

## The Journey To Recovery of Individuals Undergoing Rehabilitation: A Phenomenological Study

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### Abstract

*Live experiences in phenomenological research denote an individual's first-hand engagement and direct experiences. Meaning-making experiences, in which individuals have a deep understanding and make their experiences significant by adding purpose and value to life. This study aimed to discuss the experiences of individuals undergoing rehabilitation and meaning-making through their journey to recovery. This phenomenological study used interviews as a qualitative method to gather data. An in-depth thematic analysis of the data was conducted. The findings revealed that four (4) superordinate themes emerged through thematic analysis: ambivalence in undergoing treatment, gradual changes in oneself, transformational experiences, and personal growth while receiving treatment. Low motivation, misconception, and adjustment to the new environment marked the experience of newly admitted drug dependents during the first phase of rehabilitation. Individuals receiving treatment have gradually experienced increases in motivation; development of healthy coping skills and strategies; and changes in their physical, behavioral, and psychological states. Understanding the participants' life events concerning receiving therapy was the essence of meaning making. Hence, this study concludes that the interventions and activities offered during recovery are meant to help people re-establish a new, healthy, and addiction-free life.*

**Keywords:** drug rehabilitation, recovery, treatment

### INTRODUCTION

Drug dependence is a serious problem prevalent in the Philippines. It affects not only the life of a single individual but also the lives of people around them, which can last even a lifetime. According to the official website of Dangerous Drug Board Philippines reports that 5,546 rehabilitation admissions occurred in 2023, Of these numbers, 4,425 are new admissions, 85 are readmitted, or relapse cases, and 1,036 are outpatient, a 44% increase from the previous year. This increase was attributed from improved national programs for Persons Who Use Drugs (PWUDs) and more publicly available information to understand appropriate intervention.

The Centre for Prisoner Health and Human Rights (n.d.) reported a significant increase in the number of people arrested, charged, and jailed for drug charges. In the country, problems related to drugs were viewed as criminal acts upon which the government acted and focused on policy

implementation for the punishment of illegal activities rather than treating it as a disease (Simbulan et. al., 2019) as there have been numerous crimes related to drug use. The relationship between drug abuse and crime is undeniable (Rafaiee, Olyaei & Sargolzaiee, 2013). Addiction is heavily stigmatized and has a low recovery rate (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018). Many studies have shown that it is possible to recover from addiction. In a recent survey by the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health, more than 75% of individuals who are addicted to alcohol or drugs recover with health and life improvement, and the use of substances has ceased to dominate their lives.

Many individuals are struggling or battling with addiction; the most difficult step toward recovery is the very first step, which is to recognize that you have a problem and decide to make a change. It takes a lot of courage to accept the need to help change and to start recovery. The significance of recognizing the perspective of a

person seeking therapy has been emphasized (Wangensteen & Hystad, 2021) and a significant amount of research has investigated the efficacy of residential treatment services for substance use and addiction (De Andrade et. al., 2019). The Republic Act 9165, or “The Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002” of the Philippines, requires the state to provide mechanisms that are effective in helping people who have been victims of illegal drug abuse and dependence through long-term and sustainable treatment and rehabilitation programs, which are essential components of drug demand reduction (Dangerous Drugs Board, 2022).

A study conducted by Briones et al.. al (2023), the study explored Filipino substance abusers’ addiction, rehabilitation, and recovery experiences. As a result, the study developed the Lotus Model of Addiction, Rehabilitation, and Recovery of Filipino Substance Abusers. This model characterizes three (3) interrelated but distinct themes of substance abusers’ experiences: realizing (Get through), purifying (Get on), and recuperating (Get over). This study highlights Purifying (Get-On) experiences of the participants such as a significant shift in environment when they moved to a remote, confined facility, difficulty acclimating to facility policies, and a shift in perspective when they realized that rehabilitation would make them more resilient and help them avoid using drugs after the program was over. Furthermore, a study by Sol and Dominguez (2021) generated the Filipino Substance Use Recovery Theory with five theoretical phases: Exhaustion, Recognition, Acceptance, Involvement, and Maintenance. Considering the aim of this study, the Involvement Phase will be emphasized, as it describes individuals who voluntarily undergo treatment and rehabilitation programs, participate in the provided interventions with the help of professionals, and are actively involved in their own care.

