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In the Shade of the Tree: Understanding Wildlife Conservationists' Experiences Through a Phenomenological Approach

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ABSTRACT

Wildlife conservationists dedicate their efforts to preserving and protecting local wildlife. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Davao City's wildlife conservationists, including both the rewarding and challenging aspects of their work, as well as the coping strategies they employ. The researchers adopted a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach. A semi-structured questionnaire served as the main research instrument. Eight wildlife conservationists from Davao City, representing various organizations, were interviewed about their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The results revealed that conservationists are driven by a genuine love for wildlife and by memorable encounters with animals. However, they also face difficult realities, such as emotionally and physically demanding fieldwork, job insecurity, financial instability, and the stress associated with animal care. To cope, many find comfort in wildlife itself—interacting with animals and spending time in nature helps them relax and feel grounded. Support from family, friends, and colleagues also plays a key role in managing emotional stress. Additionally, they rely on effective time management, strategic work planning, and lessons gained through mentorship and experience. Based on their insights, the study underscores the value of ongoing training and seminars for raising awareness and highlights the importance of holistic, community-based conservation efforts. Strengthening partnerships with government agencies and reinforcing conservation policies are seen as essential steps toward helping conservationists perform their roles more effectively and maintain their well-being. Despite the challenges, these conservationists remain deeply committed to their mission, demonstrating that passion remains a powerful driving force in the field of wildlife protection.

INTRODUCTION

Wildlife conservationists' role in today's world is vital as they preserve and protect wildlife, promote environmental sustainability, and maintain ecological balance. However, their importance is often overlooked, and their condition is rarely given much attention. Individuals working in wildlife conservation, such as wildlife keepers, usually experience emotional fatigue due to demanding animal care and ethical issues, which can lead to poor mental health (Walker, 2023). Similarly, individuals deployed in the field, such as field biologists, often encounter emotional challenges due to fieldwork hurdles ranging from harsh environmental conditions to struggles in convincing locals residing in the area (Meaningful Travel, n.d.; Moraru *et al.*, 2024).

Despite the obstacles they encounter, these individuals find their work rewarding and fulfilling, as they can enjoy nature's beauty and pursue their passion for conserving wildlife. According to an article published by National Geographic Society (n.d.), individuals who have encountered and interacted with wildlife have developed a passion, strengthening their motivation to pursue a career in this field. Additionally, conservationists derive emotional comfort from nature, which helps alleviate

their stress at work. Jones and Smith (2022) emphasized that nature reduces stress and enables people to maintain a clear mindset. This shows that even in the challenging moments of their role as wildlife conservationists, they were able to find solace in nature, highlighting the positive benefits of nature for individual mental well-being.

However, with the emerging threats to our environment today, these individuals may struggle to fulfill their goals of protecting wildlife and habitats. The study by Pienkowski *et al.* (2023) revealed that conservationists experienced stress and burnout due to a lack of organizational support and social isolation. Furthermore, witnessing habitat degradation leads to distress among wildlife conservationists, as seen in the case of wildlife carers during the 2019-2020 Australian bushfires (Chenery, 2025). These suggest that there is indeed an enormous problem that many conservationists worldwide have to endure; this problem, unfortunately, affects their performance in conservation efforts.

In the current state of the conservation field, one subject of inquiry must be addressed: the psychological and emotional dimensions of conservationists' work. However, despite the number of studies engaging in the psychological aspects of wildlife conservationists,

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there's still a need for extensive exploration of such an area of research. Boon (2023) emphasized that research has widely overlooked the impact of nature conservation on individual mental health, highlighting a critical gap in understanding the psychological effects of biodiversity loss on conservation professionals. The above suggests the need for further exploration of the various psychological influences of conservation work on the well-being of conservationists, analyzing different emotional factors such as motivation, satisfaction, stress, and coping mechanisms.

