving needs of older adults, many of whom require continuous assistance due to chronic illnesses, disabilities, or cognitive impairments. The combination of increasing care demands, staffing shortages, and resource limitations may contribute to heightened levels of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion, which can adversely affect both caregiver welfare and resident outcomes.

Despite the indispensable contribution of caregivers to the provision of quality eldercare services, their lived experiences remain insufficiently explored, particularly within the Philippine context and in resource-constrained communities such as Dipolog City. Existing studies have predominantly focused on caregiver burden, occupational stress, and burnout, with limited attention given to how caregivers experience, interpret, and derive meaning from their caregiving roles in adult care home facilities. Understanding these lived experiences is essential for uncovering the realities, challenges, coping strategies, and sources of fulfillment that shape caregivers' daily lives. Such insights can serve as a foundation for the development of context-responsive policies, support systems, and interventions aimed at enhancing caregiver well-being, strengthening workforce sustainability, and improving the quality of eldercare services.

Given these considerations, this phenomenological study sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of caregivers working in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research question:

What are the lived experiences of caregivers in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of caregivers working in two privately operated adult care home facilities in Dipolog City. Phenomenology was deemed appropriate as it seeks to uncover and interpret the meanings individuals ascribe to their lived experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of caregivers' perceptions, challenges, coping mechanisms, emotional attachments, and sources of fulfillment within their caregiving roles. The selected facilities provided a suitable context for the study due to the growing population of older adults in Dipolog City and the increasing demand for long-term care services in the area (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021).

The study involved fifteen (15) primary caregivers, comprising thirteen participants from the first facility and two participants from the second facility. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of information-rich individuals who possessed firsthand knowledge and substantial experience in caregiving within adult care home settings. To be eligible for participation, caregivers were required to: (a) have at least three months of caregiving experience in the facility and (b) voluntarily consent to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to caregiving responsibilities and could provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Cebuano within the participants' respective workplaces. The use of the local language enabled participants to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences more naturally and comprehensively. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. In addition, field notes were maintained to capture nonverbal cues, contextual observations, and reflective insights that complemented the interview data. A validated interview guide was utilized to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. Potential participants were introduced to the study through the facility administrators or owners, after which informed consent was secured. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached after fifteen interviews, at which point no new themes, categories, or significant insights emerged from the participants' narratives.

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The process began with the verbatim transcription of all recorded interviews, followed by repeated reading and immersion in the data to achieve familiarity with the participants' accounts. Initial codes were then systematically generated to identify significant statements, recurring ideas, meaningful expressions, and salient patterns across the narratives. These codes were subsequently grouped into categories and organized into broader themes that captured the essence of the caregivers' lived experiences. The emerging themes underwent a rigorous process of review, refinement, and definition to ensure coherence, credibility, trustworthiness, and faithful representation of participants' perspectives. Through this analytical process, four major themes and several subthemes were identified, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, coping strategies, emotional connections, personal growth, and sources of fulfillment experienced by caregivers in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings of the study on the lived experiences of caregivers working in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City. Through in-depth interviews, participants shared rich narratives that provided valuable insights into the realities of caregiving, including the challenges they encounter, the coping mechanisms they employ, the relationships they develop with residents, and the meaning and fulfillment they derive from their caregiving roles. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) Challenges Faced by Caregivers, (2) Coping Mechanisms of Caregivers, (3) Nurturing Deep Attachment in Caregiving, and (4) Caregiving as a Path to Fulfillment, Growth, and Purpose. Verbatim quotations are presented to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices and to illustrate the lived meanings embedded within each theme.

### Theme 1: Challenges Faced by Caregivers

Participants consistently described caregiving as a physically, emotionally, and financially demanding occupation. The physical demands of assisting residents with activities of daily living, such as lifting, transferring, bathing, feeding, and mobility assistance, often resulted in fatigue, physical exhaustion, and, in some cases, work-related injuries. Some participants also reported experiencing aggressive behaviors from residents, particularly those with cognitive impairments and behavioral difficulties. As shared by Imperial:

*"Iyaa ko gi headbat. Dayun dako kayo kog bukol diri (pointing on his forehead) agi sa pag headbat niya."*

("He headbutted me. Then, I got a huge lump here (pointing to his forehead) from the headbutt.")

