

Narratives on Triumphs and Defeats: A Study on Suicide Ideation in the Selected Coastal Communities of San Miguel Bay

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of individuals with suicidal ideation in marginalized coastal communities surrounding San Miguel Bay in Camarines Sur. It aims to explore how risk and protective factors shape suicidal thoughts and resilience among vulnerable populations in this specific coastal context. A qualitative case study design using narrative inquiry was employed to capture participants' demographic profiles, perceptions, risk factors, coping mechanisms, and access to support systems. Nine participants, consisting of men, women, and youth from vulnerable backgrounds, were purposively selected to provide rich and in-depth accounts of their lived experiences. Findings reveal that suicidal ideation is strongly influenced by cumulative adversities, including chronic poverty, abuse, neglect, social isolation, and strained interpersonal relationships. These experiences represent “defeats” in participants' narratives, characterized by emotional distress, hopelessness, and heightened vulnerability to self-harm, wherein thoughts of death are often perceived as temporary relief from suffering. In contrast, “triumphs” emerge through protective factors that foster resilience and help sustain life despite adversity. These include engagement in religious and spiritual practices, strong family and community support systems, participation in meaningful work, involvement in constructive recreational activities, and the internalization of moral and spiritual values. Such coping mechanisms provide emotional stability, psychological relief, and pathways toward recovery. The study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive, community-based mental health interventions that integrate psychosocial support, strengthen social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihood opportunities. Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of suicidal ideation within the coastal communities of San Miguel Bay and highlight the need for holistic, context-specific strategies to enhance resilience, well-being, and quality of life among at-risk populations in these communities.

Keywords: suicidal ideation, “triumphs”, “defeats”

Introduction

Suicidal ideation is widely recognized as a precursor to suicide attempts and completed suicide. The heightened uncertainty caused by socio-economic distress has intensified mental health burdens among vulnerable populations, many of whom report persistent thoughts of death. Recent surveys in the Philippines, such as the Fifth Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS5), revealed that one in five Filipino youth aged 15–24 reported considering suicide during the pandemic (UP Population Institute, 2022). Similar studies across Southeast Asia confirm that

psychosocial factors such as hopelessness and loneliness, social-environmental stressors, and socio-demographic variables remain dominant influences on suicidality (Tan et al., 2023).

Globally, suicide continues to be a pressing public health concern. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among adolescents aged 15–19, with males disproportionately affected. A recent meta-analysis of rural communities in Asia found that suicide rates remain higher in rural than urban areas, driven by economic instability, stigma, and limited access to mental health services (Khan & Lee, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, restricted mobility, reduced social interaction, and diminished economic opportunities exacerbated depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation across communities (Patel et al., 2022). These findings underscore that geographical setting alone does not mitigate suicide risk; contextual stressors elevate vulnerability across environments.

In the Philippines, suicide has emerged as a growing public health issue. National data indicate that male suicide deaths occur at rates four times higher than female suicides

(Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). More recent analyses suggest an alarming rise in male suicides in Southeast Asia, pointing to an emerging epidemic (Cana, 2024). These trends highlight the urgency of evidence-based interventions. Scholars emphasize the need for accessible, adaptable best-practice guidelines for suicide detection, intervention, and prevention (Bernert, 2022). Such initiatives also align with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: “Good Health and Well-Being,” which emphasizes mental health promotion and the reduction of premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (United Nations, 2015). Educational institutions are increasingly called upon to foster supportive environments and provide psychosocial services (Canbaz & Terzi, 2021).

Resilience, defined as a dynamic process of positive adaptation despite adversity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), remains central to understanding how communities endure traumatic experiences. Recent studies confirm that resilience and social support significantly reduce suicidal ideation among Filipino youth and tertiary students (BMC Public Health, 2024). Yet Filipino populations remain vulnerable due to the scarcity of mental health professionals. Only 2–3% of the national budget is allocated to health care, below WHO recommendations (Conde, 2022). As of 2023, the Professional Regulation Commission reported fewer than 1,000 licensed psychologists nationwide, with most concentrated in metropolitan areas (PRC, 2023). In this context, resilience is not only about confronting external forces of nature but also about addressing internal psychological struggles. Strengthening community resilience, promoting mental health literacy, and establishing accessible support systems are essential steps toward improving well-being in coastal and rural communities.