Integrating psychology into this topic is crucial as it helps explain the reasons behind conservation behaviors and the role of coping in maintaining emotional well-being. The above will highlight the critical role of conservation psychology in conservation work. It provides a significant perspective on understanding animal attitudes and their impact on conservation activities and policies (Fernández-Llamazares *et al.*, 2020). Hence, psychology offers a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying conservation efforts and sheds light on the psychological factors that contribute to the challenges faced by conservationists.

Given the problems and identified gaps discussed, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of wildlife conservationists in Davao City—specifically, to uncover the emotional and mental challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ in response to those challenges. The specific objectives of this study are as follows: First, to identify both the favorable and unfavorable experiences that wildlife conservationists encounter in their work. This exploration seeks to better understand the unique circumstances shaping their experiences. Second, the study aims to examine the coping mechanisms these conservationists commonly use to manage the emotional and psychological demands of their work.

Lastly, by merging insights into their experiences and coping strategies, the study seeks to contribute meaningful knowledge to the broader field of wildlife conservation. In doing so, it aims to raise awareness about the vital role of wildlife conservationists and highlight the importance of conservation efforts in Davao City.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) proposed by the United Nations, this study specifically targets the following areas or goals. First, this study aligns with the area of SDG No. 8: decent work and economic growth, as it particularly explores both the professional and financial challenges faced by these so-called environmental conservationists, contributing to the goal of further improving the quality of their work and advancing the economic development in areas with less focused on such as ecological development. Second, this study also advances the goal of SDG No. 11: sustainable cities and communities, as it resonates with improving the functionality of individuals working in the field, which are necessary vehicles for maintaining ecological balance that benefits both cities and local communities.

Third, the study further places emphasis on the goals for both SDG No. 15, life on land, and SDG No. 14, life below water, because the study advocates for the conservation of wildlife animals, especially for those who are considered critically endangered, by understanding the experiences of those individuals who are in the front line of preserving their existence. Thus, by understanding the lived experiences of wildlife conservationists, the study contributes to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals, primarily focusing on professional work and wildlife conservation.

More importantly, this study holds global significance as it provides valuable insights into the roles of wildlife conservationists and highlights the timeliness of their efforts in addressing pressing environmental crises worldwide. By shedding light on their experiences, the study enables various groups and ecological movements to amplify their advocacies and offer greater support to individuals leading environmental conservation efforts. It also advocates for policy proposals focused on environmental movements, including support for wildlife conservationists across different regions of the world.

This study will play a significant role in the following sectors or areas. First, wildlife conservationists—particularly those working in Davao City—will gain valuable knowledge and a deeper understanding of their professional roles, which can enhance their motivation and effectiveness in wildlife conservation management. Second, government agencies at the forefront of environmental conservation can use insights from the study to guide the development of policies and programs to improve conservationists' emotional and mental well-being. The above includes designing appropriate benefits and resource allocations to ensure a healthier, more supportive work environment.

Those who advocate for wildlife conservation can also benefit from this study, as it will deepen their understanding and further motivate them to raise awareness about the state of our wildlife and promote support for conservation efforts. Local communities can gain valuable knowledge from the experiences of wildlife conservationists, fostering cooperation and awareness that contribute to more effective and practical conservation initiatives. Lastly, future researchers can build upon the substantial insights provided by this study, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on wildlife conservation and expanding it to related subjects or topics.

The study was anchored on Environmental Stewardship Theory (Bennet *et al.*, 2018), which advocates for stewardship among individuals and communities to preserve the environment for the common good. The proponents of this theory offer a conceptual framework that outlines stewardship as an ethical and practical solution, considering ecological, social, and economic aspects. This theory helps explain the three core elements in the framework, particularly the motivation, capacity, and behavior of individuals who work for environmental protection, such as wildlife conservationists. This

theory is relevant in this study, as it sheds light on the driving mechanisms behind the efforts of wildlife conservationists to conserve biodiversity, explores their conservation behaviors, and identifies the factors that contribute to it.