Furthermore, studies on addiction have identified it as a neurological disease that can pass through the stages of relapse and remission (University of Rochester, 2022). In a rehabilitation center, various activities are

provided that aim to rebuild a new and healthy life for addiction-free drug abusers free from addiction (Cirque Lodge, 2022). Residents expressed that staying in a rehabilitation center was challenging but recognized that it paved the way for recovery from addiction to begin a sober life (Briones et. al, 2019). The ultimate goal of recovery is to prevent individuals from relapsing into drug dependence and reintegrating back into society to live productive lives and develop law-abiding behaviors.

As a research gap, a review of the literature revealed that there are limited studies and existing literature that highlight the lived experiences of individuals while undergoing rehabilitation. Additionally, current studies have focused on substance use outcomes, if not, concentrated on the lives of recovering drug dependents after undergoing treatment and rehabilitation. At the same time, the literature review also revealed that there are no local studies conducted in the Philippines that explore the process and in-depth experiences of individuals while undergoing rehabilitation (EBSCO Information Services, 2024). This was recommended by Briones et al.. al (2023), the need to explore and improve programs for the effective treatment and recovery of Filipinos who use drugs. Additionally, the male-to-female ratio of 12:1 indicates a rise in admissions, according to the Philippines’ Dangerous Drug Board. As a result, the researchers are eager to help identify potential causes of prevalence and offer insights into male behavioral patterns.

To fill the aforementioned research gaps, the objectives of this study were to (1) describe the experiences of individuals undergoing rehabilitation, and (2) describe the essence of the experiences of individuals undergoing rehabilitation.

## METHOD

The live experiences of individuals undergoing treatment and rehabilitation were examined in this study through the use of a phenomenological research design. It describes and explains the meaning of individuals’ lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept

(Creswell, 2013). In this study, the subjective experiences of the participants were investigated to describe what they had in common with rehabilitation for the treatment of drug addiction.

Before data collection, the researchers formulated a semi-structured interview guide instrument that was validated by three experts (a registered psychologist in the clinical field, psychometrician working in the field of addiction, and master's teacher). The instrument is divided into two parts. The first part was the demographic profile of the participants, including name, age, civil status, address, educational attainment, admission date, substance of choice, and phase in treatment where the participant was currently situated. The second part identified the experience of individuals while undergoing rehabilitation, including questions about their admission, daily routine, lived experience and its essence, effect of treatment while undergoing recovery, the difference between their previous and present life, and hopes and aspirations after rehabilitation. Furthermore, the researchers acquired permission with an approval letter from the specified rehabilitation center of this research location to obtain information about the participants. Once approved, the researchers went to the facility to conduct face-to-face interviews guided by a semi-structured questionnaire used to collect data. The researchers ensured that rapport was established and properly briefed on the study before they were given a demographic profile sheet with an attached informed consent form written in both English and Filipino to signify their voluntary participation. The researchers provided time for the participants to read the forms and facilitate inquiries if there were any. After ensuring that the participants understood the process of participating in the study, the interviews began. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to guarantee that their stories were accurately captured. Checking before and after the interview session was also facilitated for each participant to ensure their safety in the conduct of the research. Responses from the interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis to guide, help, and assist with the results of the data.

The participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on eligibility criteria. A qualitative study may employ a relatively small purposively selected (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which researchers deliberately choose individuals who meet the criteria relevant to the research objectives. This is often used to select participants who possess unique characteristics or experiences that can provide valuable insights into a research topic (Kelly, 2010). Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this study given the need to collect an array of experiences and viewpoints among individuals undergoing rehabilitation. This facilitated the selection of participants who could provide nuanced accounts of their lived experiences related to undergoing rehabilitation and the essence of those experiences. Little is known about the experiences of people with substance use disorders in rehabilitation centers (Mangaoil, 2020).

