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Residing among the Departed: Exploring the Lived Experience of Individuals Living Within the Proximity of Cemeteries

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is conducted to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries in depth and to identify the individuals' challenges and coping strategies to navigate the ongoing challenges associated with their proximity to cemeteries. The study adopted a phenomenological research design. The researchers employed snowballing techniques to carefully select a diverse group of fifteen participants for the study. The interview questions were unstructured and validated by respected experts in the field. The researchers have included supplementary probing questions to ensure the depth and richness of the data, which will only be used if necessary. All collected data was securely stored to safeguard confidentiality and privacy. The information was organized systematically, using transcribing, coding into themes by thematically analyzing, and categories that emerged from the interviews. This allowed for easier analysis and interpretation of the data. Living within the proximity of cemeteries uncovers a complex interplay of emotions, perspectives, and unique narratives that challenge conventional notions of individuals' life and death. This study sheds light on the diverse ways individuals navigate their existence within this unconventional living environment, offering valuable insights into the individuals' capacity to find meaning and connection even in the proximity of the departed. This research offers a comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences of individuals residing within cemeteries, contributing valuable insights to both academic discourse and practical applications in various fields.

INTRODUCTION

Cemeteries are sacred spaces that serve as final resting places for the departed. However, individuals who reside within the proximity of cemeteries may have unique lived experiences that are shaped by their environment. This study aims to: explore the lived experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries, the challenges they face, and the coping strategies they develop to navigate this distinctive living situation. Living within the proximity of cemetery can have effects on individuals' daily lives.

Several factors can influence the lived experience of individuals residing within the proximity of cemeteries; the cultural background, religious beliefs, and personal experiences of an individual can shape their perceptions and reactions to their environment. The landscaping, maintenance, and overall ambiance of cemeteries can vary significantly, influencing perceptions of the environment. Examining the role of cemetery design and upkeep in shaping residents' experiences is an important aspect of this study. Moreover, the presence of cemeteries can influence the physical environment surrounding these areas. Factors such as noise levels, traffic patterns, and accessibility can influence the daily lives of individuals living nearby. Addressing these practical challenges can contribute to improving the overall quality of life for residents in proximity to cemeteries.

Through this study, the researchers aim to highlight the

coping strategies that individuals employ to navigate the challenges associated with residing within the proximity of cemeteries. Coping mechanisms can vary greatly, encompassing everything from embracing religious or spiritual practices to seeking support from community networks or taking part in activities that amplify positive emotions and a sense of connection. By understanding the needs, concerns, and coping strategies of residents, and policymakers can create inclusive environments that support the emotional, and social well-being of individuals near burial grounds. By shedding light on the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of individuals residing within the proximity of cemeteries, the study aims to promote understanding, acceptance, and support for these individuals. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to the development of strategies that enhance their overall well-being and quality of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Literature

Cemetery Influence Analysis

As expressed by Abia (2020), the study explored the potential health hazards associated with cemeteries, particularly in developing nations where rapid urbanization has led to the emergence of informal settlements near burial grounds. It elucidates the environmental contamination attributed to these cemeteries, specifically the presence of bacterial pathogens such as *Escherichia coli* (*E. Coli*).

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This research examined the ramifications of deficient sanitation and waste management services, contributing to cemetery pollution, which could potentially taint water sources in neighboring communities, posing a substantial public health risk. Moreover, the study scrutinized the antibiotic resistance exhibited by the E. Coli strains identified in cemetery water samples, thus accentuating the looming threat of antibiotic resistant infections stemming from cemetery environments.

The author, Sodiya *et al.*, (2021), investigated whether the proximity of cemeteries significantly affected the rental values of nearby residential properties. It collected data from residents near Atan Cemetery in Lagos and found that cemetery proximity within a 200-meter radius did not have a statistically significant impact on property rental values. The study on the impact of cemeteries on residential property values is valuable for our research on individuals living in close proximity to cemeteries. While our study aims to explore the lived experiences of these individuals, understanding the potential influence of cemetery proximity on property values is essential because it could be one of the challenges they face.

Cemetery Location Influence

According to Valerie Kalfrin (2020), provided insights into the influence of living within cemeteries on residential property values. It highlights that contrary to common apprehensions, proximity to a cemetery does not necessarily result in a negative effect on property values. The study cited in the article found instances where homes with a view of the cemetery sold for higher prices, suggesting that other factors beyond cemetery proximity influence property values. This finding could inform this study, prompting the researcher to explore whether individuals' perceptions of living near cemeteries align with property value trends. Additionally, the real estate agent's strategies for presenting such properties can offer lessons on how individuals adapt to and cope with the challenges of their unique living environments, aligning with our research's objectives regarding coping strategies for ongoing challenges.