This theory was further supported by the Cultural Ecosystem Services Theory (Church *et al.*, 2014), which explains the non-material benefits an individual gains from nature, prompting them to practice pro-environmental behavior. The above supports the Environmental Stewardship Theory, as individuals known to be natural stewards, such as wildlife conservationists, are dedicated to their job because of the rewards they gain from wildlife, including the experience of appreciating nature's beauty. Additionally, Convivial Conservation Theory (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019) provides an essential approach to conservation that is not profit-driven but rather fosters social justice for the environment, empowering communities to participate in conservation efforts that are not motivated by market and economic factors. Overall, these theories suggest that wildlife conservation should be driven by intrinsic motivation, considering nature's significant benefits to our well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Design and Procedure section outlines the framework and steps followed in conducting the research. The Participants section describes the demographic characteristics of the participants and the recruitment methods employed. Lastly, the Materials and Instruments section details the tools and techniques used for data collection and analysis.

Design and Procedure

The researchers used a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of wildlife conservationists in Davao City. This design enabled the researchers to understand how conservationists perceived and interpreted their work and environment in relation to wildlife conservation efforts, as it focused on understanding individuals' personal experiences and how they made sense of those experiences (Creswell, 2021). By employing the phenomenological research design, the researchers successfully addressed the research gap in understanding conservationists' perspectives, which is crucial for developing effective conservation strategies (Cranston & Khalil, 2022).

Individuals working with non-governmental organizations, government agencies, academic institutions, or local volunteer groups engaged in wildlife conservation from Davao City were involved in selecting at least eight (8) wildlife conservationists as participants for this study. To ensure the richness of the data, participants were required to meet the criteria provided by the study's researchers, which was further discussed in the participant part. Data collection primarily consisted of online interviews with the selected participants. Google Meet was used as a platform for conducting the online interview in a private

comfortable setting, allowing the participant to share their answers freely and enabling researchers to obtain rich data on their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Additionally, the online interview was recorded with the participants' approval to ensure the accuracy of the researchers' transcription. The recordings were also used to prove the collected data were not fabricated. Moreover, the researchers ensured that they followed ethical guidelines by obtaining permission before conducting the online interviews, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring the anonymity of participants throughout the data-gathering process.

In this study, the researchers selected eight (8) participants from various organizations employed as wildlife conservationists in Davao City. Participants were chosen based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. For inclusion, individuals were required to be actively engaged in a wildlife conservation organization, such as animal keepers, field biologists, wildlife consultants, or in other related roles. Additionally, they were required to have a minimum of four months of work experience in the field and be based exclusively in Davao City.

For this qualitative study, the researchers employed a snowball sampling approach. This non-probabilistic technique is often used to reach hard-to-access populations by leveraging connections with local conservation groups to identify suitable participants for the study. The researchers began by selecting a small group of wildlife conservationists, who then referred additional participants, creating a "snowball" effect to expand the sample. This method was particularly suitable for the study as it allowed the researchers to connect with conservationists who may not have been easily reachable through other sampling techniques (Gierczyk *et al.*, 2023).

Materials and Instruments

The researchers employed semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth participant insights, utilizing a semi-structured interview guide as the primary data collection instrument. This approach facilitated a focus on key thematic areas while maintaining a conversational style, which proved effective in eliciting participants' motivations, attitudes, and beliefs (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). To capture detailed information regarding the wildlife conservationists' lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, the interview guide incorporated open-ended questions, allowing participants to articulate their responses in their own words. The semi-structured questionnaire was organized around the main research questions, supplemented by probing and clarifying questions aligned with the study's objectives to elicit specific and meaningful responses. Probing questions further encouraged participants to elaborate on their initial answers, thereby enabling rich, nuanced data collection. These methods were integral to the study as they addressed critical topics while granting participants the freedom to provide comprehensive and authentic accounts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers presented the participants' profiles, analyzed the themes that emerged from their responses, and explored insights aligned with previous research literature. This analysis offers valuable contributions to addressing the research question and enhances the understanding of the lived experiences of conservationists.

