

From Physiological to Self-Actualization: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Out-of-School Youth Miners in Pantukan

Phoebe Cates B. Pahud, LPT

phoebecatespahud@gmail.com / phoebecates.pahud@hcdc.edu.ph

Master of Arts in Education major in Teaching Social Studies,

Holy Cross of Davao College, Sta. Ana Avenue Corner C. De Guzman Street,

Bry. 14-B, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

Abstract

Child labor is a critical global concern. I explored the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed. The data collected through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). I selected thirteen out-of-school youth miners purposively, and I analyzed the data using thematic analysis. The results showed that out-of-school youth working in mining experienced financial instability, unstable employment and societal discrimination. I recommend researches utilizing the themes in the study as variables and emerging subthemes as indicators. Also, qualitative research may explore emerging themes to challenge the Hierarchy Needs Theory.

Keywords: From physiological to, self-actualization, lived experiences of out-of-school youth, miners in Pantukan

1. Introduction

Child labor in small-scale mining remains a critical global concern, particularly in developing nations where poverty and limited access to education compel children to engage in hazardous work (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Out-of-school youth are often compelled working in illegal and hazardous mining environments.

In Ghana, youth who drop out of school are frequently found working in small-scale and illegal mining operations, known locally as *galamsey* (Azumah, Baah, & Nachinaab, 2021). In Nigeria, illegal lithium mining has drawn widespread concern due to the involvement of children, who are forced to work in hazardous conditions for minimal wages (Associated Press, 2023). Also, a 2022 study from South Africa investigated the involvement of out-of-school youth miners in illegal gold mining activities. The research highlighted the hazardous working conditions (Mabunda, Mthembu, & Ndlovu, 2022).

In the Philippines, particularly in rural areas like Camarines Norte and Masbate. Many out-of-school youth are engaged in physically dangerous and illegal mining activities. (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Additionally, a recent study conducted by the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER) in Compostela Valley (now

Davao de Oro), Mindanao, highlights the involvement of out-of-school youth in illegal and hazardous mining environments. (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research [EILER], 2021).

Out-of-school youth who engaged in mining are exposed to a range of serious health risks. Beyond the immediate physical risks, involvement in mining also disrupts the educational and social development of youth, reinforcing cycles of poverty and limiting future opportunities (Allan-Blitz, Goldfine, & Erickson, 2022). This highlights the urgency of this study. Added to this is that, there is only limited number similar to my studies published that critically examined the experiences of out-of-school youth engaged in hazardous mining. Therefore, this study was conducted in response to the identified urgency and to address the existing gap in the literature.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study emphasizes the lived experiences of out-of-school youth working as miners, exploring their perspectives on their occupations while providing readers with valuable insights and information on the subject. This research examines the experiences faced by youth miners in Pantukan, focusing on how they navigate their labor-intensive work and how their experiences shape their identity as young laborers in the mining sector. Additionally, my study aligned to the Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty); studying and highlighting their experiences can contribute to creating policies and programs to reduce poverty. This study will benefit the government and labor sectors, such as the mining industry, which is present all over the world.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this study, I aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan engaged in hazardous mining activities. Below is the central research question that guided in this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan as they engage in mining labor coupled with their survival in fulfilling their basic physiological and safety needs, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization and how do these experiences shape their sense of identity?

This study examined the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in regards to their labor in hazardous working condition, maintaining their safety for survival, and understand how their involvement in mining identity, particularly in the face of the stigma often associated with their line of work.

1.3 Interview Guide Questions

The interview guide questions for this study focused on examining the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan. Key questions include:

1. How do the labor conditions in mining site affect the basic needs of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan?
2. What are the risks and danger encountered while working that affects the safety and security in mining and what strategies they used to secure physical and emotional survival?
3. How does working as an out-of-school youth miner influence the shaping of their identity, and how do they strive social acceptance despite the nature of their work?

1.4 Assumptions

In this study, exploring the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan, I assumed that their experiences are influenced by both personal and shared realities, where their labor, survival, and sense of identity intersect, shaping their perception of their roles in society and their daily coping mechanisms. These young miners engage in mining primarily to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, while also seeking to fulfill their social needs, such as a sense of belonging and self-worth, despite the inherent risks and difficulties they face. Their sense of identity is strongly impacted by their work in the mining sector, the harsh conditions they endure, and the relationships they form within the mining community, all of which contribute to the development of their self-concept. Additionally, I anticipated that participants will share authentic, reflective accounts of their experiences, providing a deeper understanding of how they balance the demands of survival with the formation of their identities in the context of mining.

1.5 Theoretical Lens

In this study, I anchored on the Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Maslow (1943), as cited in McLeod (2023), stating that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. This theory, comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often shows hierarchal levels through a pyramid. This theory highlighted five (5) levels in a pyramid starting from physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization.