Beyond physical demands, caregivers experienced emotional strain resulting from verbal mistreatment, challenging resident behaviors, communication barriers, and the

unpredictability of emergency situations. Participants described moments of frustration, sadness, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion arising from their responsibilities. Financial concerns further intensified these difficulties, as several caregivers perceived their compensation and allowances as inadequate relative to the demands and responsibilities associated with their work.

From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences reveal caregiving as a multifaceted burden that extends beyond the performance of routine tasks. Participants' narratives illustrate how caregiving involves continuous emotional engagement, physical exertion, and financial sacrifice. The convergence of these stressors often created feelings of vulnerability and fatigue, influencing their overall well-being and professional functioning. The findings suggest that caregiving is not merely a technical occupation but a deeply embodied and emotionally demanding experience that requires sustained personal investment.

The findings support existing literature indicating that caregiver burden encompasses physical, emotional, psychological, and financial dimensions. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to caregiving demands can contribute to stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and diminished quality of life among caregivers. The present findings highlight the necessity of strengthening institutional support systems through adequate staffing, occupational safety measures, continuous skills training, fair compensation, and accessible mental health services. Such interventions are critical in protecting caregiver well-being and ensuring the delivery of quality care to older adults (Goto et al., 2023).

## Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms of Caregivers

Despite the numerous challenges they encountered, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience by employing a variety of adaptive coping mechanisms. Caregivers described rest and relaxation, prayer, emotional expression, humor, leisure activities, and social support as essential strategies for managing stress and maintaining emotional well-being. Kintanar explained:

*“Bisag kapoy na, naa pa gihapon time nga mopahoway pud ta, mo relax ana bitaw, mo day off ko para maka relax dili kay permanente ra ug trabaho.”*  
 (“Even if we’re tired, we still make time to rest and relax. I take a day off to relax because work shouldn’t be nonstop.”)

Participants emphasized that taking time to rest enabled them to recover physically and mentally from the demands of caregiving. Spiritual practices, particularly prayer, served as a source of strength, comfort, and emotional stability. Likewise, family members, friends, and colleagues provided encouragement, understanding, and emotional support that helped them navigate difficult situations. Several participants also identified patience, perseverance, and endurance as personal strengths that enabled them to continue fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities despite adversity.

The findings demonstrate that caregiver resilience is shaped by both individual and social resources. Coping strategies functioned as protective mechanisms that enabled participants to manage occupational stress while preserving their emotional well-being. From a phenomenological standpoint, these coping practices reflect the caregivers' active efforts to create meaning, maintain balance, and sustain themselves within demanding caregiving environments.

The results also support studies by Del-Pino-Casado et al., which found that greater perceived social support is associated with lower caregiver burden and better mental health outcomes. Likewise, research on caregiver resilience has shown that self-care practices, spiritual coping, and supportive relationships strengthen caregivers' capacity to adapt to prolonged caregiving demands and maintain their quality of life. These findings demonstrate that resilience is not solely an individual attribute but is cultivated through supportive relationships and intentional self-care practices. Consequently, caregiving institutions should develop programs that encourage stress management, peer support, psychological wellness, and work-life balance to strengthen caregivers' capacity to cope with occupational challenges (Ebulum et al., 2026).

### **Theme 3: Nurturing Deep Attachment in Caregiving**

A significant finding of the study was the development of deep emotional attachments between caregivers and residents. Through daily interactions, compassionate care, and shared experiences, participants formed meaningful relationships that often resembled familial bonds. Fajardo shared:

*"Ig abot nako kay mingawan bya gyud ko, ig abot nako mo greet ko nila, pangutana dayun nikaon na ba, kuan to siya as in mura na siyag nahimo na nimong mama, na close na mo."*

("When I arrive, I really feel like I miss them. As soon as I get there, I greet them and ask if they have eaten. It's like they've become a mother to me; we've grown close.")