Profile of the Participant

In this section, participants provide insights into their profiles, highlighting details such as occupation and specific personal information, including age, gender, years of experience, and address. However, to protect confidentiality, real names have been withheld.

The participants in this study were selected based on their active involvement in wildlife conservation. Their diverse backgrounds—spanning animal care, field research, and consultancy—ensure they can provide valuable insights into the experiences and challenges of conservation work. The study includes eight participants, aged 23 to 40, with varying experience levels. Several participants work as animal keepers within organizations dedicated to wildlife conservation, specializing in different animal groups. Participant 1 (34 years old) and Participant 2 (32 years old) focus on avian fauna, with 10 and 7 years of experience, respectively. Participant 3 (35 years old) specializes in mammalian care, while Participant 5 (40) has 15 years of experience handling reptiles. Participant 6 (26 years old) serves as the Park Operations Supervisor, overseeing park management with 2 years of experience. Participants 4 (23 years old) and 7 (24 years old) are field biologists working for an organization focused on wildlife conservation. They are involved in research and conservation activities related to endangered species. Participant 4 has 4 months of experience, while Participant 7 has 1 year and 2 months of experience. Participant 8 (40 years old) is the most experienced, with 29 years in the field. He works as a wildlife consultant, field biologist, freelancer, and college professor within an organization that supports conservation initiatives. These participants were selected for their direct involvement in wildlife conservation efforts in Davao City. Their diverse roles and varying levels of expertise offer a comprehensive perspective on the realities of conservation work, making them well-suited contributors to this phenomenological study.

Lived Experiences of Wildlife Conservationists in Davao City

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the experiences of Philippine Eagle conservationists in Davao City. The researchers identified several recurring themes across participants' responses: passion and commitment to wildlife conservation, awe-inspiring experiences and encounters with wild animals, stress and challenges associated with animal care responsibilities, concerns regarding job security and financial stability, and the physical and emotional toll of fieldwork.

Passion and Commitment to Wildlife Conservation

The conservationists' dedication to protecting wildlife, particularly the Philippine Eagle, is deeply rooted in early life experiences and formative encounters with nature. Participants consistently described how childhood interactions with wildlife and immersive experiences, such as internships, ignited a lasting passion that shaped their career paths and sustained their commitment. This intrinsic motivation not only fuels their perseverance in the face of challenges but also enhances their effectiveness in biodiversity preservation. The narratives reveal that such early exposure fosters a profound emotional connection to wildlife, which serves as a foundation for long-term engagement in conservation efforts. "Going back to my childhood experience, maybe that's it because until now, it keeps on—coming back. I don't know how to explain the happiness I felt when I first met a Philippine Eagle, as they are one of the reasons I chose to pursue a degree in BS Biology. I want to conserve, conserve the Philippine Eagle" (Participant 8).

Awe-Inspiring Experiences Encounters with Wild Animals

A defining and rewarding aspect of conservation work is the opportunity to engage intimately with nature and its inhabitants. Participants expressed profound awe and fulfillment derived from exploring diverse ecosystems—from ridges to reefs—and from direct interactions with wildlife, such as collecting eggs or observing endangered species in their natural habitats. These experiences foster a strong emotional bond with the animals and a heightened awareness of their ecological significance, reinforcing the conservationists' sense of purpose. The emotional resonance of witnessing the Philippine Eagle in the wild, the national symbol of the Philippines, was particularly impactful, providing a source of inspiration and job satisfaction. Like they say, from ridge to reef and back to the ridge—that's how it is" (Participant 7).