Paradigm

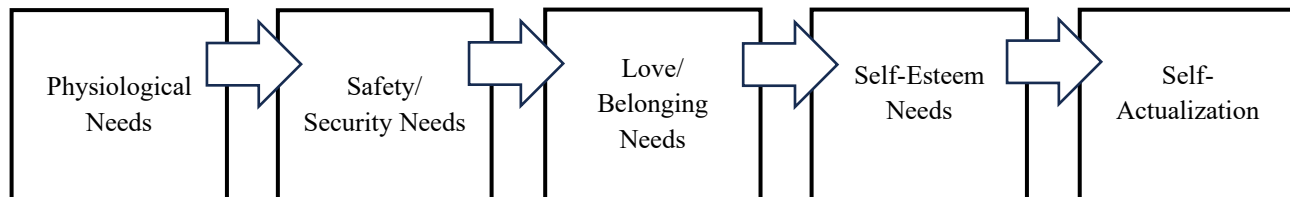


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study through Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow 1943

The paradigm of this study is rooted in Hierarchy of Needs Theory, emphasizing that individuals are motivated to fulfill a series of needs arranged in a five-tier structure, starting from the most basic to the most advanced. As shown in Figure 1, it emphasized that human motivation is structured in a hierarchical model consisting of five levels: Physiological Needs, Safety and Security, Love and Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization.

Physiological needs refer to “the organism’s primary survival requirements most critically, regular access to nutrient-dense food that maintains energy balance, alongside water, air, temperature regulation, and sleep because inadequate nourishment rapidly impairs all higher-order functioning” (Gupta & Singh, 2022). Safety (security) needs refer to the motivation to obtain physical protection, health assurance, financial stability, and environmental predictability that reduce uncertainty and vulnerability (Hale, Troxel, & Buysse, 2020). Love and belonging needs capture the universal drive to establish warm, reciprocal bonds and to feel accepted and connected within family, friendship, and community networks (Ahuvia, Thin, & Wong, 2021). Esteem needs encompass the pursuit of competence, achievement, and social respect, leading individuals to seek both self-regard and recognition from others (Pohlmann & Thomas, 2022). Self-actualization is the higher-order striving to realize one’s fullest capabilities through authentic, creative, and purpose-driven activity that expresses the true self (Kaufman, 2022).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study is qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan. Guided by the perspective of Tenny (2022), who describes qualitative research as a method that offers profound insights into real-world problems. By engaging directly with the voices of the participants, I aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of their experiences

2.2 Locale of the Study

In this study, the focused is on the community of Pantukan, Davao de Oro, a place known for its numerous mining sites. I have chosen this setting because it presents a distinct and meaningful context for examining the lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners. By centering my research in this community, I aimed to explore the complex realities they face that shape their involvement in mining. This setting provides critical insight into the intersection of out-of-school youth, labor in a resource rich yet vulnerable area.

2.3 Sample and Sampling

This study is focused on out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 24. This age group falls within the broader definition of youth, which, according to Aslan (2024), encompassing individuals aged 15 to 35. By focusing my sample to this particular demographic, I aimed to conduct an in-depth exploration of their lived experiences within the mining sector.

2.4 Data Gathering Technique

The data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). I have chosen these methods because they offer complementary strengths: the in-depth interviews allow me to gather detailed and personal narratives, while the focus group discussions provide a broader understanding of the social context surrounding the issues faced by out-of-school youth miners. These approaches are particularly well-suited for capturing the complexity of the participants lived experiences.

Prior to conducting these activities, I obtained informed consent to ensure that each participant is fully aware of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point should they feel any form of discomfort. A total of 13 participants involved in this research, six in the focus group discussions and seven in the in-depth interviews. To foster a comfortable and open environment, I conduct the interviews on-site at Port Side Grill House a restaurant near the beach in Pantukan.

The interviews were scheduled at times most convenient for the participants, and used a validated interview guide to maintain the reliability and consistency of the questions. Additionally, I informed the participants that audio recordings are made during the interviews to ensure accuracy in capturing their responses and to support the integrity of the data collection process.

2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for interpreting the qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. As described by Caulfield (2023), thematic analysis is a systematic approach to analyzing qualitative data, often applied to interview transcripts, that allows for the identification of recurring themes, topics, and patterns of meaning. In line with the phenomenological nature of this research, I engaged deeply with the participants narratives to uncover shared experiences.

2.6 Trustworthiness

In undertaking this phenomenological study, I recognized that establishing trustworthiness is vital to ensuring the legitimacy and dependability of my qualitative findings. Guided by the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as outlined by Sirwan (2024).

Confirmability is the degree of alignment maintained in the study (Lim 2024). This emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the outcomes of the research are shaped by the respondents and the conditions under which the data were collected and analyzed. Also, audit trail was included in the process. According to Marian Carcary (2020) it is a strategy that involves maintaining an audit of all key stages and theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions, as well as documenting how a researcher thinking evolves throughout the research project.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts or settings. As emphasized by Admin-Id (2023), providing rich and thick descriptions of the research setting, participants, and context enhances the ability of readers to evaluate the relevance and applicability of the findings to similar populations or environments.

Dependability underscores the importance of consistency and reliability in the research process. According to Moran (2021), ensuring that interpretations and conclusions are directly grounded in the raw data reinforces the stability of the research. By maintaining a clear and traceable documentation of procedures, the research process remains logical, systematic, and transparent.