Nevertheless, a journalist Starcevic, S. (2023), provided a valuable insight into the perception of living near cemeteries and airports and its influence on property prices and buyer interest. According to Brisbane agent Byrony O'Neill, who has sold homes near cemeteries, most buyers are not bothered by the proximity to the dead. In fact, some individuals appreciate the green space and quiet environment provided by cemeteries. Additionally, the prices of houses near cemeteries tend to be slightly lower, making them attractive to young couples looking for affordability and less competition. The article "Worst neighbors ever? The surprising truth about living next to a cemetery or airport" also mentions a US study from 2010 that found houses near cemeteries generally do not experience a significant drop in value, with some being up to 10% cheaper.

Furthermore, the author emphasized that these findings

challenge the notion of cemeteries as abandoned and frightening spaces, encouraging further research to explore the unique experiences and coping techniques of individuals living near burial grounds. This can be done through ethnographic research and the use of visual representations. Understanding the challenges, resilience, and sense of community of people living within the proximity of cemeteries can provide valuable insights for future research in this field.

However, Hooper, C. (2020), explored Australians' evolving perspectives on traditional cemeteries and their potential for community use. Hooper discusses the historical development of cemeteries in Australia and the scarcity of available space in metropolitan areas. The article "Bringing New Life to Cemeteries" highlights the work of anthropologist Dr. Hannah Gould and the DeathTech team from the University of Melbourne, who aim to enhance the cemetery experience for both bereaved families and wider communities through the exploration of new technologies and cemetery design. The study explores the tension between preserving cemetery sites and utilizing them for contemporary community needs. The article also mentions the adoption of new technologies in cemeteries worldwide, such as digital grave management, alternative burial methods, and virtual offerings. This research contributes to the understanding of the complex experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries and highlights the potential for new approaches to cemetery design and utilization.

The Royal Examiner asserted that the article "Is buying a home near a cemetery a grave mistake?" discusses the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing a home in close proximity to a cemetery. On the positive side, living near a cemetery offers quiet neighbors and picturesque green spaces. Relating this article to the research it becomes evident that the public's perceptions and concerns about residing near cemeteries are essential aspects to consider. The Royal Examiner article sheds light on the factors that individuals weigh when deciding to live near a cemetery, providing valuable insights into their experiences and potential challenges. Understanding these perspectives can contribute to a comprehensive examination of the lived experiences and coping strategies of individuals living in close proximity to cemeteries, addressing the research's stated problems and objectives.

According to the article entitled "The Living among the Dead: Cemeteries as Urban Forests, now and in the Future" authored by Quinton *et al.*, (2020), cemeteries have a long and complex history around the world and take on various forms based on local traditions and culture (Quinton and Duinker, 2019). Although their primary purpose is typically commemoration and memorialization of the deceased, cemeteries are being embraced as locations suitable for low-impact recreational activities such as jogging, walking, photography, education, relaxation, and socialization (Deering, 2010; Grabalov, 2018; Swensen *et al.*, 2016). Cemeteries' low-impact usage

reduces soil compaction, and this, combined with the absence of overhead utility wires, automotive activity, and impermeable surfaces, suggests that cemeteries may be good settings for the survival of young trees. Other than monuments and the occasional building, the lack of manmade infrastructure within cemeteries suggests that there may be open space suitable for developing tree populations.

Comparative Cemetery Studies

In the research conducted by Tan *et al.*, (2020), the authors examined the influence of proximity to cemeteries on the purchasing of residential properties in Malaysia. The study investigates how different races and religions in Malaysia perceive housing near cemeteries, which can influence their decisions when considering property purchases. It employs quantitative research methods, including statistical analysis and Pearson Chi-Square, to analyze the data.

In addition, quantitative research methods aid the research since it offers a complementary perspective on the factors that shape individuals' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies when residing near cemeteries. By comparing the findings of both studies, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between cultural, religious, and practical considerations that individuals face when living within the proximity of cemeteries. This comparative analysis can enhance the depth and richness of the research on the lived experiences of individuals within the proximity of cemeteries and provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

In the study "The City of the Living or the Dead: On the Ethics and Morality of Land Use for graveyards in a rapidly urbanized world" by Zaheer Allam (2019), explored the ethical and moral implications of using land for graveyards, particularly amid fast-paced urbanization. It highlights the convergence of various religious practices in favor of burying the deceased for the sake of a peaceful afterlife. However, it also underscores the challenges posed by urbanization, including limited land availability, rising property prices, overpriced housing, and societal inequality.

Moreover, the study can assist the research paper since the research on individuals living near cemeteries aims to understand their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies.

Allam's paper enriches this study by shedding light on the ethical and moral dilemmas associated with cemetery land use, especially in urbanized settings. It emphasizes the competition for land resources between the living and the deceased and how this competition can influence housing affordability and societal equity.