Stress and Challenges in Animal Care Tasks

Wildlife conservationists in Davao City face significant emotional stress linked to the demanding nature of animal care. Tasks such as bathing large birds or treating injured wildlife can be physically taxing and emotionally draining, especially when animals unexpectedly deteriorate or die despite their efforts. This emotional toll reflects the deep empathy conservationists have for the animals under their care, highlighting the psychological burden of witnessing suffering and loss. "Stress, maybe when we bathe the birds. It's really stressful, especially when it's a big one—my goodness, like a parrot. We have to bathe them properly and clean them thoroughly, and if something happens, like if they suddenly become weak, it's really stressful" (Participant 1).

Job Security and Financial Stability

Financial security and organizational support emerged as important factors contributing to conservationists'

job satisfaction and commitment. Participants expressed appreciation for benefits such as healthcare and stable income, which enable them to support their families and remain dedicated to conservation work. This sense of financial stability fosters a positive work experience and motivates ongoing engagement in wildlife protection efforts. “The benefits are really significant. There are many people looking out for us, and I also earn financially to support my family, including food. I get a lot of benefits from the birds—I also gain something from them, and I gain valuable experiences as well” (Participant 1).

Physical and Emotional Toll of Fieldwork

Fieldwork presents a range of physical and psychological challenges for conservationists, including harsh environmental conditions, social isolation, and complex interpersonal dynamics. Participants reported frustration with bureaucratic restrictions on communication, conflicting motivations among collaborators, and disruptions caused by unpredictable weather, all of which impede conservation objectives and increase stress. “There are also people from government agencies, they would ask you to be silent, silent yourself. It’s like you’ll feel frustrated, something like that. And it affects you because it’s the government, and we’re just individuals. So, imagine how stressful that is” (Participant 8).

The Coping Mechanisms Employed by Wildlife Conservationists to Overcome the Challenges

Wildlife conservationists face considerable emotional and physical challenges in their work, necessitating effective coping strategies to sustain their resilience and commitment. Participants in this study revealed that personal coping mechanisms, particularly those involving direct engagement with nature and wildlife, play a crucial role in managing stress and adversity inherent in conservation work.

Wildlife Encounters as Stress Relief

One of the most significant sources of emotional relief for conservationists is their direct encounters with wildlife in natural habitats. Observing animals thriving in the wild serves as a powerful reminder of the purpose behind their efforts, providing moments of inspiration and renewed motivation. Participants described how witnessing the Philippine Eagle or other species in their natural environment alleviates fatigue and emotional exhaustion. These encounters reaffirm the tangible impact of their conservation work, fostering a profound sense of fulfillment that helps counterbalance the stress of their demanding roles. “When you see the wildlife, that part of my work relieves the tiredness, especially when seeing an eagle in the wild” (Participant 4).

Exploring Nature for Relaxation

Beyond direct wildlife encounters, conservationists also utilize broader engagement with natural settings as a means to decompress and restore mental clarity. Participants

reported taking deliberate breaks to immerse themselves in tranquil environments such as nearby waterfalls or open landscapes, which provide essential respite from the pressures of their work. These moments of solitude and reflection enable them to regulate emotions, reduce stress, and gain perspective on their professional challenges. Such restorative experiences are vital in preventing burnout and sustaining long-term dedication to conservation goals. “Sometimes, I just step out of the area for a while, like go to the highway or somewhere open to clear my head. Or I go on a quick trip—like visit waterfalls or nice views nearby. That’s part of “it too—taking a break to relax and reset my mind. It helps me think, “Ah, maybe this is what I should do next time,” or “This could be my strategy moving forward” (Participant 7).

Social Interactions as an Emotional Outlet

Social interactions serve as a critical emotional outlet for wildlife conservationists, helping them manage the psychological demands of their work. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of communication with colleagues, family, friends, and even guests as a means to alleviate stress and restore emotional strength. One participant emphasized the role of maintaining connections with loved ones through calls or video chats, especially when working with unfamiliar teams in remote field settings, noting that such interactions help “emotionally reset” and regain motivation (Participant 7). “So you really need to feel energized or motivated. You can call or video call your family or friends to regain that emotional strength from the people close to you, especially if you’re not used to the people you’re working with in the field. That’s why talking to your friends and family helps you emotionally reset.”