In rural coastal areas such as those surrounding San Miguel Bay, structural inequalities and cultural dynamics further shape mental health experiences. Individuals in these settings often face compounded adversities, including unstable livelihoods, family strain, exposure to abuse or neglect, and limited institutional support. Despite these challenges, protective factors embedded within community life—such as strong familial ties, religious and spiritual practices, and

communal resilience—may mitigate suicidal ideation. However, there remains a lack of in-depth, context-specific research that captures how individuals in these communities narrate their struggles and sources of strength.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of individuals with suicidal ideation in selected coastal communities of San Miguel Bay, Camarines Sur. Using a qualitative case study design informed by narrative inquiry, it seeks to understand the interplay between risk factors (“defeats”) and protective factors (“triumphs”) in shaping individuals’ experiences. Specifically, the study examines participants’ perceptions, coping mechanisms, and access to support systems, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of suicide ideation in rural coastal contexts. By foregrounding personal testimonies, the researcher captured the authentic perspectives that reveal both the vulnerabilities (“defeats”) and the resilience (“triumphs”), helping individuals to confront and manage suicidal thoughts within their communities. These accounts are intimate, first-hand, and directly drawn from the participants themselves, reflecting their actual lived experiences. In the context of limited access to mental health professionals in the village, local government units may draw on the findings of this study to inform the development of a contextually appropriate and community-responsive intervention model. Such a model should be language-friendly, culturally grounded, and aligned with the lifestyle of the participants. It can be administered by locally trained health workers as an initial scaffold while the government continues to pursue the recruitment and training of additional health professionals.

Moreover, while some community-based programs exist, their availability, accessibility, and effectiveness remain unclear. Studies emphasize that resilience and social support are protective factors against suicidal ideation (BMC Public Health, 2024), but little is known about how these are enacted in rural coastal settings. Equally important are the self-adopted coping strategies and informal interventions that individuals employ, which may hold valuable insights for strengthening community resilience and suicide prevention efforts. To address these gaps, this study seeks to investigate the following research problems: How do participants perceive suicidal ideation? What are the lived experiences of participants before, the episodes of suicidal ideation? What interventive programs currently exist in the coastal communities of San Miguel Bay to address suicide prevention? What self-adopted coping strategies or informal interventions do participants employ, and in what ways might these practices contribute to community-based approaches to suicide prevention?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using the multiple case study method to explore suicidal ideation and coping mechanisms among fisherfolk in coastal communities. San Miguel Bay, a coastal area spanning the provinces of Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte in the Bicol Region, served as the geographical context, specifically covering the municipalities of Cabusao, Calabanga, Sipocot, Siruma, and Tinambac in

Camarines Sur, and Mercedes in Camarines Norte (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic

Resources [BFAR], 2019; San Miguel Bay Resource Management Plan, 2021). Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants based on their lived experiences relevant to the study, with the assistance of barangay workers; fifteen (15) volunteers were initially identified, from which nine (9) participants were selected for semi-structured interviews based on inclusion criteria and the richness of their narratives. A semi-structured interview guide was developed and pilot-tested for clarity and cultural appropriateness. To assess current suicidal ideation, the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) was utilized as a screening tool (Posner et al., 2011), with the instrument translated into the Bicol dialect and reviewed by language experts to ensure accuracy. Ethical procedures were strictly observed, including written approval from the Office of Research and Innovation, permission from barangay officials, and informed consent from all participants, with confidentiality and anonymity maintained throughout the study. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, involving familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining and naming final themes. Codes were systematically compared across transcripts to ensure consistency, and peer debriefing with academic colleagues was conducted to enhance the credibility of the findings and reduce interpretive bias.

Results & Discussion

The findings of this study were derived from semi-structured interviews, direct observations in the coastal communities of Calabanga, and a review of relevant literature. These sources of data collectively provided a comprehensive understanding of suicidal

ideation among fisherfolk, its underlying risk factors, and the coping strategies employed to manage such thoughts. The interviews revealed personal narratives that illustrated how poverty, family strain, and limited access to mental health services contributed to suicidal tendencies. Observations further supported these accounts by highlighting the socio-economic realities and cultural practices within the community. In addition, the findings were consistent with existing literature, which has identified socio-economic hardship, gendered responsibilities, and cultural stigma as critical determinants of suicide risk, while also emphasizing resilience and social networks as protective influences. In this section, the results were discussed in relation to prior studies and contextual realities, with emphasis on how they contributed to understanding suicide risk and resilience in coastal communities of San Miguel Bay.

Profile of Participants

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The sample consists of nine (9) individuals, eight (8) of whom are female and one (1) male. Given the qualitative nature of the study, this distribution does not imply that males have a lower prevalence of suicidal ideation; rather, it underscores that men also experience such thoughts and possess personal, context-specific narratives that contribute to suicidal ideation. A comparable study by Norhayati, Hoh, Che Din, and Chen (2017) found that male participants reported higher mean scores in suicidal ideation, future feelings, loss of motivation, and future expectations,

whereas female participants exhibited higher mean scores in depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participants/Code No.	Ag	G	Civil Status	Occupation/Profession	Locale/Village
Participant 1	38	F	separate	Housewife	Bgy Sabang
Participant 2	58	F	widow	Parabadi	Bgy Sabang
Participant 3	17	F	Single	student	Bgy Sabang
Participant 4	22	F	Single	None	Bgy Sabang
Participant 5	62	M	Widowe	PWD	Bgy Sabang
Participant 6	28	F	Married	Laundrywoma	Bgy Sabang
Participant 7	42	F	Married	Housewife	Bgy Sabang/Bonot
Participant 8	52	F	Widow	Housemaid	San Antonio
Participant 9	35	F	Married	Housewife	San Roque