3. Results

In this chapter I presented the experiences of out-of-school youth miners which I gather from their responses. I specifically included the modified paradigm based on the themes and subthemes added to the original themes included in the fundamental concept of the theory that I used.

The modified paradigm presented in this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of out-of-school youth in mining site, with a particular focus on the core aspects of labor, survival, and identity. Grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this framework has been expanded and contextualized to reflect the unique realities faced by youth engaged in mining activities. This modified paradigm illustrates the various layers of human needs ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization. Furthermore, this model includes subthemes that portray mining not only as a means of livelihood but also as a survival strategy intricately linked to family obligations, social stigma, and aspirations for a better life.

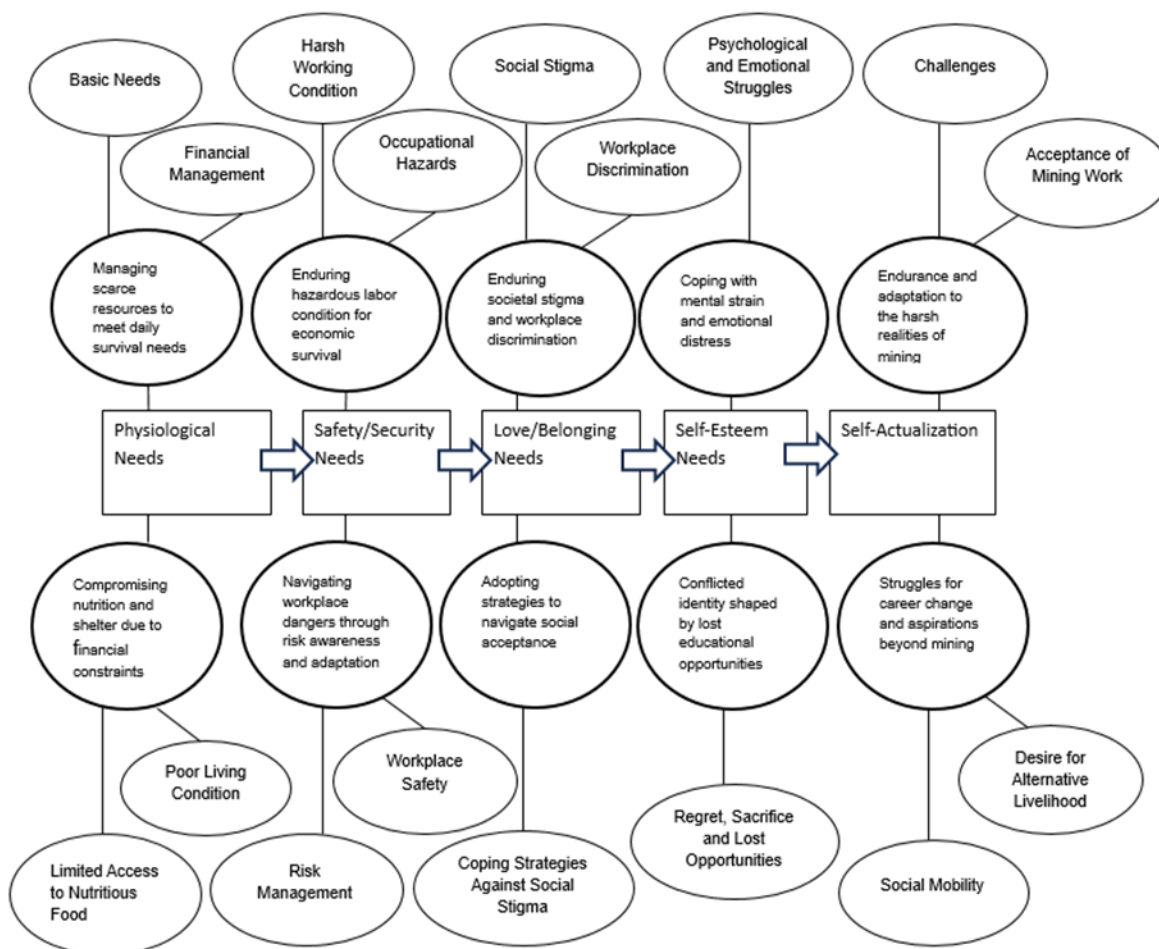


Figure 2. Modified Paradigm of the Study

Physiological Needs

Through the participants lived experiences, the out-of-school youth miners revealed how they managed the limited resources to meet their daily needs. Their narratives highlight a practical consciousness in prioritizing essential

expenses, particularly the purchase of food. I have identified two subthemes in this theme: Managing scarce resources to meet daily survival needs, Compromising nutrition and shelter due to financial constraints.