Support System from Family and Friends

Emotional support from family, friends, and colleagues plays a vital role in helping wildlife conservationists cope with the multifaceted challenges of their work. Participants consistently emphasized that knowing their loved ones appreciate and understand their efforts provides a crucial source of motivation and emotional relief amid daily stressors. For example, one participant described how the simple yet meaningful acts of care from his wife—such as preparing meals and creating a restful home environment—significantly alleviate his burdens and foster a sense of being valued (Participant 5). This form of tangible support not only nurtures physical well-being but also reinforces emotional resilience. “My family is very supportive of my work here, sir. Yes, my wife takes good care of me. Every morning, she prepares my packed lunch with a little viand. When I get home, it’s the same—everything is ready. If I’m tired, I just eat, relax, and don’t have to worry about anything.”

Time Management and Work Planning

Effective time management and strategic work planning are essential mechanisms through which wildlife

conservationists balance their demanding professional responsibilities with personal well-being. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of organizing tasks by priority and deadlines to optimize productivity and reduce stress. One participant described the utility of creating a comprehensive yearly work plan with quarterly goals, enabling clear visualization of tasks and identification of free periods for rest and recuperation (Participant 7). This structured approach facilitates focused attention on urgent matters while preventing task overload. “For me, the best approach is categorizing tasks based on importance and deadlines. You also need to create a work plan. A yearly work plan with quarterly goals so you can see what needs to be done and when. This helps with time management because you’ll know when you have free days.”

Learning Through Experience and Mentorship

To cope with work-related challenges, conservationists often seek mentorship and support from senior colleagues. Mentorship provides emotional support and professional development opportunities for those new to the field. Through guidance from experienced professionals, conservationists acquire valuable skills and receive practical advice on navigating complex challenges. “I adjust and ask my colleagues who have more knowledge so that I can work more securely” (Participant 2).

Insights from the Experiences of Wildlife Conservationists

This section presents five key themes derived from participants’ responses. These themes highlight various strategies for supporting wildlife conservation, including raising awareness, implementing comprehensive protection measures, and engaging local communities. They also emphasize the importance of strengthening government policies and fostering passion-driven conservation efforts. These insights are grounded in the experiences of conservationists working to protect diverse wildlife species and their habitats. Understanding these themes contributes to developing more effective conservation programs and policies.

The Role of Training and Seminars in Conservation

Training and awareness-raising play a crucial role in wildlife preservation. These programs help individuals and communities understand the challenges involved in conservation while addressing socioeconomic needs. Public education provides the knowledge and strategies necessary to support practical conservation efforts. It also promotes policies that ensure the survival and the economic and social well-being of communities. By spreading awareness, facilitating training sessions and workshops, and conducting seminars, conservation initiatives motivate community participation in wildlife protection, thereby contributing to preserving balanced biodiversity alongside sustainable human development. “I think people need seminars to educate them about the

importance of not disturbing wildlife. They need to be informed about why leaving wild animals alone is crucial. That’s the best way to raise awareness” (Participant 1).

Holistic Approaches to Wildlife Protection

Participants emphasized that wildlife conservation encompasses multiple dimensions, including strategies such as wildlife protection, community engagement, and the enforcement of robust policies and regulations. Collaboration among conservationists, government agencies, and local communities is essential for long-term sustainability. Integrating education, responsible resource management, and effective legislation promotes the protection of animals and their habitats. It also highlights the need for conservation methods to evolve in response to emerging environmental challenges. Through this comprehensive strategy, wildlife protection becomes more effective, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy and benefit from the natural world. “What I can really share with them is how to take care of animals—how to properly handle them, what to feed them, and what needs to be done to ensure their well-being” (Participant 1).