Participants in this study were individuals who met the following criteria: (1) male, (2) Filipino citizen, (3) aged 20 to 50 years, (4) single or married, (5) diagnosed with severe stimulant use disorder in sustained remission, (6) no concurrent personality disorder and psychotic condition or any medical condition, and (7) had undergone a minimum of six (6) months of inpatient treatment in a government rehabilitation facility in Cavite.

This study highlights male participants because, according to the Dangerous Drugs Board of the Philippines, admissions in treatment and rehabilitation centers consist of ninety percent (90.06%) of patients are admitted to treatment and rehabilitation centers. Consequently, a study recommends exploring rural areas (Briones et al., 2023) such as Cavite, which ranked second in the Dangerous Drug Board 2019 annual report with the highest number of admitted patients to rehabilitation facilities related to drugs. The findings of the study conducted by Briones et al. al. (2023) suggested that there is a need to evaluate and improve existing programs to improve the quality of treatment and recovery of Filipino drug-dependents. According to the existing literature, many victims of drug abuse in the country do not have knowledge of and access to drug treatment and rehabilitation centers

(Briones, et. al., 2023) even in government facilities.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria hold equal significance, as they aid in identifying individuals who might not be suitable candidates for participation owing to a range of problems that may compromise the study's safety, efficacy, or integrity. For this study, the following exclusion criteria were proposed: (1) participants will not be allowed to participate if they exhibit severe withdrawal symptoms, active psychosis, suicidal thoughts, or other urgent medical conditions requiring rapid management; (2) people who suffer from serious mental illness or cognitive impairment that makes it difficult for them to understand, engage in, or benefit from the study will not be allowed to participate. This requirement is to protect the participants' safety and well-being as well as the safety and well-being of other research participants; (3) individuals with a documented history of violent behavior or threats toward staff or other participants, posing a risk to the safety and security of the participants, will be excluded from participation; and (4) individuals who are minors or who have completed their treatment will not be allowed to participate in the study.

In phenomenological research, participants are gathered for an interview by the researchers to provide a considerable amount of data (Morse, 1995) and usually employ between six and ten participants. Additionally, qualitative research data were gathered, where data saturation refers to the point in qualitative data collection, where new data no longer provide novel insights into the themes being explored. During the first analysis of the themes extracted from the participants, nine residents were interviewed, and the ninth participant did not provide additional themes. This suggests that the researcher gathered sufficient information to thoroughly understand and interpret the phenomenon under study. At this stage, collecting more data is unlikely to contribute significantly to the depth or richness of the analysis (Saunders, et. al., 2018).

This study, which involved human subjects, was approved and certified by the ethics review board of De La Salle University-

Dasmariñas. This study was conducted in compliance with the university's research ethics policy.

Each participant was assigned a code to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. After completion of this research study, the collected data will be disposed of. Participation in this study was purely voluntary, and informed consent was discussed properly to the participants and made sure that they understood the purpose of the study, including its possible risks. Thus, the researchers conducted emotional check-ins before and after the interviews.

To ensure the validity of the instrument and obtain the necessary data, three subject matter specialists with the necessary education and experience validated the interview guide questions, since the topic in the interview may recall and involve sensitive questions from the participants. Further, the researchers requested permission from the participants for audio recording; at the end of data collection, participants were informed that they would be given access to the results of this study. Appreciation gifts were provided to the participants as expressions of gratitude for voluntarily participating in this study.

## RESULT

This study aimed to document participants' experiences during their admission to a drug rehabilitation center and to depict their journey toward recovery. Second, the researchers aimed to investigate the meaning-making process concerning recovery. Two key questions intended to elicit participants' unfiltered responses served as the study's compass. Each researcher interviewed a minimum of two participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria.