A study titled, "The City of the Dead as a Place to Live: Unpacking the Narratives About Tomb Communities" authored by Lindsey Bertrand Logan (2020), analyzed how the housing options available now do not satisfy the demands of daily Cairo residents. As a result of

overcrowding and a lack of cheap housing, many now squat and build their own homes. The city of the Dead (COD), the center of her research, is one such "informal" community. Many of Cairo's impoverished and rural migrants live at COD, a group of cemeteries in the city's center. Planning projects such as Masterplan Cairo 2050 express intentions to evict these residents without offering details on their rehabilitation. Embedded place narratives that cannot be removed obstruct decision-makers and new or changed development. Stories have the power to shape, modify, and discard what already exists.

In addition, this study looks into the City of the Dead legends that Masterplan Cairo 2050 dismisses. She used qualitative approaches to investigate these narratives about COD held by prominent parties such as government officials, urban planners, the public, and other sources to elucidate how they contribute to the unfavorable planning outcomes proposed in policy texts. She reveals through her in-depth research of the themes and words used by respondents that the most common perception of COD is that it is a cemetery rather than a residential community. This dominant narrative ignores the benefits of living in COD, as evidenced by the policies and laws that govern it, as well as the vocabulary used to refer to its people.

Local Literature

Resilience in Cemetery Life

The author, Algura, P. O. (2019), asserted the study "Living Among the Dead in the Manila North Cemetery: A Cartographic Re-Imagination," challenges the idea of cemeteries as abandoned and frightening. Algura uses ethnographic research and cartography to convey this distinct urban environment's liveliness. The research finds tales of optimism, familial relationships, and perseverance in interviews and observations, depicting the cemetery as a place where the living and the dead cohabit. This research inspires how to handle this issue sensitively and deeply, making it relevant to the study. Emphasizing the human aspect of cemetery sites invites scholars to investigate the rich tales and unique coping techniques of persons living near burial grounds. The study's use of visual representations and ethnographic insights can help other researchers capture the complex experiences of people living within the proximity of cemeteries, helping to understand their challenges, resilience, and sense of community.

According to Lapatha *et al.*, (2019), cemeteries in the Philippines serve not only as resting places for the deceased but also as homes for the living. In their qualitative study titled

"Living with the Dead: A Qualitative Study on the Social Well-being of Filipino Families Living in Cemeteries in Cebu City," the authors aim to explore the social well-being of families residing in cemetery settings and raise awareness about their circumstances within the government and the larger community. The research methodology involved conducting interviews with six residents from three public cemeteries, transcribing their

responses, and analyzing the data thematically through code. The study findings reveal that families reside in cemeteries primarily due to employment opportunities, geographical displacement, and generational factors. Despite facing numerous challenges related to sustaining their means of subsistence, ensuring their safety, and establishing their sociopolitical significance, the families exhibit social well-being, as per Keyes' social well-being theory. This study not only provides valuable insights into this unconventional lifestyle but also lays the foundation for future research, contributing to our broader understanding of such unique living environments.

In addition, Sevilla, C., & Yu, L. S. (2019), discussed the lives of cemetery workers in Manila South Cemetery. In the article titled "Living among the Dead: The Life of a Public Cemetery Worker". The authors interviewed 48 informal gravediggers who live in the cemetery and found that they have a variety of jobs, including digging graves, cleaning tombs, and maintaining mausoleums. The workers also described the challenges of their work, such as the risk of injury from sharp objects and the emotional toll of dealing with death daily. However, they also expressed a sense of pride in their work and a commitment to providing a dignified burial for the dead. This helps to contribute to the research on the study of living in a cemetery environment by providing a first-hand account of the lives of cemetery workers. The interviews provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges and rewards of working in a cemetery environment.

Notably, the author Casilao, J. L. (2020), highlighted the story of Maica Kate Lopez, a seven-year-old student living inside the Manila South Cemetery in the Philippines who gets homeschooled among graves. Despite the numerous challenges she encounters, including the constant noise in her surroundings and limited resources, Maica continues to demonstrate remarkable perseverance in her online classes. To overcome these obstacles, she ingeniously transforms burial niches into her personal study sanctuary. Her mother, Lyka Eusebio, runs a small store at the cemetery and supports Maica's education while emphasizing the importance of education and wanting her daughter to achieve her dreams. This article titled "Student who lives at a cemetery gets homeschooled among graves" provides an interesting perspective on the lived experience of individuals who live in close proximity to cemeteries. It highlights the challenges that these individuals face, such as the lack of access to resources and the stigma associated with living in a cemetery. However, it also shows the resilience and determination of these individuals, as they strive to achieve their dreams despite the obstacles they face.

Moreover, the article "Living among the Dead" authored by Kabagani, & L. J. (2019), explored the lives of people who live in the Manila North Cemetery (MNC), which is a strange and unique place in and of itself. It tells the story of Aurora Mangampo, also known as Nanay Diday, who has lived in the graveyard with her family for

more than 60 years. Even though they have problems, like being poor and losing loved ones, the story shows that the people have a feeling of resolve, community, and even some happiness. The text highlights their adaptation to their unique living conditions and emphasizes how, in certain aspects, they lead lives comparable to those in regular communities. Within the cemetery, children engage in play, friends gather, and locally operated stores offer essential goods.