In the present study, participants provided personal accounts describing factors that contributed to suicidal thoughts and the strategies employed to overcome them. One participant, a 62-year-old male, articulated: “*Mahirap ang buhay pag matanda ka na at nag-iisa, parang gusto mo na lang mamatay*” (“Life is difficult when you are old and alone; it feels like you just want to die”). Although he disclosed thoughts of death, he did not describe any specific plan or means of self-harm. Similarly, the eight (8) female participants acknowledged experiences of suicidal ideation, though their reasons and coping mechanisms varied.

The age group with the highest number of participants was 31–40 years; however, documentation from the study indicates that active suicidal ideation was more prevalent among participants aged 17–22 years, particularly those who were single.

The youngest participant expressed: “*Ayaw ko nang mag-aral, gusto ko na lang dito sa bahay*” (“I no longer want to attend school; I just want to stay home”). These findings are consistent with existing literature in the Philippine context. Cimene, Buko, and Nacaya (2022) identified depression, family-related problems, and financial difficulties as the most common causes of suicide, with socio-demographic factors such as age, sex, and economic status significantly influencing vulnerability. This supports the present study’s findings, where poverty, family conflict, and emotional distress emerged as central drivers of suicidal ideation among participants in coastal communities. The study, *The Causes of Suicide and Its Socio-demographic Factors in the Philippines* show that individuals aged 18–27 years accounted for the highest proportion of suicide cases (33.8%), followed by those aged 28–37 years (21.3%). More than 12% of cases involved individuals aged 17 and below, with the youngest case recorded at 10 years old.

As to their socioeconomic characteristics, only three (3) of the nine participants were employed—as a laundry worker (*tagalaba*), fish processor (*parabadi*), and domestic helper (*katulong*). These forms of work are temporary and compensated on a daily basis. One participant was a high-school student, one was a person with disability (PWD), and the remaining participants were housewives. Collectively, this profile reflects a low-income socioeconomic status. While *Psychological Medicine* notes that communities with lower socioeconomic status tend to demonstrate lower rates of suicide, suicidal ideation nonetheless persists and is shaped by individual-level factors, as evidenced in the

participants’ narratives. Rehkopf, D. H., & Buka, S. L. (2005). Therefore, while national-level studies have identified key determinants of suicide in the Philippines, the present study highlights that suicidal ideation is also present in geographically isolated coastal communities, shaped by context-specific socio-economic and relational factors.

Perceived Ideas on Suicide Ideation

Across communities, perceptions of suicide ideation often emerge from cultural narratives, religious beliefs, and collective experiences, influencing how individuals understand its causes and consequences.

These perceived ideas can determine whether suicide ideation is seen as a sign of weakness,

a cry for help, or a complex response to overwhelming circumstances. Such interpretations matter because they shape responses at both personal and societal levels—affecting help-seeking behavior, the willingness of families to discuss the issue, and the strategies institutions adopt for prevention. By examining perceived ideas surrounding suicide ideation, this study seeks to uncover the underlying meanings that frame public understanding, offering insight into how cultural and social contexts influence both recognition and response.

Suicidal Ideation as a Perceived Solution to Hopelessness. Across the interviews, eight participants described suicidal ideation as a perceived remedy for profound hopelessness. They articulated a sense of futility, expressing that their circumstances showed no signs of improvement. As Participants 1, 4, and 9 shared, “*paulit-ulit din lang naman ang sitwasyon, wala namang nagbabago*” (“It’s like you’re stuck in a loop where things just keep happening and nothing changed anyway”). This perception aligns with

Joiner’s (2005) Interpersonal–Psychological Theory of Suicide, which posits that repeated exposure to painful or provocative events contributes to the acquired capability for self-harm. Chronic experiences of failure, disappointment, or stagnation may therefore heighten vulnerability to self-destructive behavior, particularly in individuals who believe that no positive change is attainable.