On Managing Scarce Resources to Meet Daily Survival Needs. This allocation of income reflects not only in the economic realities of out-of-school youth in mining sites but also their resilience in navigating scarcity. Their testimonies emphasized the challenges of their work which greatly affect in securing their basic needs. As stated by one participant:

"The situation is very difficult because sometimes you barely have anything to go through the tunnel is very tight, and the road gets very slippery when it rains, and it is also really cold. Sometimes, we even run out of food supplies." IDI-P2

This was also, expressed by another participant:

"Dried fish, those kinds of things." FGD-P1

Aside from dried fish, another participant also shared:

"Noodles like Lucky Me, the kind that is quick to cook." FGD-P2

Listening to their stories, I felt a deep ache in my heart. Each word they spoke exposed how hard they fought just to make ends meet with so little. It pained me to hear how these young miners still so young, yet burdened by such heavy work do not even get to eat a proper, healthy meal after a long, exhausting day. Their thin bodies and pale faces said more than words ever could. As I looked at them, I could not help but wonder if their families know what they are going through. Do their parents see the struggled in their eyes? And if they do, how do they feel about it? These are the questions that I want to further asked but I did not go through as it is too personal.

Furthermore, the lack of financial stability pushes them to rely on borrowing money to sustain themselves, with repayment depending on their ability to work. Irregular work schedule and unpredictable income force them to rely on credit to afford basic necessities.

"It is really difficult, maam, especially when there is a brownout that lasts for a week, we cannot go to work. The situation there is really hard. When we run out of supplies, we were left with no choice but to borrow money. We pay it back once we are able to work again." FGD-P2

As I hear these narratives it reveals the hand to mouth conditions of miners in mining sites. Added to hunger is the harsh physical condition like the experienced of power interruptions that last for a week or more. This affect their working duty as electricity is important in their operation in the tunnel. I saw their financial constraints right before my eyes. They look weak and thin. Their eyes are reddish and frail. Pitiful. If their body can only tell, they complained about their nutrition. This nutrition problem is coupled with agony when it comes to their shelter.

On Compromising Nutrition and Shelter Due to Financial Constraints. This illustrates how limited access to nutritious foods affects their ability to secure proper nutrition. Added to this, is the condition of their shelter in the mining site which is significant as it serve their resting place after a tiring day of work. As shared by one participant:

"It is really exhausting going into the site, especially if you have not eaten, you are weak, and it affects your health. You can get sick, possibly develop ulcers. The food is also repetitive, mostly dried fish and the like, so you might even end up getting a UTI." FGD-P5

These sentiments were expressed by the participants:

"Our walls are just made of bamboo. But it is not really dangerous because we built it properly. We are just used to it." IDI-P2

As I listened to their words, a wave of sorrow washed over me. Their voices revealed a life tightly bound by poverty. As I observed while uttering the words their mouths are shaking. It seems that they want to expressed more but they lack the courage to shared further. What broke my heart even more was seeing how this hardship echoed in their way of living fragile bamboo shelters stood as their only shelter, offering little comfort and almost no security. One of them quietly said, "Anad2 rajud," and in that simple phrase, I felt the weight of resignation, a silent acceptance that this life of suffering had become their norm. I could not imagine how they survive the cold nights with only thin

bamboo walls between them and the wind. It made me realized just how deeply their safety and security are being compromised.

Safety and Security Needs

The experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan reveal the physically demanding and hazardous nature of their work. Their testimonies illustrate the constant risk of landslides, poor ventilation, and unsafe tunnel structures, which they endure in their struggle for economic survival. Two subthemes were identified in this theme: Enduring hazardous labor conditions for economic survival, Navigating workplace dangers through risk awareness and adaptation.

On Enduring Hazardous Labor Conditions for Economic Survival. Mining, as revealed through their lived experiences is marked by harsh and demanding working conditions. Their narratives reflect frequent encounters with accidents, such as landslides. These conditions are not abstract risks, but daily realities that shape their bodies, choices, and ways of surviving within the mining environment. As expressed by one participant:

"It is really difficult, maam, especially since landslides happen often there. When there is an earthquake, we also lose our work. There was even a time someone got buried underneath." IDI-P5

As I listened, I felt the heavy weight of the struggles they faced in the mining site. When one of the participants shared a story, I saw how painful the memory was for him, he recalled how one of their co-workers was buried alive in a landslide. I saw the emotion in his eyes, how tears started to form, and how his voice trembled as he spoke. In that moment, I realized how truly difficult and dangerous life in the mountains. Every day for them feels like a constant gamble between living and dying.

On Navigating Workplace Dangers through Risk Awareness and Adaptation. This highlights the importance of risk awareness and adaptation to survive in a high-risk work environment. Despite the unsafe working environment, safety remains their priority. The miners prioritized actions or measures that can protect them from harm. As stated by one participant:

"He told us not to take shortcuts because the path might collapse. We should not just go recklessly. Of course, they are the ones who are knowledgeable." FGD-P4

When I heard that statement, I sensed how the participant felt a strong security just knowing that someone cared for them gave them comfort and made them feel less alone in their struggles. I saw it in their eyes, there was a spark of happiness as they shared their thoughts. It made me realized that if I showed a simple gesture of care to someone, I could create a big impact to their life. Through this, I sensed a quiet acceptance of risk, not as something extraordinary, but as part of the everyday mining life.

Risk is perceived as an unavoidable element of life in the mining sites a reality that is neither denied nor resisted, but accepted with quiet resolve. As added by one participant:

"He makes us aware, Maam, like she meets with us beforehand, gathers us together." FGD-P1

In my conversations with them, I came to understand that these dangers are not dismissed or downplayed; instead, they are consciously acknowledged and carefully managed as part of everyday survival. Guided by their seasoned colleague miners makes them feel loved and belonged to the mining community.