Additionally, this piece is important to research because it shows a real-life case study of people who live close to graves and talks about their daily lives, problems, and ways to deal with them. It shows how important it is to understand the different things people in these situations go through, to challenge assumptions, and to encourage kindness. Also, talking about recent demolitions and the moving of people who lived near cemeteries brings up questions about how government policies and actions influence the lives of people who live near cemeteries. Exploring the stories of people like Nanay Diday can help us learn more about how people who live near graves live their lives and what that means for policy and community development.

Cemetery Dwellers' Well-being

In the article, "Tombstone Pillow" authored by Bayou Bennett and Daniel Lir (2022), showed the plight of 6,000 impoverished Manila North cemetery inhabitants. These people are lured to graves for free accommodation and low earnings, live in poverty, and lack basic facilities like sanitation and clean water. Due to budget restrictions, civilian fatalities from police raids during anti-drug activities are routinely uninvestigated. The film "Tombstone Pillow" draws awareness and promotes change in this serious poverty problem. An affluent widow learns to sympathize with cemetery dwellers during a police raid. The film "Tombstone Pillow" may help us understand the issues faced by those living near graves, particularly those caused by poverty and inadequate living conditions. The film depicts Manila North cemetery dwellers' struggles, unfairness, and inequalities to underscore the significance of understanding their lives. The book "Tombstone Pillow" is a wonderful case study that might be utilized in our research to illustrate the social and psychological effects of living near graves. Such characteristics enhance understanding of people's social, economic, and psychological aspects. The research study's main goals are to identify policy implications and solutions to improve the quality of life for cemetery residents. The film's support for reform and improvement is compatible with these goals. In conclusion, the film offers a captivating and emotionally evocative perspective that might enrich our scientific research by revealing the complex issues faced by non-traditional residents.

On the other hand, Mara Cepada (2022), discussed the influence of the pandemic on the livelihoods of individuals who work in cemeteries, such as candle vendors and grave

cleaners. The temporary closure of cemeteries during the pandemic prevented these workers from earning an income and disrupted the traditional festivities associated with All Saints' Day. This article provides insight into the cultural significance of cemeteries in Filipino society and the influence of temporary closures on both the community and the economy. By showcasing the revival of this seasonal livelihood for slum-dwellers who clean graves and sell candles, the article underscores the interdependence between the cemetery and the residents. It highlights the emotional significance attached to visiting the graves and reinforces the role of cemeteries as spaces for remembrance and connection with deceased loved ones.

Additionally, Descalsota, M. (2023), delved into the story of Gesophine Grama, who has been residing in the Chinese Cemetery in Cebu, Philippines, for over a decade. Grama was initially forced to be homeless due to financial difficulties but found solace when the caretaker of the cemetery offered them a place to stay in one of the mausoleums. The Chinese Cemetery, once a burial ground for esteemed Chinese Filipinos, has now become an informal settlement where people live without rightful ownership. Grama's situation reflects poverty and homelessness in the Philippines, with millions of people living below the poverty line. However, the local government plans to evict the families living in the cemetery to convert it into a heritage park. The article sheds light on the challenges and struggles faced by those living in cemetery environments and raises awareness about the need for further research to understand their experiences and develop appropriate interventions.

Furthermore, Alvin Murcia (2022), described the life of informal squatters in Manila's South and North Cemeteries in the article titled "Living among the dead in Cemeteries." This lifestyle has been passed down through generations, with families living amid graves. The article discusses their cemetery job, including caretaking and tomb service, and their struggles, such as poor wages and cemetery management evictions. It also covers unique cemetery elements like tapping energy from neighboring poles and inhabitants returning after government relocations because of graveyard labor familiarity.

In addition, this article represents a significant advancement in the study of cemetery dwellers. Firsthand reports of their everyday life, economic activities, and struggles are significant. It also emphasizes the generations-old history of this living arrangement. These insights into their economic tactics and cemetery community social and security issues help us comprehend their experiences. The article helps us understand policy consequences and community support systems.

Moreover, the article titled "Thousands Living in Cemeteries Built into Slums" by Von Dacre (2019), shed light on the existence of slum communities within public cemeteries in Manila, Philippines. The author describes the dire living conditions, including rickety huts, garbage, open sewage, and the presence of gangs, prostitutes, and

laborers. The study emphasizes the overwhelming poverty and danger prevalent in these communities. Additionally, the lack of basic amenities such as electricity, running water, and sanitation is highlighted.

Furthermore, the article also mentions the violent police raids in these slums, resulting in casualties and a lack of proper investigations. Danial Eriksen's firsthand experience living among the cemetery slum-dwellers is discussed, showcasing their organization and sense of safety within the graveyard. This article provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals living in cemetery environments, urging further research on their unique experiences, coping mechanisms, and community dynamics.