Suicidal Ideation as Rebellion. Participant’s narratives also revealed that suicidal thoughts may emerge as a distorted form of resistance against abuse. For some individuals, the idea of ending one’s life is framed as a means of eliciting guilt or remorse from an abusive partner. Participant 2 recounted contemplating running into an oncoming vehicle during episodes of verbal and emotional abuse from her husband: “*Mabuti pa magpasagasa sa sasakyan para tumigil na ang asawa ko*” (“It would be better to get hit by a car and die; maybe then my husband would stop”). This phenomenon reinforces findings in the literature of Mittra (2023). In his work, he identified experiences of intimate partner violence have been consistently linked to suicidal ideation among women. He found out that women exposed to spousal abuse report significantly higher levels of psychological distress, including suicidal thoughts, as a consequence of sustained emotional and physical victimization. This supports the present study’s findings, where participants described suicidal ideation as both an escape from abuse and a response to prolonged relational suffering. further reported that the risk of suicidal ideation is highest among women experiencing both physical and emotional abuse, underscoring the cumulative psychological toll of chronic victimization.

Suicidal Ideation as an Escape. Participants also framed suicidal thoughts as an escape from overwhelming physical, emotional, or psychological pain. Participant 2’s narrative illustrated sustained emotional torture: although her husband did not

physically harm her while intoxicated, he prevented her from sleeping, yelled incessantly, and intentionally disrupted her rest even at dawn. These experiences were normalized within the community, further compounding her isolation. For Participant 3, the pain stemmed from failed expectations. She described leaving a previous relationship in hopes of finding a better life, only to

experience greater hardship: “*Ewan ko ba, Ma’am, akala ko maayos; hindi naman pala*” (“I don’t know, Ma’am. I thought things would get better, but they didn’t”).

Her distress was exacerbated by financial instability and her inability to provide adequately for her children. These accounts reflect empirical findings that acute disruptions in financial stability, rather than chronic poverty alone, are significant predictors of suicidal ideation (Zwerling & Merchant, 2002; Turvey et al., 2002). Both financial loss and emotional distress operate as potent triggers for destructive thoughts, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable communities. Further, Escape from Shame. The theme of “hiya”—a culturally embedded concept of shame in the Filipino context—also emerged as a critical factor influencing suicidal ideation. Shame, deeply tied to self-worth and social identity, can be profoundly distressing when experienced publicly. Participant 4 recounted feeling intense humiliation when her girlfriend dragged her along a public street during a violent altercation. She later attempted self-harm using a cutter she habitually carried: “*Nilaslas ko po, Ma’am, ang pulso ko...*” (“I cut my wrist, Ma’am...”). The episode left her feeling exposed and judged by onlookers, intensifying her desire to disappear.

Tangney et al. (2002) describe shame as a global and debilitating emotion in which the entire self—not merely a behavior—is perceived as defective, unworthy, and powerless. Research consistently shows that women report higher levels of shame-proneness than men, and that individuals with a history of suicide attempts—particularly those with borderline personality traits—exhibit markedly elevated shame sensitivity (Åsberg et al., 2012). These findings correspond with the participant’s account, illustrating how shame can overwhelm coping mechanisms and precipitate suicidal behavior. Table 2 shows the classification of statements as coded and classified to theme.

Table 2. Perceived Ideas on Suicide Ideation

Narratives	Participants	Code	Theme
“ <i>paulit-ulit din lang naman ang twasyon, wala namang nagbabago</i> ” It’s like you’re stuck in a loop where things just keep happening and nothing changed anyway)	1,4,9	Solution Hopelessness	Perceived Ideas on Suicide Ideation
“ <i>Mabuti pa magpasagasa sa sasakyan para tumigil na ang asawa ko</i> ” (I feel so desperate that sometimes I think the only way things would stop is if I were gone)	2	Rebellion	

“Ewan ko ba, Ma’am, akala ko aayos; hindi naman pala” (“I don’t know, Ma’am. I thought things would get better, but they didn’t”).	3	Escape from Pain
“Nilaslas ko po, Ma’am, ang pulso ko...” (“I cut my wrist, Ma’am...”).	4	Escape from Shame

Lived Experiences of Participants before a Suicide Ideation

Understanding suicide ideation requires more than examining the moment when such thoughts emerge; it also calls for attention to the lives people lead before those thoughts take shape. Lived experiences prior to suicide ideation often reveal patterns of resilience, relationships, and routines that anchor individuals in their daily worlds. These experiences—whether marked by joy, struggle, or ordinary continuity—provide context

for how meaning is constructed and how disruptions in that meaning can lead to vulnerability. By exploring how individuals lived before the onset of suicide ideation, this study seeks to highlight the importance of personal histories and social environments in shaping mental health trajectories. Such an approach underscores that suicide ideation does not arise in isolation but is intertwined with the lived realities that precede it, offering valuable insight into prevention and support strategies rooted in the fullness of human experience. These lived experiences before the ideation were identified as Risk Factors.