Similarly, Lazaro explained:

*"Kana bitawng alagaan nimo sila nga mura pog imong lola ana. Di nimo sila e turing nga laing tawo bitaw, e turing nimo sila nga pamilya."*

("It's like taking care of them as if they were your own grandmother. You don't treat them as just another person; you treat them as family.")

Participants described these relationships as sources of trust, affection, emotional connection, and mutual respect. Caring for residents over extended periods enabled caregivers to develop genuine attachments that enriched their caregiving experiences and strengthened their sense of responsibility toward those under their care. However, participants also acknowledged that these attachments increased their emotional vulnerability, particularly when residents became seriously ill or passed away. Several caregivers described experiencing grief comparable to losing a family member.

These findings suggest that caregiving extends beyond the fulfillment of professional duties and evolves into a deeply relational and humanistic experience. The formation of family-like bonds transforms caregiving from a task-oriented role into an emotionally meaningful relationship characterized by empathy, compassion, and emotional investment. Such relationships enhance the quality of care while simultaneously exposing caregivers to emotional risks associated with loss and bereavement.

The findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that meaningful caregiver-resident relationships contribute to improved emotional well-being and quality of care. Nevertheless, the emotional labor associated with these relationships should not be overlooked. Caregiving institutions should therefore provide bereavement support, counseling services, and opportunities for emotional debriefing to help caregivers process grief while maintaining healthy professional boundaries (Wanu et al., 2025).

#### **Theme 4: Caregiving as a Path to Fulfillment, Growth, and Purpose**

Although caregiving was frequently described as physically and emotionally demanding, participants consistently portrayed their work as a meaningful source of fulfillment, personal growth, and purpose. Many caregivers expressed satisfaction in helping residents, witnessing improvements in their condition, and receiving appreciation from residents and their families. Belmonte reflected:

*“Rewarding sa akong kay kanang magpasalamat ang pasyente... gapasalamat kay sila kay ing ana ba rewarding kaayo siya nako.”*

(“It is rewarding for me when the patient expresses gratitude... they were very thankful, and that was extremely rewarding for me.”)

Participants further explained that caregiving contributed to their personal development by enhancing patience, empathy, emotional regulation, adaptability, resilience, and practical caregiving skills. Many described becoming stronger, more compassionate, and more understanding as a result of their experiences. These personal transformations positively influenced not only their professional performance but also their relationships with family members and the broader community.

Furthermore, participants identified both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for entering and remaining in the caregiving profession. Compassion, empathy, family responsibility, financial stability, and preparation for caring for aging relatives were commonly cited motivations. These factors reinforced their commitment to caregiving and strengthened their sense of purpose despite the challenges they encountered.

The findings reveal caregiving as a transformative journey that fosters personal and professional growth. Participants found meaning through service, human connection, and the opportunity to positively impact the lives of others. The emotional rewards derived from caregiving served as powerful protective factors against occupational stress and reinforced their dedication to the profession.

Consistent with literature on meaningful work and caregiving, the findings demonstrate that a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment can sustain caregiver engagement despite workplace challenges. Therefore, interventions designed to support caregivers should not only address sources of stress and burnout but should also create opportunities for recognition, professional development, career advancement, and meaningful engagement. By fostering both well-being and professional growth, caregiving institutions can strengthen caregiver resilience while enhancing the quality of care provided to older adults (Theng et al., 2023).

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that caregivers in adult care home facilities in Dipolog City experience caregiving as a multifaceted and deeply meaningful role characterized by both significant challenges and rewarding experiences. Caregivers encounter physical, emotional, and financial difficulties arising from the demanding nature of their responsibilities, including managing residents' complex needs, coping with workplace stressors, and operating within resource-constrained environments. Despite these challenges, caregivers demonstrate resilience through various coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support, engaging in spiritual practices, taking time for rest and recreation, and drawing upon personal strengths such as patience and perseverance.

The study further concludes that caregiving extends beyond the performance of routine tasks and develops into a deeply relational experience. Through continuous interaction and compassionate care, caregivers form strong emotional attachments with residents, often perceiving them as members of their own family. These relationships foster trust, affection, and a greater sense of purpose, while simultaneously increasing emotional vulnerability, particularly during experiences of illness, decline, or loss among residents.