In the article titled "Living with the Dead" by Salas, C. Von L.P. (2019), revealed that as early as the 1950s, many families have been living in squalid conditions above cemeteries. Families are typically jobless and without a source of income despite residing in one of the most notoriously crowded cities in the world. Given the influx of people from the countryside seeking better prospects, Manila is one of the cities with the densest populations in the world. When they arrive, the bulk of migrants find few job options and no housing, so they live in unofficial colonies. Some of these slums have migrated inside the public cemeteries.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the various components of the research methodology. This includes the research design, selection criteria for participants, details regarding the research instrument employed, procedure for data collection, approach to data analysis, the role of the researcher, as well as ethical considerations that guide the study.

Research Design

In this study, the researcher utilized a qualitative approach to delve into the complex and nuanced experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries. By adopting a phenomenological research design, the researchers aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Phenomenological research explores the essence and lived experiences of individuals, shedding light on the meaning and significance of these experiences.

To better define phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) described it as a method that involves a thorough exploration of individuals' lived experiences and their subjective interpretations. By incorporating detailed descriptions provided by the participants, phenomenological research aims to illuminate the various aspects and intricacies of a particular phenomenon. In the mentioned study, the researcher adopted a phenomenological research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of interest as perceived by the participants. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration and examination of real-

life examples to improve the understanding of the subject matter. By incorporating a phenomenological framework, the study aimed to uncover the essence and meaning of the participants' experiences related to the topic being studied.

Selection Criteria and Participants

The researcher employed snowballing techniques to carefully select a diverse group of fifteen (15) participants for the study. This method involved initially identifying individuals who meet the inclusion criteria and then asking them to refer other eligible individuals who can provide valuable insights into the experience of living within the proximity of cemeteries. To ensure a comprehensive exploration, the following criteria were established for participant inclusion:

(a). Participants must have resided within cemeteries for a substantial period of time, typically within a minimum of 5 years. This criterion will enable a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects and experiences associated with living within the proximity of cemeteries.

(b). A diverse range of participants will be sought to capture a variety of perspectives. This includes individuals from age 40 and above, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts. Such diversity will enrich the analysis and shed light on the experiences of various groups living within the proximity of cemeteries.

(c). The participants must be willing and open to discussing their lived experiences, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions related to living within the proximity of cemeteries. This openness will ensure that the study captures valuable insights and personal narratives

(d). The participants should be available for either individual interviews or focus group discussions. These sessions will be conducted to gather the necessary qualitative data for analysis, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the topic. By adhering to these rigorous selection criteria, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals residing within the proximity of cemeteries.

Research Instrument

The research instrument consists of a set of unstructured interview questions, validated by respected experts in the field. Additionally, the researchers have included supplementary probing questions to ensure the depth and richness of the data, which will only be used if necessary.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was carried out through a series of interviews conducted within the proximity of cemeteries. The first step involved locating the site and identifying suitable individuals who lived within cemeteries. The researchers employed an interview-based approach using a snowballing technique to identify participants

who meet the researchers' criteria. The researchers would reach out to them and explain the purpose of the study, seeking their voluntary participation.

Once the participants were identified, the next step was to establish rapport and gain access to conduct the interviews. This involved building trust and ensuring that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Interviews were conducted in a private and quiet setting, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and emotions. During the interviews, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed to ensure a diverse range of perspectives were captured. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, such as length of residency near the cemetery and frequency of interactions with it. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in different circumstances.

To record the information shared by participants, both audio and written notes were taken. This dual approach ensured that no valuable insights or details were missed during the interviews. Additionally, participants were given the option to review and clarify any information recorded to ensure accuracy.

Throughout the data collection process, field issues were addressed promptly. Any challenges, such as noise interruptions or logistical constraints, were resolved to maintain a conducive environment for open and honest communication. This ensured the reliability and validity of the collected data. All collected data was securely stored to safeguard confidentiality and privacy. The information was organized in a systematic manner, using codes, thematic analysis, and categories that emerged from the interviews. This allowed for easier analysis and interpretation of the data.

Overall, the data collection procedure employed in this research adhered to rigorous ethical standards and aimed to capture the authentic experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries. By employing purposeful sampling strategies, gaining access, establishing rapport, resolving field issues, and recording information accurately, a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the participants was achieved.

Data Analysis

The researchers transcribed recorded interviews and familiarized with the participants' perspectives. The researchers conducted initial coding to identify meaningful data units, without preconceived categories. The codes were reviewed and then organized into potential themes, which were further refined through constant comparison. The researchers ensured themes accurately represented the participants' views. The researchers explored the data within each theme to understand experiences and viewpoints comprehensively. Patterns, variations, and relationships were analyzed within and between themes, considering context and background. The findings were summarized, highlighting key insights, and linking them to the research objectives.