Repeated Exposure to Abuse. Repeated exposure to physical, emotional, or psychological abuse significantly increases vulnerability to suicidal ideation. Samuelson (2015) found that recurrent violence—whether experienced or perpetrated—correlates strongly with elevated suicide intent, suggesting that chronic exposure to aggression erodes emotional regulation and coping resources. This aligns with extensive evidence indicating that intimate partner violence, family abuse, or ongoing maltreatment contributes to depression, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts (Devries et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2014). Repeated trauma also reshapes cognitive schemas, making individuals more likely to adopt self-destructive coping mechanisms (Joiner, 2005). Participant 8, sighed. Participant 2 added, “*Ang sabi ko noon, kelan kaya matatapos ito?*” (I ask myself then, when all these will end?) When her husband died of illness, it was a relief for her. Currently, Participant 2 still works as Parabadi and takes care of a son who has mental illness. The status of living remains, but she claimed, “*kahit po mahirap pa rin, mas mabuti na na walang kunsumisyon*”. (Our way of life hasn’t changed, but in some ways it’s better now—no one bothers us anymore).

Isolation and Neglect. Social isolation is one of the most powerful predictors of suicidal ideation. When individuals feel disconnected, rejected, or emotionally abandoned, they lose access to protective social bonds. When Participant 6 was sent to work in Manila, she was only 13 years old. She wasn't allowed to go out and rest "on a day off" She felt isolated, as there was no cellphone or any means then to communicate back to Calabanga, hence she thought of hurting herself. "*Paano kaya ako makakuwi sa Mama ko? Mabuti pa mamatay na lang ako*" (How can I go home back to my mother, I'd rather die). The Interpersonal–Psychological Theory of Suicide emphasizes "thwarted belongingness" as a central driver of suicidal thoughts (Joiner, 2005). Empirical studies show that isolation increases suicide risk among adults, adolescents, and elderly populations, particularly when it coexists with social neglect (Calati et al., 2019). Neglect further contributes to feelings of worthlessness and invisibility, undermining self-esteem and reinforcing the perception that one's absence would go unnoticed.

Lack of Family Support. For Participants 3 and 4 who are sisters, family is a critical protective system— especially in collectivist cultures like the Philippines. Lack of emotional, economic, or moral support from family increases vulnerability to suicide by removing a key buffer against stress (Garcia et al., 2021). "*Iniwan kasi kami ni Papa at Mama, at pareho sila nag asawa ng iba, naiwan kami dito sa Sabang at kasama nila ang kanya-kanya nilang pamilya*" (Our parents left us and found their own partners and started their families leaving us here in Sabang). Adolescents and adults who perceive low family cohesion report significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Prinstein et al., 2000). "(We have our grandmother but cannot take care of us, as she has nothing to help us, too. We even become a burden for her). As the researchers say, strong family ties reduce stress thresholds and promote problem-solving. A lack of such support therefore intensifies feelings of abandonment and isolation.

Chronic poverty is a well-established risk factor for suicidal behavior. Economic stressors— such as unstable employment, inability to meet basic needs, and financial loss—create persistent psychological strain. Participant 8 said, "*Dae nindo aram ang pagmati kan grabeng pagtios, garo na maraot ang payo mo kaiisip*" (You have no idea what it's like to have nothing—it nearly drove you to the edge). Research demonstrates that people living in long-term poverty show higher rates of suicidal ideation due to shame, hopelessness, and chronic distress (Iemmi et al., 2016). Studies also show that financial instability uniquely predicts suicidal thoughts, even after controlling for mental illness (Turvey et al., 2002). The cumulative burden of poverty restricts access to health services, reduces social participation, and deteriorates emotional well-being.

Compromised or Broken Relationships. In this case, three of the recorded abuses comes from compromised relationships, as used in this study, they engaged themselves into relationships which are not permitted by their community and lacks legal support to support for survival. The 22-year-old Participant lived with a lesbian partner two separate women lived with someone formerly married. "*Noon masaya, pero dumating yung panahon wala nang katahimikan. Nagseselos sa babae, nagseselos sa lalaki*" (We used to live happily together, but over time, the peace faded. She became jealous—not only of other women, but of men as well).

Hence, this relationship is in distress—including marital conflict, betrayal, abandonment, or separation—is consistently associated with suicidal ideation. Loss of intimate relationships challenges one’s sense of belonging and emotional security (Beautrais, 2001). Interpersonal conflicts can cause intense emotional pain, self-blame, and fear of social judgment, all of which heighten suicide risk. Studies also show that individuals experiencing relationship breakdowns are significantly more likely to report suicidal thoughts (Kposowa, 2003). Table 3 reflects the narratives and codes for Lived Experiences of Participants.