Love and belonging Needs

The lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan revealed how they navigated the social stigma and workplace discrimination associated to them. Many miners expressed feeling that society perceives them as inferior due to their occupation. Two subthemes were identified in this theme: Enduring societal stigma and workplace discrimination, Adopting strategies to navigate social acceptance.

On Enduring Societal Stigma and Workplace Discrimination. The societal stigma and discrimination associated in out-of-school youth work is the sad reality they faced. As expressed by one participant:

"I personally have not experienced being neglected, but it seems like others really see me that way, like I am someone of very low status." IDI-P2

In addition, this was advised by one participant:

"I just ignore it, Maam, and you cannot really talk back to them either, because they might take it the wrong way, even if they do not know what a person has been through." FGD-P3

As I listened to their stories, I realized that their exhaustion goes beyond just physical tiredness it also weighs heavily on their emotions. While one of them was talked about their experienced, I noticed their hands were shaking and their voice was trembling. Even me, the one doing the interview, felt like crying. I could not fully explain what I was feeling, because it hit me deeply.

In their situations, they encountered direct discrimination, such as being bullied for not knowing how to performed tasks outside of mining. As shared by the participant:

"For example, when you are told to buy a load for a phone, but you do not even know how to do it, and then they bully you for it." IDI-P2

Similarly, a participant also advised:

"We just ignore what they say because they do not really understand our situation, how difficult our life is." FGD-P1

While we were talking, one participant took out his phone and showed me a picture of someone who had bullied him. I was shocked and deeply saddened when I found out that person was actually his relatives. As I listened, I realized that they also faced silent but painful forms of discrimination, especially outside the mining site. A moment that revealed to me how society often assumed they lack even the most basic knowledge outside their work. Hearing this, I could not help but feel a deep ached in my chest. Despite this, they adopted the strategy of ignoring judgment in enduring difficult situation.

On Adopting Strategies to Navigate Social Acceptance. These coping strategies help them move forward, facing social challenges while preserving their dignity and holding on to hope for acceptance.

The sensed of being judged or looked down upon has become a part of out-of-school-youth miners daily reality. In response, they have developed ways to cope, a strategy that allow them to endure and continue living as miners despite the social challenges. As one participant emotionally expressed:

"I just let it pass through one ear and out the other, Maam those constant insults and criticisms. They do not even know what a person has been through." IDI-P5

In line with this statement, another participant advised:

"You really just have to ignore them, Maam, because if you engage with them, they tend to become more arrogant." FGD-P2

From their shared experienced, I am amazed because at their age they developed strategy to coped with the discrimination encountered. As the participant talked, I saw in his face the expression of not being affected, they have learned to leaned on their emotional resilience, disengagement to the people discriminated them, and even humor as tools to counter negative perceptions. One approached that stood out to me was their decision to simply ignored hurtful remarks to avoid confrontation. In this way, they start to reshaped their identity, addressing their esteem needs in the face of judgment.

Esteem Needs

This suggests that while miners have developed strategies to cope with emotional struggles, their psychological well-being remains fragile. The absence of formal mental health support, coupled with harsh working conditions, challenged their esteem needs, leaving them vulnerable to emotional distress. Based on the interview it revealed two sub-theme: Coping with mental strain and emotional distress, conflicted identity shaped by lost educational opportunities

On Coping with Mental Strain and Emotional Distress. The immense mental and emotional strain they endured due to their difficult working condition makes them to employed coping mechanisms managed emotional distress. According to the participant:

"I just laugh it off, Maam, since I do not really have a choice. Sometimes, I just end up crying from exhaustion." IDI-P5

Furthermore, one participant added this statement:

"Just rest for a while, have some coffee, and relax." FGD-P3

While they were sharing their stories, I noticed one participant turn away and quietly wiped his eyes after answering a question. I pretended not to notice, so that he will not feel embarrassed. Me, too, was holding back my tears. At first, I thought they were all strong and cheerful, with tough personalities because they are miners. But I realized that behind their smiles, they carried so much sadness in their hearts. I tried to imagined myself in their place and honestly, if people judged or criticized me the way they were treated, I do not think I could handle it. But they managed to stay calm and composed. The way they carried their pain with quiet strength and it truly impressed me. I can say they have truly been molded well in their work as miners. This daily conflict reflected their struggle with a conflicted identity, as they learn to suppressed their true feelings just to survived each day.