Educating and Engaging Communities in Conservation

Education plays a key role in maintaining the balance of wildlife conservation. When people understand and become more aware of the importance of preservation programs and training, they are more likely to actively participate in conservation efforts, such as volunteering or avoiding activities that harm natural habitats. Knowledge provides a strong foundation for improving preservation strategies. Through education, individuals are inspired to engage actively in conservation and contribute to building a better environment for future generations. One participant emphasized the importance of adapting conservation efforts to current trends to enhance their effectiveness: “The good thing about the Philippine eagle is that they have markers. Perhaps the best approach is to join the trend—create something efficient, do something that aligns with the trend” (Participant 4).

Strengthen Government Policies and Agency Partnerships

Creating strong policies and fostering partnerships between government agencies are critical to protecting wildlife. Such policies facilitate the enforcement of laws that prevent illegal hunting, habitat destruction, and wildlife trafficking. Additionally, government support can provide essential funding for research, conservation programs, and the rehabilitation of endangered species. Through collaborative efforts, wildlife conservation becomes more effective and sustainable. As one participant noted, the situation in Davao has improved in reducing illegal wildlife trade due to stricter government enforcement: “I think the situation in Davao is better now because there’s less illegal wildlife trade. The authorities

have become stricter, and the government is really enforcing laws against it. That's a good thing because illegal trading is one of the biggest threats to our wildlife, especially when animals are sold outside the country" (Participant 1).

Government policies and partnerships are crucial in safeguarding wildlife and natural resources. These policies help mitigate threats to wildlife by enforcing laws that prevent habitat destruction and promote conservation initiatives. However, as highlighted by participants, challenges such as limited funding and low prioritization within this sector hinder the sustainability of these efforts. In response, collaboration among local government units, organizations, and agencies—such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)—strengthens policy implementation and supports conservation initiatives, fostering long-term solutions to protect biodiversity.

Passion-Driven Conservation Efforts

Passion is essential in conservation, as it motivates individuals to remain dedicated to their work despite its challenges and demands. Those passionate about conservation are likelier to invest effort, time, and energy because they sincerely believe in the cause. Passion sustains inspiration and commitment to advocacy, awareness-raising, action, and program implementation, all of which are vital for ensuring long-term sustainability. Without passion, motivation and persistence may decline, undermining the potential for lasting impact. One participant emphasized the importance of responsibility and dedication in wildlife care: "First and foremost, value the animals you take care of, love your work, and always be responsible" (Participant 2).

Passion is a Powerful Motivator In Conservation Work

A love for nature encourages individuals to be more protective and cautious, prompting them to take action to preserve the environment and prevent harm to ecosystems. It highlights the importance of continuing conservation efforts despite challenges. Such commitment inspires communities to participate in conservation initiatives actively and fosters collaboration among conservationists, government agencies, and local communities, thereby paving the way for a healthier environment for future generations.

CONCLUSION

This section presents the conclusions and implications of the study based on the previous findings. By exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by wildlife conservationists, valuable insights are gained that contribute to the overall significance of the research. Additionally, this section highlights the implications for academic programs and provides recommendations for future research.

This study illuminates the lived experiences of wildlife

conservationists, revealing a profession marked by profound passion and commitment alongside significant challenges. Driven by a deep love for wildlife, conservationists serve as frontline defenders of biodiversity, finding fulfillment in direct encounters with nature's complexity and beauty. These interactions not only reinforce their dedication but also foster a strong sense of responsibility toward environmental stewardship. However, despite the intrinsic rewards, conservationists frequently face workplace stressors—including demanding animal care, rigorous fieldwork, and unpredictable environmental conditions—that adversely impact their mental health. Recognizing their humanity and need for emotional support is paramount in addressing these challenges.