Table 3. Lived Experiences of Participants before the ideation

Narratives	Participants	Code	Theme
“ <i>Ang sabi ko noon, kelan aya matatapos ko?</i> ” (I ask myself then, when all these will end?)	8	Repeated Exposure to Abuse	Risk factors
“ <i>Paano kaya ako makakuwi sa Mama ko? Mabuti pa mamatay na lang ako</i> ” (How can I go home back to my mother, I’d rather die).	6	Isolation and Neglect	
“ <i>Iniwan kasi kami ni Papa at Mama, at pareho sila nag asawa ng iba, naiwan kami itto sa Sabang at kasama nila ang kanya anyang nilang pamilya</i> ” (Our parents left us, built new lives with their own partners, and started new families—leaving us behind in Sabang)	3,4	Lack of Family Support	
“ <i>Dae nindo aram ang pagmati kan rabeng pagtios, garo na maraot ang payo ko kaiisip</i> ” (You have no idea what it’s like to have nothing—it nearly drove you to the edge).	8	Chronic poverty	

<i>“Noon masaya, pero dumating yung anahon wala nang katahimikan. Nagseselos sa babae, nagseselos sa lalaki”</i> We used to live happily together, but over me, the peace faded. She became jealous—not only of other women, but of men as well).	3	Compromised Relationship	
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Interventive Programs available in the Community

Micro level interventions. This refers to the individual or self-adopted interventions which the participants adopted after and during suicide ideation.

Family and Friends. Informal social support remains the most accessible mental health resource in many rural and low-income communities. Disclosure of distress acts as emotional ventilation and decreases suicidal ideation (Kleiman & Liu, 2013). Social support also increases perceived safety and reduces isolation. Participant 1 declared, *“Sa mga kaibigan ako nagkukwento. Pero ang pamilya ko, walang alam”* (I confided to a friend; my family has no idea what I’m going through. However, disclosure of very personal information to other people has long destroyed trust and respect among neighbors and friends. *“Hindi na po ako nagkikwento, kasi pag tsi-tsiismisan ka lang.* (I don’t bring it up anymore—they might start gossiping.) Despite the apprehension they still consider talking to friends aired their baggage’s which somehow made them felt better.

Prayers and Reflection. Faith-based support correlates with improved coping and lower suicidal ideation (Hassan et al., 2021), particularly in Filipino contexts where religiosity is culturally embedded. From among the female participants, six (6) of them narrated how they pray repeatedly to take them out of the situation. Some prayed in tears, while the oldest, Participant 2 would go to “Amang Hinulid” to lift her petition. *“An sabi ko pobaguhin nyo po ang asawa ko. Kaawaan mo po ang mga anak ko.”* (Please transform my husband, Lord, and have mercy on my children). This may not form part of an intervention, but Participant 2 considered the early death of her husband as a form of relief

from her sufferings. Her relayed that upon the death of her husband, she begun to live peacefully with her children.

Classmates and Teachers. In the Philippine context, schools are not only centers of academic learning but also sites where social norms, cultural values, and coping strategies are transmitted. Programs emphasizing spirituality, collective responsibility, and moral education may augment coping mechanisms by reinforcing hope, resilience, and a sense of accountability to family and community (VanderWeele, Li, Tsai, & Kawachi, 2016; Tuason et al., 2007). These interventions can be particularly effective in rural or marginalized communities where access to formal mental health services is limited. As related to this study, schools began to notice signs of

ideation after observing students' frequent absenteeism and declining academic performance, which are indicators of anxiety.

Macro Level Interventions. These refers to the agency, formal organizations and government programs, policies implemented to address the issue. In the Philippines it has established several national mental health and social protection mechanisms intended to support individuals experiencing psychological distress. These include the Mental Health Act (Republic Act 11036) and the Department of Health's National Mental Health Program, which promote the integration of mental health services into local health systems, including Rural Health Units and barangay-level health services. In addition, crisis response mechanisms such as the National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) Crisis Hotline (1553) provide immediate psychological support and referral services for individuals in distress.

Similarly, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) implements psychosocial and financial assistance programs such as the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) and services under its Crisis Intervention Units (CIUs), which are designed to support individuals and families experiencing acute economic, social, or emotional crises. These programs are intended to be accessed through local government structures, often requiring barangay or municipal-level endorsement and coordination.

However, based on participants' narratives in this study, there was limited explicit awareness or mention of these formal government-led mental health and crisis intervention services. Participants primarily described reliance on informal coping strategies and community-based support systems rather than structured national programs. This suggests a possible gap between the existence of macro-level interventions and their visibility, accessibility, or localization within geographically isolated coastal communities such as San Miguel Bay.

This does not indicate the absence of such services, but rather highlights the importance of strengthening dissemination strategies and improving integration between national agencies (DOH, DSWD, and NCMH) and barangay-level health and social welfare systems. Enhancing awareness at the community level may improve early access to psychosocial support and crisis intervention services for vulnerable populations.

Self-Adopted Coping Strategies.