On Conflicted Identity Shaped by Lost Educational Opportunities. Out-of-school youth miners identity is marked by both regret, sacrifice and lost opportunities highlighting a choice between survival and aspirations for a better life. Their testimonies revealed mixed emotions of pride, regret, and resignation regarding their current situation. As one participant emotionally shared:

"It is kind of mixed feelings, there is regret, but also pride. There were times I was able to help my parents, but there were also times I felt regret because I wasted the time when I was still in school. I could have become someone better by now." FGD-P1

Meanwhile, a participant also sentimentally expressed:

"There is a regret because I wasted my chance at schooling, and now I have entered something that is not easy at all." FGD-P3

As I listened to their stories, I felt the weight of the deep and painful emotions they carried, especially about the difficult choices they have had to make. While they were talking, I saw regrets written all over their faces. They did not look me in the eyes; instead, they looked down and kept nodding their heads, as if ashamed or unsure. I honestly struggled with how to comfort them, because my heart ached from what I heard. It hurts to saw them caught in a situation where they have to choose between helping their families and pursuing their education. As a teacher, it is heartbreaking to witnessed this kind of reality. What stayed with me the most was their deep sensed of regret and I could not stop thinking and hoping they still get the chance to go back to school. I truly wish that their stars would align with the moon guiding light into their darkest nights and that the heavens would finally favor these young miners, allowing their longing dreams to gently rise and come true. This longing reflected their pursuit of self-actualization, as they strived to become the fullest and best version of themselves.

Self-Actualization

This shows how mining shapes the identities of out-of-school youth miners, helping them build resilience while also limiting their dreams. Those who see no other options are more likely to accept mining as their permanent future, while those who hold on to hope continue working with the aim of improving their lives and reaching their full potential. Two subordinate themes emerged: Endurance and adaptation to the harsh realities of mining, struggles for career change and aspirations beyond mining

On Endurance and Adaptation to the Harsh Realities of Mining. In engaging in mining out-of-school youth miners encountered a range of difficulties as they navigate through the tunnels, which, in turn, become a source of motivation to persist in their work at the mining site. A participant shared his emotion:

"We just keep praying. Not all the time do we get small amounts of gold; we just keep striving until we get a big one. There is no certainty, but at least there is something." FGD-P1

Additionally, one participant emotionally expressed:

"Still striving, Maam, always working hard, so you can achieve what you want." FGD-P2

As I listened to their stories, I felt something stir deeply in my heart a quiet, powerful hope that lives within these young miners, even as they walked through a life filled with hardship and uncertainty. One participant, while speaking, looked up at the sky with a soft smile on his face. In that moment, I saw more than just a gesture, I saw a silent prayer, a plea to God to make space for their dreams in this difficult world. It touched me deeply. Despite earning so little and having no promises for tomorrow, they still hold on. They believed that as long as they work hard, there is always a chance. I was in awe. If their parents heard what I heard, I know they would be proud. Even me, just sitting there listening, never expected to witness such strength, such quite courage. These youth so young, yet so strong have learned to carry pain with dignity. They do not complain. They endured. And that, for me, is a kind of strength that breaks my heart and inspired me. This determination to achieved a better future underscores their struggles for career change and their aspirations beyond mining, marking crucial steps in their journey toward self-actualization.

On Struggles for Career Change and Aspirations Beyond Mining. This subtheme captures the lived experiences as they navigate the challenging transition from working in the mines to other chances. As expressed by one participant:

"You would not really get ahead as a miner, but if I were given the chance to stop mining, I would definitely take it." IDI-P4

The uncertainty of income in the mining industry led them to desire for more stable and sustainable livelihood opportunities. While speaking, I saw him keep nodding his head. It seems like he was sure not to prosper as a miner. This statement highlights deep desire for a change, reflecting their aspirations for a better future beyond mining. As expressed by one participant:

In addition, another participant also voiced his sentiment:

"If I were still in the mining, I would really be working there, but for now, I will hold off for now because I also have plans and it is really hard in the site these days." IDI-P3

Listening deeply to their reflections, I was deeply moved by the hope that still lingers within them the desired to pursue a different path, if only given the chance. While telling their stories, I saw a sad expression in their face with teary eyes. This broke my heart, because once in their life, working in mining is a great hope now a dream slowly fading. I found not just struggle, but also silent resilience and a longing for transformation. They expressed a strong desire to shift to a different career path if given the opportunity knowing that they are not sure anymore what lies ahead in mining.

Viewpoint and Standpoint

As a researcher and member of the Pantukan community, I saw the need to explore the lives of out-of-school youth miners. Their daily struggles reflect Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting with the basics earning through mining to afford food and water. Despite the dangers, it helps them survive. Yet, safety remains fragile due to landslides, toxic exposure, and poor working conditions. With limited access to education and stable homes, many find love and belonging within their mining circles, forming bonds through shared work and hardship. Their self-worth grows as they provide for their families, gaining pride and purpose. For some, this even sparks hope dreams of escaping poverty and helping others rise through education.

Through this study, it became evident that their identities are deeply influenced by their work as miners. The lived experiences of these out-of-school youth show how mining becomes not only a means of survival but also a foundation for social identity, self-understanding, and personal meaning. Despite the harsh conditions they endure, their narratives reflect resilience, agency, and a complex navigation of human needs amidst adversity.

4. Discussions

In this chapter, I discussed the themes and the corresponding subthemes that emerged in the processed of my conversation to my study participants. Also included herewith, the implications for practice, which emphasized interventions; the future directions, outlining key areas for further research and exploration. Also, a review of existing literature, which I identified similar studies that affirm and support my findings.