The findings of this study were able to share the experiences that were similar to those described in the Purifying (Get-on) experiences (Briones, et. al., 2023), such as a significant shift in environment when they move to a remote, confined facility, difficulty acclimating to facility policies, and a shift in perspective when they realized that rehabilitation would make them

more resilient and help them avoid using drugs after the program was over.

Four (4) superordinate themes emerged from this study: ambivalence in undergoing

treatment, gradual changes with oneself, transformational experiences, and personal growth through thematic analysis.

**Table 1.** *Participants' Rehabilitation And Recovery Experiences*

| Superordinate Themes                | Subordinate Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ambivalence in Undergoing Treatment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low motivation</li> <li>2. Misconception</li> <li>3. Adjustment to the new environment</li> </ol>                                                                        |
| Gradual Changes with Oneself        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased motivation in treatment</li> <li>2. Development of healthy coping skills and strategies</li> <li>3. Physical, behavioral, and psychological changes</li> </ol> |

Table 1 shows the participants' rehabilitation and recovery experiences. According to the results of the interviews, two (2) themes were conceptualized. The themes were as follows: 1) Ambivalence in Undergoing Treatment and 2) Gradual Changes with Oneself.

### **Ambivalence in Undergoing Treatment**

Three (3) subthemes fall under the theme of Ambivalence in Undergoing Treatment. These are 1) low motivation, 2) misconceptions, and 3) adjustment to the new environment.

#### **Low motivation**

In retrospect, the participants acknowledged that they found the initial phase of treatment challenging to follow. One participant responded that this was against his will.

*"It was like against my will. At first, it was hard to accept (Parang labag sa loob ko. Noong una, mahirap tanggapin)." (P-05, 31 y/o)*

The participants found it difficult to feel motivated during rehabilitation. They do not acknowledge the need to undergo treatment because they feel like they can do so on their own. Most participants experienced difficulty in accepting their situations when they were admitted.

*"I was upset because I don't want it, I really don't want it. I always told myself*

*that I can do it, I can do it on my own (Nainis ako kasi, ayaw ko e, ayaw ko talaga. Lagi ko sinasak sa isip ko na na kaya ako naman eh, kaya ko naman)." (P-02, 32 y/o)*

#### **Misconception**

Notably, unique experiences were shared during the data gathering. Some participants felt that the rehabilitation facility was more like a mental health facility. One participant stated the following:

*"At first, I thought the people here were crazy. I just thought because I didn't even accept that I was in rehab (Nung una, akala ko mga baliw iyang mga tao rito. Akala ko lang po kasi hindi ko rin po natanggap na nasa rehab ako)." (P-04, 19 y/o)*

Most of the participants were not familiar with a rehabilitation facility and only had assumptions about what they had heard from other people; stigma and misconception with what is the real purpose of a rehabilitation center is observed.

*"Rehab.. it was new to me that what I knew is similar to those people in mental institutions where people with mental problems live. That's what I've heard (Yung rehab... Una sa pandinig ko po na ang alam ko na parang kapatid ng*

*mga tao sa pulang bubong, mga tirahan ng mga baliw. Yun ang una kong pandinig kasi).*" (P-09, 36 y/o)

This also means that they need to understand that treatment is helpful for them, and there is nothing wrong with starting treatment in the facility.

#### **Adjustment to the new environment**

The participants clearly remembered how hard it was for them to get used to the new surroundings since they had to strictly adhere to the schedule and participate more in the program. One of the participants' responses stated that

*"When I was new here, it felt strange especially when I moved to junior phase because it was different from Bictuan, in Bicutan, they are more lenient unlike here that they are very structured even during wake up time, I was not used to it (Yung bago po ako dito naninibago ako lalo nung nalipat nako ng junior phase kasi hindi katulad sa Bicutan, sa Bicutan medyo maluwag e kumbaga dito kasi talagang sobrang structured ultimo sa oras ng gising nanibago ako).*" (P-01, 28 y/o)

*"We have 7 minutes to shower. We need to get that time. If we don't get that, you have a fumble (May 7 minutes kami na paliligo. Kailangan makuha namin yung oras na yun. Kung hindi namin makuha yun, meron kang fumble)"* (P-03, 30 y/o)

This suggests that individuals undergoing rehabilitation experience changes in their daily routine. This allows them to follow and develop their lost routine of activities while under the influence of drugs.