The role of nature itself emerges as a vital source of psychological relief and inspiration, with wildlife encounters shown to enhance well-being and mitigate stress. Equally important are social connections, particularly with colleagues and local communities, which provide essential emotional support and facilitate adaptive responses to evolving conservation challenges. Effective time management and strategic work planning further enable conservationists to maintain productivity and reduce occupational stress, underscoring the need to cultivate workplace cultures that prioritize these skills.

Findings also highlight the critical importance of integrating local communities into conservation initiatives through education, collaboration, and shared stewardship. Conservationists in Davao City advocate for community mobilization and inter-agency cooperation as foundational to sustained success. Strengthening policy frameworks and fostering multi-sectoral partnerships are essential to creating resilient conservation strategies that reflect social, environmental, and institutional realities.

Ultimately, this study underscores that passion alone is insufficient to sustain effective conservation efforts. Robust institutional support, stable funding, and comprehensive frameworks addressing psychological, social, and structural dimensions are imperative to empower conservationists and ensure the long-term protection of biodiversity. A holistic approach that embraces these elements is crucial for advancing a sustainable and impactful conservation vision.

Implication

This study provides critical insights into the psychological and emotional dimensions of wildlife conservationists' work, a subject of growing importance within conservation psychology and applied psychology more broadly. The findings reveal that conservationists face multifaceted psychological challenges, including stress from animal care, unpredictable fieldwork conditions, and complex social interactions with local communities. Recognizing these challenges is essential for psychologists and conservation organizations aiming to develop targeted interventions that support the mental and emotional well-being of conservation professionals. Addressing these

psychological needs is fundamental to enhancing job satisfaction, resilience, and sustained commitment in this demanding field.

By foregrounding the often-overlooked internal struggles of conservationists, this research underscores the necessity of integrating meaningful psychological support into conservation programs. Such support may encompass stress management training, access to counseling services, and resilience-building strategies tailored to the unique pressures of conservation work. When conservationists feel emotionally supported, their capacity to perform effectively and maintain long-term dedication improves, thereby contributing to the overall success and sustainability of conservation initiatives.

More broadly, this study contributes to the global discourse linking environmental sustainability with mental health. It challenges the historical neglect of conservationists' emotional well-being by highlighting the psychological toll of their work. This awareness calls for a holistic approach among organizations, advocacy groups, and policymakers—one that incorporates mental health services, work-life balance policies, and financial support mechanisms specifically designed for conservation workers. Leading conservation organizations can leverage these findings to reform existing programs, emphasizing the emotional and psychological dimensions of conservation labor and fostering more supportive professional environments.

The implications extend to multiple stakeholders. For conservation practitioners, the findings offer a framework for self-reflection and the refinement of personal coping strategies to enhance resilience and job effectiveness. Government agencies responsible for environmental management can utilize these insights to design and implement training and support programs that address both technical skills and emotional well-being. Additionally, local communities stand to benefit from a deeper understanding of conservationists' challenges, promoting stronger collaboration in field-based projects such as wildlife rescue and species monitoring.

This research also fills a notable gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of conservationists in Davao City, providing a foundation for future studies across diverse socio-political and ecological contexts. Given that conservation challenges vary geographically, expanding research to include different regions will deepen understanding of global patterns in conservationists' psychological resilience and coping mechanisms. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating conservation psychology with sociology, public policy, and related fields offer promising avenues for further inquiry.

Future research should also explore intervention-based studies that evaluate the effectiveness of institutional mental health services, professional mentorship, and community engagement in mitigating conservation-related stress. Investigating motivational factors, burnout prevention, and resilience-building strategies will provide

practical guidance for enhancing conservationists' well-being and productivity.

This study stimulates critical reflection and further research into the psychological dimensions of conservation work. By addressing these issues, future efforts can develop more effective support systems, ultimately empowering wildlife conservationists to sustain their vital role in preserving global biodiversity.

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