Physiological Needs of Out-of-School Youth Working in Mining Areas

Physiological needs, including essentials like food, shelter, and water, are the most basic human requirements (Shoib et al., 2022). The lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan reflected the struggles of managing limited financial resources to ensure daily survival needs such as food. Two subthemes were discussed in this theme: Managing scarce resources to meet daily survival needs, compromising nutrition and shelter due to financial constraints.

Managing Scarce Resources to Meet Daily Survival Needs. In mining areas, Hilson (2016) examined the economic struggles of small-scale miners and highlights how unpredictable income forces miners into cycles of debt. The study underscores that many miners prioritize daily survival over long-term financial planning, similar to the experiences of Pantukan youth miners.

In this finding, I observed that my participants still lived in poverty despite engaging in gold extraction. This reinforced the theme of managing scarce resources. This supports the study of Verbrugge (2015), which examined the economic realities of small-scale mining in the Philippines, emphasizes that miners often face fluctuating incomes that prevent them from consistently securing basic necessities. Also, I found that the youth miners struggled to meet their basic physiological needs which affirm the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), in compromising basic needs such as food just to survived each day.

Compromising Nutrition and Shelter Due to Financial Constraints. In this finding, the experienced of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan highlighted the difficult trade-offs they made due to financial constraints. After gathering their testimonies, it revealed the compromised they endured in terms of food quality and shelter as they struggled to meet their basic needs. This affirms to the study of Hilson (2016) who discussed how artisanal and small-scale miners frequently experience financial instability, resulting in inadequate nutrition and substandard living conditions.

Moreover, as I documented my participants testimonies it revealed that they rest in bamboo houses and relied on dried fish and noodles for sustenance. This supports the idea of Verbrugge (2015) which stated that the financial hardships experienced by small-scale miners in the Philippines, citing their dependence on makeshift housing and low-cost food.

Their struggles to meet essential needs such as food and shelter prevented them from progressing toward another level of hierarchy which is the safety and security. This finding also aligns with the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), particularly at the base level of physiological needs.

Safety and Security Needs of Out-of-School Youth Working in Mining Areas

According to Shoib et al. (2022), safety and security needs encompass the human desire for protection from harm, stability, and order in one environment. This theme encompasses two subthemes. Enduring hazardous labor conditions for economic survival, navigating workplace dangers through risk awareness and adaptation.

Enduring Hazardous Labor Conditions for Economic Survival. The experienced of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan talks about how they endured hazardous work environments without proper protective measures. This finding supports the study of Hilson and McQuilken (2014) which examined the dangers of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and argue that miners often work in unsafe conditions due to a lack of safety regulations.

The testimonies of out-of-school youth miners confirmed the presence of unstable structures and poor ventilation in mining tunnels. This confirms the idea of Verbrugge (2015) who discussed the physical risks faced by

small-scale miners in the Philippines, highlighting the frequency of tunnel collapses, landslides, and exposure to extreme temperatures.

They struggled to meet even their basic physiological and safety needs due to the extreme working conditions. This aligns with Maslow's framework, as their lack of stable and secure work environment severely restricts their ability to progress to higher levels of well-being.

Navigating Workplace Dangers through Risk Awareness and Adaptation. In my study, the experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan confirm their daily encounters with occupational hazards at the mining site. This asserts with the findings of Hilson and Garforth (2012), who emphasized that artisanal and small-scale miners often develop informal safety practices to navigate workplace hazards. While such awareness and adaptation can help reduced accidents, the absence of formal safety regulations continues to make mining one of the most dangerous forms of employment.

In this finding, their experiences confirm the reality that workplace risks are navigated rather than eliminated. This aligns with Beck's Risk Society Theory (Beck, 1992), which posited that modern labor environments are increasingly characterized by unavoidable risks. In high-risk occupations such as mining, workers depend on collective knowledge, experience, and informal safety practices to manage these dangers.

Love and Belonging Needs of Out-of-School Youth Working in Mining Areas

According to a 2023 study by Dr. Frederick Edward T. Fabella, love and belonging needs are fundamental human requirements, encompassing the desire for interpersonal relationships, affection, and acceptance. Two key subthemes were explored within this theme: Enduring social stigma and workplace discrimination, adopting strategies to navigate social acceptance.

Enduring Societal Stigma and Workplace Discrimination. The struggles of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan talks about stigma and discrimination they faced. This affirms the study of Hilson and McQuilken (2014) which examined the social status of artisanal and small-scale miners, noting that they are often viewed as inferior and unskilled workers.

In my study, they experienced social stigma, as their occupation is viewed as low-status and undesirable but they choose to ignore negative comments they adopted this strategy to avoid direct confrontation to minimize further discrimination. This finding affirms Goffman's (1963) Stigma Theory. According to Goffman, individuals perceived as different or inferior by society, develop coping strategies to navigate their marginalized status.

Adopting Strategies to Navigate Social Acceptance. As revealed in my study, out-of-school youth miners explained that thinking about negative situations in a less harmful way, is an important way to cope. This is evident in the miners approached of dismissing negative comments rather than internalizing them. I found that the coping strategies of young miners affirm the concepts discussed by Major and O'Brien (2005), who examined how marginalized individuals manage social rejection.