Role of the Researchers

In a qualitative research study on individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries, researchers play a crucial role. They adopt a phenomenological approach to understand the participants' experiences through personal narratives. This involves developing focused research questions, identifying diverse participants, building trust, collecting data through interviews and observation, adhering to ethical guidelines, analyzing data rigorously, reflecting on biases, approaching with empathy, and sharing findings with a wider audience. Ultimately, researchers aim to collect and analyze narratives in a sensitive and ethical manner, capturing the richness and complexity of participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers had a responsibility to ethically prioritize the rights of the participants. These include ensuring participants have a clear understanding of the research purpose and obtaining their written consent. In addition, confidentiality should be maintained by using pseudonyms or unique identifiers, while interviews should be conducted in a comfortable and private setting. Furthermore, transparent communication about sharing research results and the right to withdraw without consequences should be emphasized. Lastly, support should be offered for sensitive topics, and the researcher must actively reflect on personal biases and power dynamics that could influence the research process, trust and participant well-being should be prioritized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings derived from this study aim to provide insights into the three problem statements: What are the experiences of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries? What are the challenges faced by individuals living within the proximity of cemetery environment? What are the coping strategies to navigate the ongoing challenges associated with their proximity to cemeteries? The participants were chosen accordingly to their demographic profile including their gender, age, occupation, and the duration of their residence within the cemetery. To protect their privacy, the researchers used pseudonyms to represent their names. This valuable data was gathered by conducting interviews with the participants. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in different circumstances.

The Participants' Experiences Living within the Proximity of Cemeteries

The study reveals the particular experiences encountered by the participants who lived within the proximity of cemetery. The collected data from the participants were meticulously crafted into various themes by the researchers to provide a deeper understanding and to address the participants' experiences in the unique environment they have. The first theme, "Living Amidst the Serenity of the

Cemetery," emphasizes the serenity and peace that can be found in such an environment. It serves as not only a peaceful dwelling but also as a source of livelihood, providing both solace and opportunities for personal growth. Although the primary purpose of the cemeteries are typically commemoration and memorialization of the deceased, cemeteries are being embraced as locations suitable for low-impact recreational activities such as jogging, walking, photography, education, relaxation, and socialization (Deering, 2010; Grabalov, 2018; Swensen *et al.*, 2016). The theme acknowledges the challenges that may come with residing in a cemetery, such as societal perceptions and the emotional weight of working as a gravedigger, yet emphasizes how individuals have chosen to embrace and find pride in their roles and their familiar surroundings. It signifies a deep appreciation for the serenity and tranquility that coexist with the cemetery's unique dynamics, allowing for a meaningful and fulfilling way of life amidst the eternal grounds.

Furthermore, the second theme, "Profound Reflections Through Witnessing Burial

Ceremonies," summarizes the reflections of the participants in witnessing burial ceremonies. The theme highlights the mirrored emotions evoked by these ceremonies, which serve as poignant reminders of personal loss and the delicate nature of life itself. Through the act of witnessing burials, individuals are prompted to contemplate the transient nature of existence, fostering a deeper appreciation for the preciousness of life and the significance of relationships.

This theme acknowledges the sorrow and grief that accompany such experiences while also acknowledging the opportunity for personal growth and introspection that arises from engaging with the rituals and rites of passage surrounding death.

In addition, the third theme, "Finding Peace Amidst the Fragility of Life," discusses the unique nature of living within a cemetery. Indeed, a journalist Starcevic, S. (2023), provided a valuable insight into the perception of living within the proximity of cemeteries and airports and its influence on property prices and buyer interest. According to Brisbane agent Byrony O'Neill, who has sold homes near cemeteries, most buyers are not bothered by the proximity to the dead. Certainly, some individuals appreciate the green space and quiet environment provided by cemeteries. Furthermore, the participants enthusiastically shared their experiences living within the proximity of a cemetery. The theme acknowledges the fragility and solemnity of life but also highlights the unique sense of unity, purpose, and connection that can be found in such an environment. The theme suggests that despite the inherent vulnerability and uncertainty of life, individuals have the capacity to find inner peace and a meaningful way of living amidst it all.

Moreover, the last theme, "Community Resilience in the Face of Adversity," uncovers the unique experiences of the individuals residing in a cemetery. The residents and workers within a cemetery are united as one community

that promotes camaraderie and mutual support that would help them in terms of overcoming difficulties and adapting to adverse circumstances. In the interview conducted by Kabagani, & L. J. (2019), the authors comprehensively discussed the accounts of their subject. Even though they have problems, such as straitened and losing loved ones, the story shows that the people have a feeling of resolve, community, and even some happiness. The study highlights their adaptation to their unique living conditions and emphasizes how, in certain aspects, they lead lives comparable to those in regular communities. Within the cemetery, children engage in play, friends gather, and locally operated stores offer essential goods. The theme highlights the remarkable ability of communities to come together, provide support, and surmount hurdles, even amidst challenging situations.