#### **Gradual Changes with Oneself**

Similarly, three (3) subthemes fall under the theme of gradual acceptance and change. The subthemes were as follows: 1) increased motivation for treatment, 2) development of healthy coping skills and strategies, and 3) physical, behavioral, and psychological changes.

#### **Increased motivation in treatment**

After undergoing prescribed interventions over a certain period, participants were able to improve and increase their motivation to continue their treatment program. One of the participants further stated this:

*"When I had job function, I had a new reason to do well in my program (Noong nagkaroon ako ng function para akong nagkaroon ng bagong dahilan para ayusin ang pamomograma ko).*" (P-01, 28 y/o)

In a rehabilitation facility, they have a chance to become officers, which helps them develop responsibility and accountability.

#### **Development of healthy coping skills and strategies**

In the past, drug dependents used drugs to cope with their own problems. Undergoing treatment and rehabilitation helps individuals learn healthy coping mechanisms and develop skills such as self-expression and problem solving.

*"When I am stressed, I use drugs. When I am bored, I use drugs. So, we are taught some techniques how to face those situations (Kapag na-stress ako, mag-shabu ako. Kapag nag-boring ako, mag-shabu ako. So, doon tinuruan kami ng mga techniques kung paano namin harapin yan).*" (P-03, 30 y/o)

*"Before, when I am mad at someone, I would fight him. But now, I try to understand him/her, even myself, because it would be difficult if I only believe myself to be always right (Dati, pag may galit ako sa isang tao, inaano ko siya, kinakalaban ko pa siya, Ngayon, yung inuunawa ko na, pati sarili ko, kasi, mahirap naman kasi na akala ko sa sarili ko lagi akong tama).*" (P-08, 37 y/o)

#### **Physical, behavioral, and psychological changes**

Participants underwent a process of change in various aspects of their lives, including

physical appearance, way of thinking, and behavior.

*"Now, I try to take care of myself (Natutunan ko na medyo tone down yung sarili ko nang ganon konti kasi yung sasabihin ng ibang tao nakakahiya. Parang mas okay din)." (P-02, 32 y/o)*

*"My heart became soft here (Naging malambot ang puso ko dito)." (P-06, 41 y/o)*

*"But when I went to rehab, I glow up. Even in physical appearance and*

*spirituality of course (Pero, nung nag rehab ako, nag glow ako. Kahit sa physical na anyo po, saka sa spiritual siyempre)." (P-04, 19, y/o)*

Comes with these changes are satisfied with the process they are going through here, as they find themselves gradually changing their behavior while in recovery.

*"I am happy, I have changed a lot (Natutuwa ako, ang laki ng pinagbago ko)." (P-04, 19 y/o)*

**Table 2.** Meaning Making of the Experiences Related to Undergoing Rehabilitation

| Superordinate Themes         | Subordinate Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transformational Experiences | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-acceptance</li> <li>2. Restored social connections</li> <li>3. Determined to pursue recovery</li> </ol>                                                                        |
| Personal Growth              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive perception of self</li> <li>2. Learning responsibility and accountability</li> <li>3. Establishing recovery goals and plans</li> <li>4. Feelings of fulfillment</li> </ol> |

Table 2 shows the participants' meaning-making of their experiences related to rehabilitation and recovery. According to the results of the interviews, two (2) themes were conceptualized. The themes were as follows: (1) Transformational Experiences and (2) Personal Growth.

### Transformational Experiences

Following the findings, three (3) subthemes fall under the superordinate theme of Transformational Experiences. The subthemes were as follows: 1) self-acceptance, 2) restored social connections, and 3) determined to pursue recovery.