Participants described a wide range of coping strategies that helped them resist or overcome suicidal ideation. These coping mechanisms reflected a combination of spiritual, interpersonal, behavioral, and cognitive strategies, each serving a protective function against psychological distress. Existing literature supports the effectiveness of these approaches in reducing vulnerability to suicide.

Spiritual Coping – Attendance to Church and Prayers. Many participants sought comfort and stability through religious practices such as church attendance and prayer. Interestingly, Participants 3 and 4 and their siblings are attending a Christian assembly disregarding affiliation and differences in faith. When asked why attend the church if they are not members? They said, "*dyan po kasi Mam kahit papano inaasikaso po kami. Nagkakantahan po kami*" (At last we are

being taken cared of in the church. We also get to sing together). In the Filipino sociocultural context, spirituality is deeply embedded in daily life and functions as a primary coping resource (Tuason et al., 2007). Most of the women participants turned to prayers for resolution of their burdens. *“Nagdarasal po ako araw-araw na mawala na ang problema ko.* (I pray every day, seeking guidance and resolution for the challenges I face.) Prayer provides emotional release, consistent connection, and meaning-making during moments of crisis. Empirical studies show that religious involvement significantly reduces suicidal ideation by enhancing hope, fostering social belonging, and reinforcing moral boundaries against self-harm (VanderWeele et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2015). For participants, spiritual coping served both as emotional refuge and as a values-based deterrent against self-destructive behavior.

Friends and Family. Interpersonal support emerged as a key buffer against suicidal thoughts. Speaking with trusted friends allowed participants to express their emotions, seek advice, and feel understood. In the coastal community of San Miguel Bay, conversations with families and neighbors are part of everyday life, where everyone is familiar with one another’s affairs. Because houses are built close together and made of light materials, family arguments and exchanges are easily heard by nearby residents. *“Sa pamilya po namin, alam naman ng iba kong kapatid at ang sabi nila ay huwag akong susuko”* (Within our family, only some of my sisters knew about it, and they suggested that I should simply carry on and endure the situation), said Participant 6.

Consistent with the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, social connectedness directly counters “thwarted belongingness,” a known predictor of suicidal ideation (Joiner, 2005). Numerous studies confirm that perceived social support is inversely associated with suicidal thoughts and attempts, functioning as one of the strongest protective factors across age groups (Kleiman & Liu, 2013; Garcia et al., 2021). For individuals in distress, friendships provided immediate emotional validation and reduced feelings of isolation.

Focus on Work. Distract oneself. Participants 2 also described immersing themselves in work as a form of distraction and coping. She described starting work at 3 in the morning and continuing until 2 in the afternoon, leaving her extremely exhausted. However, her husband would come home drunk around 7 in the evening and wake her up with his shouting. The children would also be scolded and nagged. But she admitted that she finds her work a break from the exhausting situation. In fact, she added that once her husband started to rant, she would change and go back to work again. Sometimes even without fish to process, she would just stay outside and talk to her co-workers.

Engaging in productive activity reduces rumination—a major risk factor for suicidal ideation—and provides structure and purpose (Martell et al., 2010). Research shows that employment fosters psychological well-being by promoting agency, competence, and social integration (Milner et al., 2013). For participants, work became both a practical necessity and a mental refuge, allowing them to shift focus away from distressing thoughts.

Fear of Moral Consequences. Fear of divine judgment or moral transgression also played a significant role in preventing suicidal acts. Participants 2,3,5 and 8 claimed fear of God as their

reasons for suspending suicide ideation. “*Alam ko pong kasalanan ang magpakamatay, kaya natatakot po ako*” (*I know that suicide is a sin, hence I’m afraid*). In collectivist and strongly religious societies, such as the Philippines, moral and spiritual values shape personal decisions and provide a framework for evaluating actions (Pargament, 2011). Studies consistently show that religiosity—particularly beliefs about the sanctity of life—lowers suicide risk by discouraging morally prohibited behavior and instilling emotional resilience (VanderWeele et al., 2016). Participants’ fear of divine punishment or spiritual consequences served as a psychological barrier against self-harm.

Fear of Dying. Some participants dismissed suicidal ideation due to their fear of physical pain, injury, or the uncertainty of dying. “*Participant 8 complained, “Gusto ko pong mamatay, pero ayaw kong masaktan”* (I may want to die, but I don’t want to feel it physically). The fear of death functions as a natural protective factor, as individuals often imagine the physical suffering involved in self-harm (Klonsky & May, 2015). Studies confirm that individuals with lower pain tolerance or stronger fear responses are less likely to attempt suicide, as they lack the “acquired capability” to enact lethal self-harm (Smith et al., 2012). This aligns with the participants’ narratives in which fear of the unknown and fear of bodily harm deterred suicidal behaviors.