Esteem Needs of Out-of-School Youth Working in Mining Areas

In this finding, out-of-school youth miners need also to be respected despite the social stigma associated with them. This aligns to Nawir (2021) stating that esteem needs, such as self-respect and recognition, are essential components of Maslow's hierarchy, influencing individuals psychological development and motivation. Two key subthemes were explored within this theme: Coping with mental strain and emotional distress, conflicted identity shaped by lost educational opportunities.

Coping with Mental Strain and Emotional Distress. The lived experiences documented in my study revealed the immense mental and emotional strain miners endured due to their difficult working conditions. This supports to the study of Hilson (2016) which examined the psychological effects of small-scale mining, emphasizing that miners experience high levels of stress rooting from financial uncertainty and dangerous work environments. Similarly, Verbrugge (2015) explores how artisanal miners in the Philippines manage psychological distress, noting that many

rely on humor, camaraderie, and brief periods of relaxation to endure their hardships. The accounts of my participants affirm this, who described using laughter and short breaks as their coping mechanisms against emotional exhaustion.

Conflicted Identity Shaped by Lost Educational Opportunities. My study revealed regarding their identity, shaped by their lost educational opportunities and the necessity of mining for survival. It aligns with Bourdillon's (2006) examination of the relationship between child labor and education, where he argues that children who enter the workforce at a young age often experience regret and a profound sense of lost opportunity.

Additionally, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) applies to this subtheme. The miners prioritize economic survival (basic physiological needs) over self-actualization, which includes personal growth and education. Their struggle to move beyond mining reflects the challenge of balancing immediate survival with long-term aspirations. Achieving self-actualization becomes difficult when the fulfillment of basic needs remains a struggle.

Self-Actualization of Out-of-School Youth Working in Mining Areas

According to Von Humboldt (2022), self-actualization is the process of realizing one's full potential, achieving personal growth, and experiencing peak moments of fulfillment. This theme encompassed two subthemes: Endurance and adaptation to the harsh realities of mining, struggles for career change and aspirations beyond mining.

Endurance and Adaptation to the Harsh Realities of Mining. The lived experiences of out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan highlight their endurance and adaptability in navigating the difficulties of small-scale mining. In my study, some confirm that mining is a permanent livelihood, while others persist in the hope of achieving financial breakthroughs. These varied perspectives highlight the miners' ongoing struggles for career change and their aspirations to pursue opportunities beyond the mining industry. This supports the study of Verbrugge (2015) which explores the identity of miners in the Philippines, noting that many perceive mining both as an unavoidable fate and as a potential stepping stone to greater success.

Struggles for Career Change and Aspirations Beyond Mining. The experiences of out-of-school youth miners highlight a tension between their current involvement in mining and their aspirations for a different future. This confirms to the idea of Banchirigah and Hilson (2010) which explored the difficulty of transitioning from small-scale mining to other occupations, emphasizing how miners often feel trapped due to limited education and economic opportunities.

Youth miners confirm a strong desire to leave mining but are constrained by a lack of viable alternatives. This supports the study of Hilson and Maconachie (2017) which examined how poverty and entrenched social structures reinforce continued participation in mining, making career shifts difficult. My study affirms this, as the sentiments expressed by the miners, I interviewed who spoke of uncertainty and limited prospects beyond the mining sector.

In my findings, while some believe they can change their careers if given the opportunity, others feel resigned to their current situation. This supports the idea of Hope Theory by Snyder (1994) which provides a psychological perspective on the struggles and aspirations of young miners. Hope Theory suggests that individuals develop pathways toward their goals and sustain the motivation to achieve them despite obstacles.

Implications for Practice

My study on out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan provides insights into how their experiences fit to the tailored livelihood programs to ensure financial stability, stable employment, and safe working conditions. These programs may prioritize safety protocols in mining and encourage collaboration among local government, mining owners, and community leaders to create safer practices and secure job opportunities.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No poverty), this study highlights to create programs and policies where they are given the chance to continue their education and develop their skills for future development. These programs should also offer pathways for skills development and career growth to help them pursue alternative futures.

As part of the education sector, the results of this study help in creating specific curriculum addressing the needs of the out-of-school youth. As a teacher, it is important to have a curriculum for them so that teachers are guided

In summary, my study emphasizes the importance of addressing the various needs of out-of-school youth miners that support their physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs for a better future. By aligning interventions, we can create sustainable solutions that empower these youth to overcome their challenges and pursue more fulfilling lives.

Future Direction

As shared by the out-of-school youth miners in Pantukan during our interview in exploring their lived experiences, a future quantitative study may be conducted using the major themes in this qualitative research: physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belonging, esteem needs, and self-actualization as variables. The emerging subthemes from this study may be utilized as indicators to measure each variable more effectively.

Also, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) research may also be done, utilizing the subthemes as an indicator in order to come up with a questionnaire specific items that can be drawn out from the discussion of this study.

Subsequent studies may consider adopting Resilience Theory to explore how out-of-school youth miners demonstrate adaptive capacities and coping strategies in the face of the multiple challenges they encounter in their work environments.

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