#### Self-acceptance

This subtheme is self-acceptance, the individual's knowledge, and reflection on difficult circumstances, which leads to increased self-awareness and acceptance of one's own experiences. These are essential to instilling a sense of responsibility in the face of adversity. This idea supports one participant's statement:

*"After finishing my rehab, when I get out, I will undergo aftercare for 18 months. I really want to finish it. Because I now believe in what they say that recovery is lifetime (Pagkatapos po ng rehab ko, paglabas ko mag-aftercare po ako ng 18 months e. So, gusto ko talaga tapusin. Kasi naniniwala na ko sa sinasabi nila na lifetime po yung recovery)." (P-01, 28 y/o)*

*"Now, even if I am right, if I know that it will bring negative outcome, I learned to adjust. I will let go of it and I will do the right thing (Ngayon, kahit tama ako, pag alam ko na, pwedeng magbunga ng hindi magandang pangyayari, natututo na akong mag-adjust na. Kaya, hayaan ko na lang siya ngayon. Idaan ko sa mabuti)." (P-09, 36 y/o)*

This implies that individuals undergoing rehabilitation accept themselves as they are now, and they create space for self-discovery, self-expression, and self-improvement.

**Restored social connection**

During rehabilitation, various family interventions were provided to the residents, which helped them develop a positive support system that would encourage them to maintain recovery once they were reintegrated into society. One participant mentioned that he had suddenly developed care for other people, including their families, and wished to establish positive relationships with them.

*"That's really the biggest thing I noticed was that I had a problem connecting with people. Now, I prioritize establishing good relationships with other people. (Yun talaga ang pinaka malaking napansin ko yung nagkaroon ako ng pakialam sa tao. So, gusto ko na po, ng maayos na relasyon sa kanila)." (P-06, 41 y/o)*

This indicates that individuals undergoing rehabilitation added new characteristics and restored everything that they had lost in the past.

**Determined to pursue recovery**

The participants demonstrated commitment to their recovery journey and were willing to engage in the process of change, as one participant stated:

*"That's why I want it, of course, the aftercare will be a big help. I want to continuously expand my knowledge such as learning coping strategies and understanding the triggers that I can face. So I really want to finish it. (Kaya gusto ko na, syempre, malaking tulong po yung aftercare. Na tuloy-tuloy pa rin po yung knowledge ko sa, sa pagcope sa mga trigger na maari kong kaharapin so tatapusin ko po talaga)." (P-01, 28 y/o)*

They also retained a positive attitude toward their recovery path, focusing on their strengths and potential for a better future. They approach obstacles with positivity and hope to provide a good example for others who have taken similar paths.

**Personal Growth**

Based on these findings, two (4) subthemes fall under the category of personal growth. The subthemes were as follows: 1) positive perception of self, 2) learning responsibility and accountability, 3) establishing recovery goals and plans, and 4) feelings of fulfillment.

**Positive perception of self**

In this subtheme, participants may understand their inherent worth and deserve a healthy, meaningful existence. This perception enables them to prioritize self-care and make decisions that improve their wellbeing. According to one of the participants, he said that he wanted to be positive right now. Even if the experiences are unpleasant, he will focus on the positive lessons he can take away from each circumstance. This supports the idea that their experiences in rehabilitation help them realize their ability to make a good difference in their lives and acquire a sense of self-efficacy, the belief that they can overcome obstacles and achieve their objectives.

*"I just want to think positively now. Even if the things I went through were unimaginable, I will still look at the good lessons I learned from those situations. (Gusto ko na lang ngayon positibo lang. Kahit na pangit yung mga pinagdaanan mo titingin pa rin ako sa magandang aral na matutunan ko sa bawat sitwasyon na kinakaharap ko.)" (P-01, 28 y/o)*

**Learning responsibility and accountability**

The participants took responsibility for their recovery and adhered to the rules of the rehabilitation center. According to one participant, they tried to abide by the rules after gradually realizing that there were several restrictions. This suggests that the experiences of the participants in the rehabilitation helped them accept responsibility for their route to recovery and acknowledge their part in the healing process.