Moreover, caregiving serves as a pathway to personal growth, fulfillment, and professional development. Participants reported that their experiences enhanced their empathy, resilience, emotional maturity, adaptability, and caregiving competencies. The opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of older adults and receive appreciation from residents and their families provided a profound sense of satisfaction and purpose that sustained their commitment to the profession despite existing challenges.

Thus, the lived experiences of caregivers reveal that caregiving is both demanding and transformative. While caregivers face substantial physical, emotional, and financial burdens, they also derive meaning, fulfillment, and personal growth from their work. These findings underscore the need for strengthened institutional support, adequate staffing, fair compensation, mental health and psychosocial services, and continuous professional development programs to promote caregiver well-being and enhance the quality of eldercare services. Such interventions are essential for sustaining a

compassionate, resilient, and effective caregiving workforce capable of meeting the growing needs of the aging population.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that adult care home administrators strengthen institutional support systems by ensuring adequate staffing levels, providing sufficient caregiving resources, and creating a work environment that promotes caregiver well-being, safety, and job satisfaction.

Establishing comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support programs, including counseling services, stress management workshops, peer support groups, and regular debriefing sessions, may help caregivers effectively cope with occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and grief associated with caregiving. Furthermore, caregiving facilities should invest in continuous professional development programs that enhance caregivers' competencies in elderly care, dementia management, communication skills, behavioral interventions, and occupational safety to improve both caregiver confidence and the quality of care provided to residents.

Policymakers, local government units, and relevant government agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should formulate and implement policies that recognize the vital contribution of caregivers by promoting fair compensation, employment benefits, professional recognition, and opportunities for career advancement. Such initiatives may contribute to workforce retention, improved caregiver morale, and the sustainability of eldercare services, particularly in underserved communities. In addition, families of residents should maintain collaborative relationships with caregivers and facility personnel to foster mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and a supportive care environment that benefits both caregivers and care recipients.

Caregivers themselves are encouraged to continue practicing healthy coping strategies, including self-care activities, spiritual enrichment, physical wellness, stress management techniques, and the utilization of social support networks to maintain their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Since the study revealed that caregiving can be both demanding and rewarding, strengthening resilience and maintaining a healthy work-life balance are essential in sustaining long-term commitment to the profession.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies in other adult care home facilities, nursing homes, and long-term care institutions across different geographic and cultural contexts to validate and expand the present findings. Comparative studies may further explore variations in caregiving experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms among caregivers from diverse settings. Researchers may also employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to examine the relationships among caregiver burden, resilience, job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and quality of care.

Additionally, future studies may explore the ethical and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in caregiver training, workforce support, and service delivery, ensuring that technological innovations complement rather than replace the human-centered and compassionate nature of caregiving. Through these collective efforts, a more supportive, resilient, and sustainable caregiving environment may be established, ultimately enhancing caregiver well-being and improving the quality of eldercare services for the growing aging population.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

This study adhered to established ethical principles and standards throughout the research process to ensure the protection, dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the owners and administrators of the participating adult care home facilities. Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and possible risks. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the conduct of the study. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms or codes in all transcripts, reports, and presentations of findings. All interview recordings, transcripts, and related research data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers. The information gathered was used solely for academic and research purposes and was handled in accordance with applicable data privacy and ethical research guidelines.

The study also upheld the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, respect for persons, and justice. Care was taken to minimize any potential emotional discomfort during the interviews, and participants were allowed to decline answering questions they found sensitive or uncomfortable. The researchers-maintained objectivity and integrity during data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Furthermore, any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the preparation, organization, language enhancement, or presentation of the manuscript was conducted responsibly and ethically. AI tools were utilized only as supplementary research aids and did not replace the researchers' critical analysis, interpretation, decision-making, or authorship responsibilities. All findings, interpretations, and conclusions remained the sole responsibility of the researchers. Through adherence to these ethical standards, the study ensured the protection of participants' rights while maintaining the integrity, rigor, and credibility of the research process.

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