Children as their intrinsic motivation. For the married participants, particularly the mothers, their children served as their motivation to cope and move forward. “*Para po sa mga anak ko*” (*For the sake of my children*).

Children, served as a powerful source of motivation for parents to continue living. The awareness that self-harm could bring emotional, financial, or developmental harm to one’s children deterred many participants from acting on suicidal impulses. Parental responsibility and emotional attachment act as strong buffers against suicidal behavior (Qin & Mortensen, 2003). Research consistently shows that individuals with dependent children report lower rates of suicide attempts due to the powerful sense of purpose and obligation generated by caregiving roles (Beautrais, 2001).

Constructive Distractions: Swimming, Cleaning and Family Bonding. Participants engaged in various constructive forms of distraction, including swimming, recreational activities, household chores, and the development of healthy new relationships, as strategies for managing distress. Although these coping mechanisms were largely temporary, they provided relief as the participants continued to hope for their long-anticipated sense of peace. These activities function as behavioral activation techniques, which was shown to be effective in reducing depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation

(Martell et al., 2010). Engaging in routine or pleasurable tasks helps interrupt cycles of negative thinking, builds self-efficacy, and improves emotional regulation. Forming new relationships, can also restore belongingness and emotional support, both central to suicide prevention (Kleiman & Liu, 2013)

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The study, “*Narratives on Triumphs and Defeats: A Study on Suicide Ideation in the*

Coastal Communities of San Miguel Bay,” reveals the nuanced and deeply human experiences of individuals navigating both the darkest and most resilient moments of their lives.

Participants’ narratives highlight the **Defeats**—those low and vulnerable periods marked by hopelessness, emotional and psychological pain, chronic poverty, abuse, and social isolation—that give rise to self-harming thoughts and suicidal ideation. These moments reflect the profound emotional burdens carried by individuals in marginalized coastal communities, where environmental, economic, and relational adversities converge and heighten mental health risks.

At the same time, the findings illuminate the **Triumphs** that empower individuals to endure and continue living. These triumphs emerge from faith and spirituality, love for family and children, meaningful work, supportive relationships, and constructive activities that bring purpose, distraction, and emotional relief. The presence of community support—whether through church involvement, familial bonds, friendships, or shared cultural values—provides psychological anchors that help individuals resist suicidal impulses and rebuild a sense of hope.

Taken together, these intertwined narratives of triumphs and defeats underscore the complexity of human resilience within the context of coastal living in San Miguel Bay. They highlight the urgent need for comprehensive, culturally grounded, and community-centered mental health interventions that address not only the risk factors but also strengthen the protective mechanisms embedded in local social, cultural, and spiritual systems. Ultimately, this study affirms that while individuals may experience profound moments of defeat, their capacity for triumph—rooted in connection with the family and neighbors, faith—that is naturally characteristics of the selected villages, and resilience—that is innate in individual members of the community remains a powerful force that sustains life amidst adversity. While the C-SSRS proved that Suicide ideation is still manifested from some of the participants, this calls for immediate action and mitigation.

Recommendations

Based on the lived experiences of participants in this study, suicide prevention and mental health promotion in coastal community contexts may be strengthened through an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that responds to psychosocial, cultural, institutional, and socio-economic dimensions of distress.

A key component of this approach is the integration of faith-based and culturally grounded support systems, which emerged as particularly significant within the study context. Participants’ reliance on religious and spiritual practices suggests that, in communities where faith is deeply embedded in everyday life, collaboration with faith-

based institutions may serve as an important complementary support mechanism. Within a non-sectarian and coordinated framework, faith leaders and organizations may be engaged in psychoeducation, emotional support, and referral facilitation, in partnership with local government health structures. This approach may help strengthen informal support networks while ensuring

that mental health services remain accessible, culturally responsive, and community-accepted.

At the community level, LGUs and mental health professionals may further strengthen services through early identification of psychological distress, psychological first aid, and accessible referral pathways. In geographically isolated coastal areas, barangay-based mental health hubs and mobile counseling services may be explored, alongside capacity-building for Barangay Health Workers and trained community volunteers.

In educational settings, schools may be utilized as key platforms for suicide prevention through mental health literacy, life skills education, and resilience-building programs. Strengthening teacher capacity to identify early warning signs and establishing structured consultation mechanisms may support early intervention and help-seeking behaviors among students.

Family and peer systems may also be reinforced through programs that promote communication, parenting skills, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation, recognizing their protective role in buffering psychological distress.

Finally, livelihood and economic support interventions—such as skills training, alternative income programs, and cooperative development—may help address financial stressors that contribute to vulnerability in coastal communities.

Overall, the findings suggest that a faith-integrated, community-anchored, and multi-sectoral approach may provide a more holistic and culturally responsive framework for addressing suicidal ideation and psychological distress in similar coastal settings.

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