The Participants' Challenges Living in a Cemetery Environment

The study presents information on various themes related to the challenges faced by individuals living within the proximity of cemetery. The first theme, "Limited Opportunities for Employment," reveals that individuals residing in the cemetery struggle to find employment due to the limited job options available in that environment. As studied by Alvin Murcia (2022), the author discusses their subjects' cemetery job, including caretaking and tomb service, and their struggles, such as poor wages and cemetery management evictions. The responses highlight the few roles available, such as caretakers or security personnel, and emphasize the importance of seeking alternative livelihood options. The theme also acknowledges the impact of limited employment opportunities on financial stability.

In addition, the second theme, "Financial Struggles," addresses the difficulties in achieving financial stability for individuals living within the proximity of cemetery. The responses emphasize the lack of stable income and the uncertainty associated with fluctuating income sources. It acknowledges that income from selling flowers and candles or working as a graveyard caretaker may not always be sufficient to support their necessities. The theme recognizes the burden and complexity added by financial struggles to their lives.

Furthermore, the third theme, "Interruption of Daily Activities," focuses on the challenges individuals face in carrying out their daily routines while living in a cemetery. External factors such as flooding, traffic congestion during special occasions, and longer distances to essential places impact their ability to maintain regular activities. The theme also acknowledges the emotional weight and physical demands associated with working and residing in a cemetery, making it difficult to maintain regular meals, sleep, and effectively manage time.

Moreover, the fourth theme, "Physical Demands and Health Risks," highlights the physical challenges and potential health risks associated with the job or activities

within the proximity of cemetery. In the study of Sevilla, C., & Yu, L. S. (2019), the authors interviewed 48 informal gravediggers who live in the cemetery and found that they have a variety of jobs, including digging graves, cleaning tombs, and maintaining mausoleums. The workers also described the challenges of their work, such as the risk of injury from sharp objects and the emotional toll of dealing with death daily. The responses point out long hours spent outdoors under various weather conditions, tasks such as dismantling graves and carrying heavy coffins, and the toll these physical demands take on their overall well-being.

Additionally, the fifth theme, "Limited Access to Assistance," explores the challenges individuals face when they have restricted access to the help and support, they need. The theme recognizes that limited assistance exacerbates existing difficulties, making it even harder for individuals to seek help when needed. Lastly, the theme "Interactions with Grieving Families." Emphasizes the dynamics and experiences involved in engaging with families who are grieving the loss of a loved one. The responses highlight the importance of empathy, understanding, and offering condolences to grieving families during their difficult times.

Overall, these themes collectively illustrate the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals living within a cemetery, encompassing limited employment opportunities, financial struggles, interruptions of daily activities, physical demands and health risks, limited access to assistance, and the complexities of interacting with grieving families.

The Participants' Coping Strategies to Navigate the Ongoing Challenges Associated with their Proximity to Cemeteries

The researchers comprehensively present and explains the various themes and developed coping strategies by the individuals on their ongoing challenges associated with living and working within the proximity of cemetery. The first theme "Career Exploration," emphasizes the importance of actively seeking alternative livelihood options to overcome the obstacle of limited employment opportunities. The theme highlights how individuals become resilient to the struggles they have faced in the cemetery and learn to manage the crisis's financial stability. Moreover, the second theme, "Financial stability" addresses the importance of being proactive financial management, adaptability, and leveraging available resources living within the proximity of our cemeteries. However, the third theme, "Penetration for Assistance," reveals that individuals who lived within a cemetery learn to cope amidst the limited access to assistance in their barangay. The theme highlights the ways and strategies in which the residents received support from their local government. The individuals learned that by personally going to their barangay office, they could receive the assistance they needed. Additionally, the fourth theme entitled "Cultural and Familial Adaptation," provided a

valuable insight about individuals and families residing in or working closely with a cemetery environment and how they have adapted to this distinct way of life.

Furthermore, the fifth theme, “Witnessing Burials Builds Emotional Resilience” discusses individuals within a cemetery who learned to have emotional resilience on witnessing burial activities on a daily basis. These burial activities induce them to reflect on the importance of life and the time of mortality. The responses highlight the importance of empathy, understanding, acceptance, and offering condolences to grieving families during their difficult times. In addition, the last theme, “Normalization and Acceptance of Unique Circumstances” uncovers the versatility of the participants on facing the unique environment they encountered, including finding strength and acceptance in the cycle of life and death, embracing unfamiliar environments, instilling pride and respect in daily activities, and finding ways to adapt and overcome difficulties.

Overall, these themes significantly discuss the strategies developed by the individuals who lived within a cemetery amidst the challenges they faced during their life in a unique environment. These coping strategies encompass career exploration, financial stability, penetration for assistance, cultural and familial adaptation, witnessing burials, builds emotional resilience, and normalization and acceptance of unique circumstances.