*"When I gradually understood, I tried to follow because there were many rules inside the center. You should choose to do the right thing. So I followed. That's it, it's that simple. I just*

*really tried to follow every rule in the rehabilitation. (Noong unti-unting ko nang naintindihan, so sinubukan ko sumunod kasi maraming bawal. Kailangan kung bawal, huwag mong gagawin. So sumunod ako. Yun lang naman, ganun naman kasimple. So nung ginawa ko, sinubukan ko talaga yung pagsunod dito.)” (P-03, 30 y/o)*

### **Establishing recovery goals and plans**

The participants' experiences in rehabilitation provided them with an ideal road map for achieving recovery. They established specific goals that defined exactly what each participant hoped to accomplish. One participant expressed his desire to return to school.

*“One of the most important plans I have is to continue my studies. Since I was rehabbed, I was able to enroll again. Apparently, the process (of rehab) was better for me. Because, I was able to return to my studies again. (Ipagpatuloy ko yung pag-aaral ko. Pero simula po yung na-rehab po ako, nakapag-enroll na ulit ako. Kumbaga, nakita ko yung mas magandang process niya (ng rehab) para sa akin. Kasi, nakabalik ako sa pag-aaral ko. Tsaka, isa yun sa pinakamahalagang plano.)” (P-04, 19 y/o)*

This suggests that the participant has a personalized recovery goal, which may inspire him to complete his treatment. Likewise, the participants' target goals were to provide them with a clear direction, motivation, and framework for them to work towards during their rehabilitation time. This offers individuals a sense of purpose in life, motivating them to pursue sobriety and make life-improving decisions despite the obstacles.

### **Feelings of fulfillment**

The participants' feeling of fulfillment in the rehabilitation validates their progress in their recovery journey. This promotes feelings of understanding in their situations, which indicates

that recovery is possible and that they can create a fulfilling life. This notion reinforces the statement of one participant:

*“My life now is more fulfilled. And now I am capable of understanding things better. Unlike before that I do not have intentions to understand the situation (Kasi yung buhay ko ngayon mas fulfilled. Saka mas naiintindihan ko ngayon yung mga bagay-bagay. Dati, hindi ko, wala kasi ako intensyon ko intindihin dati.)” (P-02, 32 y/o)*

He believes that his life is becoming more meaningful and that he is improving. This shows that being in treatment broadens their perspective on life and gives them a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

## **DISCUSSION**

The extracted data are based on the accounts of the participants that encompass subjective experiences and meaning-making related to rehabilitation and recovery. Our study intends to reveal the lived experiences of people undergoing rehabilitation, as these have not been mostly seen in research, similar to the claims of Mangaoil (2020).

Individuals undergoing treatment and rehabilitation in a facility go to various treatment phases to determine their progress in recovery. Ambivalence, misconception, and low motivation marked the experience during the first phase of rehabilitation of newly admitted drug dependents, which was identified as a common occurrence when drug dependents became newly-sober (Bell et al., 2009; Erdos et al., 2009; Hirschman, 1992). They are viewed as drug dependents who cannot recover anymore, but this is also a common misconception (Gavilan, 2016). Numerous articles have also revealed the stigma and lack of knowledge of filipinos regarding the treatment of drug addiction. This experience also described the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages of change in Prochaska and DiClemente (1982), where in the pre-contemplation stage, individuals have difficulty recognizing the consequences of their actions and denial of problems; therefore, they are pressured to undergo treatment. After a

few months in the treatment and rehabilitation program, is the contemplation stage where individuals acknowledge their problem but they are uncertain, with conflicting emotions and ambivalence about changing.

In the second phase of treatment, there were evident changes and realizations. As individuals became aware of their drug-related problems, they also began to recognize the need to undergo treatment and its significance (Sol and Dominguez, 2021). This is supported by the theory of Sol and Dominguez (2021) that in the Involvement Phase, involvement in the treatment program aids participants in acknowledging and managing their emotions, thoughts, and behavior with the help of professionals, and also supports the study by Neale, et. al. (2015) that undergoing rehabilitation will come forth with motivation and realization. This is also similar to the preparation and action stages of change by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982), where, in the preparation stage, individuals are willing to take small steps to change and confirm their commitment to change. Meanwhile, in the action stage, they established a clear plan to change and implement actions towards achieve their goals. This results in gradual changes, including increased motivation for treatment; development of coping strategies; and changes in physical, behavioral, and psychological aspects. They began to gain insight that rehabilitation and recovery from drug use need more than abstinence and understand the emotional and situational triggers of relapse and their coping mechanisms (Fullam, 2020).

The essence or meaning focused on understanding participants' experiences related to undergoing rehabilitation. The findings from the data collected from the participants were aligned with the generated theory of Briones et al. al. (2023), and the Purifying (Get On) experience, wherein it is the experiential learning of Filipino substance abusers during rehabilitation. After staying in the treatment program for more than six (6) months going to twelve (12) months which is the most appropriate length of time in a drug residential treatment (APA, 2013; Hubbard et al., 2003; Laudet et al., 2009; McKetin et al., 2018; Mulder et al., 2009; National Institute on Drug

Abuse, 2012; NSW Health, 2007; Porter, 2013; SA Health, n.d.), individuals have been exposed to various and numerous interventions including family interventions, individual, group and relapse prevention sessions. This helped them progress on all aspects of their recovery. This is evident in their behavior and performance in their treatment programs. They view the interventions and activities provided during rehabilitation to re-establish a renewed life that is free from addiction and healthy (Cirque Lodge, 2022). Equally, participants were involved in recovery planning after rehabilitation (Sol and Dominguez, 2021). In the last phase of treatment during rehabilitation, which is the senior phase, the participants are prepared for reintegration into society through interventions of various integration of treatment such as spiritual enhancement, vocational and livelihood, and relapse prevention skills to be able to equip them in handling environmental stressors and challenges outside the controlled environment and rehabilitation. This is supported by the change in their behavior from what they did in the past, as well as their lifestyle in abstinence from drugs (Fullam, 2020). The transformational experiences and personal growth that emerged from the second objective of the study are directed towards appreciation of family relationships, motivation to maintain sobriety, and reintegration into society after the treatment program (Brunelle et. al., 2015; Timpson et. al., 2016). A positive outlook was reported where positive mentality towards purpose in life in the future (Fullam, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our study provides an illustration of the experiences of individuals undergoing their journey to recovery. These individuals shared common experiences during the rehabilitation process. The unique experience of individuals was ambivalence in undergoing treatment and gradual changes with oneself, which may be experienced by other individuals who undergo rehabilitation that helps them to adjust and develop healthy coping strategies. As they reach the end of their journey to recovery, our participants begin to experience

transformational experiences and personal growth, and discover their life's purpose. This contributed empirically to the Purifying (Get-On) phase in the Lotus Model of Addiction, Rehabilitation, and Recovery of Filipino Substance Abusers.

This research contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of rehabilitation, uncovering new findings, and this continual advancement enhances the understanding of the complex factors that influence recovery. This study provides valuable evidence on factors that influence rehabilitation outcomes, such as social support, coping strategies, and motivation. By incorporating this knowledge into clinical practice, mental health professionals can optimize interventions to maximize positive outcomes and promote long-term recovery.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the aftercare/post rehabilitation of the participants was not included in the study and secondly, the samples were gathered only from government facilities in Cavite, which may have shown different results if they were collected in an urban location.

Based on the summary and findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested: (1) conduct further study but with different sex, which is female, to further understand their lived experience while undergoing rehabilitation; (2) study about the aftercare recovery of the individuals once they complete rehabilitation; (3) expand into much larger institutions, such as those in urban regions with the highest number of admitted rehabilitation patients; and (4) conduct a study on the lived experiences of those undergoing rehabilitation who are admitted more than once.

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