DISCUSSIONS

The significance of the study after the data have been meticulously analyzed and interpreted as to the demographic profile of the participants in terms of gender, age, occupation, and the duration of their residence within the cemetery. To protect their privacy, the researchers used pseudonyms to represent their names. This valuable data was gathered by conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with the participants.

Additionally, the participants’ experiences living within the proximity of cemeteries, the researchers comprehensively summarize the various experiences encountered by the participants who lived within a cemetery. The transcribed responses from the fifteen participants are scrupulously analyzed and coded to develop a theme that represents the unique experiences of the participants. These themes collectively illustrate the multifaceted experiences faced by individuals living within a cemetery, encompassing living amidst the serenity of the cemetery, profound reflections through witnessing burial ceremonies, finding peace amidst the fragility of life, and community resilience in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, the participants’ challenges living in a cemetery environment presents information on various themes related to the challenges faced by individuals living within a cemetery. This section discusses the importance of addressing the challenges that arise for the participants who reside within a cemetery and obtaining coping strategies that could be helpful to the participants when the stated challenges arise in the future. The researchers

conducted an extensive examination of the accounts stated by the participants to develop a corresponding theme. These themes illustrate the limited opportunities for employment, financial struggles, interruption of daily activities, physical demands and health risks, limited access to assistance, and interactions with grieving families.

In the participants’ coping strategies to navigate the ongoing challenge associated with their proximity to cemeteries, there are various themes provided by the researchers. In discussing the individuals who lived within a cemetery, they developed a coping strategy for the particular challenges they encountered, such as limited opportunities for employment, financial struggles, interruption of daily activities, physical demands and health risks, limited access to assistance, and interactions with grieving families. These challenges served as the motivation for the participants to develop a coping strategy, as mentioned in the participants’ coping strategies. The participants share a strategy to overcome the crisis they have faced financially due to the job opportunities available in their community. For instance, these individuals learn to adapt to the unique environment they have. Despite these challenges, the theme “Career Exploration” emphasizes the importance of actively seeking alternative livelihood options to overcome the obstacle of limited employment opportunities. In addition, the researchers conduct a thematic analysis to provide a relevant theme for addressing the participants’ struggles in terms of limited access to assistance. Indeed, the participants learn to adapt to this pace gradually. The theme, “Penetration for Assistance,” thoroughly discussed the strategies of the individuals to withstand the ongoing challenges by actively seeking help from the relatives they have known who are willing to help them when their barangay does not address their concerns. However, the theme “Witnessing Burials Builds Emotional Resilience” uncovers the emotional resilience of the participants. The individuals are gradually learning to be empathetic and have emotional resilience amidst witnessing grieving families during burial ceremonies.

CONCLUSIONS

The study entitled “Residing Among the Departed: Exploring the Lived Experience of Individuals Living Within the Proximity of Cemeteries” reveals a complex interplay of emotions, perspectives, and unique narratives that challenge conventional notions of life and death. This study sheds light on the diverse ways people navigate their existence within this unconventional living environment, offering valuable insights into the individuals’ capacity to find meaning and connection even in the proximity of the departed. The phenomenon that arose focused on people who chose to live in or around cemeteries. The term “residing among the departed” implies a unique living situation, and the phrase “exploring the lived experience” indicates an in-depth examination of the daily lives and perspectives of these individuals. This could involve understanding their motivations, challenges, and the

impact of their environment on their overall experiences. Overall, as society continues to evolve, it is essential to explore and understand alternative living arrangements. This research offers a comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences of individuals residing within cemeteries, contributing valuable insights to both academic discourse and practical applications in various fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon the summary findings and conclusions presented, the following recommendation was drawn:

The Research Settings

The cemetery is known as a sacred place for the departed. However, as society continues to evolve, the researchers recommend that future scholars and readers have an in-depth understanding and examination of the individuals residing within cemeteries and the unique dynamics of their lives.

Policy Consideration

After an extensive examination of the phenomenon, the findings address the limitations provided for the residents and workers who lived within a cemetery. The researchers recommend that policymakers consider the research findings when formulating regulations or policies related to cemetery living, ensuring that they address the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals living within the proximity of the cemetery.

For Mental Health and other Medical Practitioners

The well-being of individuals is crucial aspect to address. The researchers recommend that the mental health and medical professionals create a program such as medical mission that will benefits the individuals who live within the proximity of cemeteries.

Future Residents

The future individuals who decide to migrate to a unique environment of cemeteries must consider the result of this study as an insight reference to fully understand the future experience that awaits them associated with cemeteries.

Future Researchers

For future researchers, a similar study about exploring the lived experience of individuals living within the proximity of cemeteries with another set of subjects should be conducted. Comparisons will aid in identifying similarities in the subjects' lived experience residing within the proximity of cemeteries.

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