

The Field of Empowerment: A Qualitative Case Study of Young Women Participants In Palarong Pambansa

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the resilience experiences of five rural Filipino female student-athletes, the Talaingod Lady Wakandas, competing in the Palarong Pambansa, through the lens of Garnezy's (1991) Resilience Theory. Data from semi-structured interviews with five main participants and five key informants, supplemented by photographic documentation, revealed three domains of challenges (Financial Barrier, Relational Burdens, Psychological and Role-Based Burdens), three domains of coping strategies (Resourcefulness and Collective Action, Cognitive and Emotional Reframing, Time Management and Endurance), and three domains of adaptive outcomes (Character Forged in Scarcity, Empowerment Through Faith and Achievement, Growth Through Adversity). Findings indicate that despite material deprivation, interpersonal adversity, and psychological strain, athletes developed humility, resilience, and a distinct fighting spirit through improvisation, collective action, cognitive reframing, and faith. The study extends Garnezy's framework by revealing culturally specific, collectively sustained, and spiritually anchored protective factors. Implications call for structural investment in rural sports infrastructure, flexible academic policies, and university pre-recruitment support for rural athletes. Divergences from Western literature on controlling coaching and gender inequality suggest that resilience in extreme resource-limited settings may operate through organic, necessity-driven mechanisms rather than formal interventions.

Keywords: resilience; rural athletes; student-athletes; challenges; coping strategies; positive outcomes; student-athletes; gender inequality

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Setting

Sports confidence among young women athletes is a critical global issue limiting their empowerment through sports. Research consistently shows lower confidence in females versus males, with Zuk et al. (2021) noting girls' lower skill and competitive confidence, Glenn (2023) highlighting deeper identity struggles, and Karakuş (2024) reaffirming recurring self-confidence issues—together confirming a global crisis tied to empowerment.

Globally, low sports confidence repeatedly hinders women's empowerment. Thomas and Thrower (2022) find it a hurdle for young UK athletes despite inclusive efforts; Singh and Hussain (2024) cite it as a central problem in India, especially in high-stakes events; and Glenn (2023) notes U.S. young women lack self-belief to convert participation into empowerment—underscoring a consistent global concern.

In the Philippines, similar realities persist. Guinto et al. (2021) note observable confidence challenges from national to grassroots events; Reyes (2022) finds indigenous young women athletes struggle

due to cultural and systemic barriers; and the Philippine Commission on Women (2022) reports only a 4% rise (from 38% baseline) in competitive participation, termed “modest growth” despite advocacy efforts.

Despite recognized importance, sports confidence remains underexamined in grassroots and rural contexts. Thomas and Thrower (2022) note research focuses on urban athletes; Singh and Hussain (2024) argue local neglect keeps confidence and empowerment unrecognized; and the Philippine Commission on Women (2022) states overlooking grassroots limits empowerment. Thus, this study addresses the literature gap by examining Talaingod’s young women athletes in high-stakes competitions like Palarong Pambansa.

1.2. Significance of the Study

My study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal number 5: gender equality and empower all women and girls with particular emphasis on women empowerment through sports in rural and indigenous communities like Talaingod. In the spirit of Holy Cross of Davao College’s (HCDC) Mission and Vision, which emphasize the holistic development of individuals, attention to the needs of the less fortunate, and social transformation rooted on faith, truth, and justice, my research seeks to highlight the lived experiences of young women athletes in grassroot rural communities who remain underrepresented. My study seeks to contribute to the promotion of equitable opportunities for women athletes and strengthening programs to support young women athletes in the grassroot communities like Talaingod to achieve their personal goals through sports.

1.3. Research Questions

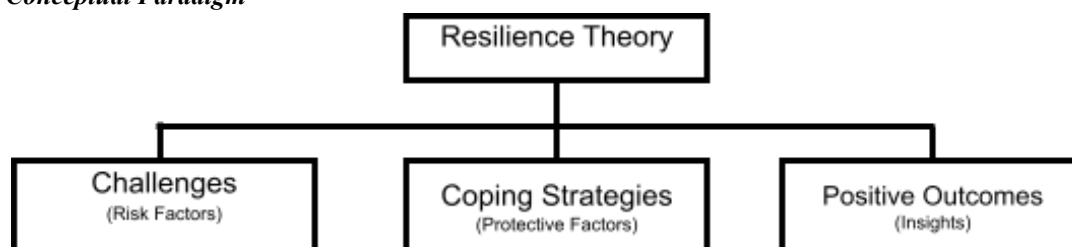
My research investigated the experiences of rural young women athletes in Talaingod who have participated in high-stakes sports events like the Palarong Pambansa, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, and positive outcomes.. Specifically, this research answered the following questions:

1. What are the specific challenges and barriers (e.g., gender bias, training difficulties, resource constraints) the young woman participant experienced within the Palarong Pambansa and the broader sporting environment?
2. What are the personal and social coping mechanisms the young woman employed to overcome these challenges, and how these actions led to and manifested as personal and relational empowerment?
3. What are the key insights the young woman gained about herself, her role, and her gender through sports participation, and to determine the meaning and significance of her Palarong Pambansa experience on her life trajectory outside the field?

1.4. Theoretical Lens

My research is anchored on Norman Garmezy’s (1991) Resilience Theory. It emphasized resilience is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of three variables, namely, risk factors, protective factors, and adaptive outcomes. Risk factors pertain to the challenges and barriers that increase the vulnerability of a person. On the other hand, protective factors are coping strategies or available support mechanisms employed to address the experienced challenges. Finally, adaptive outcomes refer to successful adjustment or thriving of an individual despite the challenges through the help of coping strategies and existing support systems.

1.5. Conceptual Paradigm



1.6. Assumption of the Study

I assumed that the experiences of rural young women athletes in Talaingod align with Resilience Theory, particularly in terms of how protective mechanisms help them overcome gender-specific risks. However, beyond this theory, I also assumed that additional cultural and local factors shape their experiences. I further assumed that the qualitative descriptive method effectively captures their narratives of resilience and empowerment, and that I have interpreted these stories faithfully by maintaining methodological rigor and curtailing personal bias. Finally, I assumed that gender disparity exists in Talaingod, and that sports participation can drive genuine transformation for these young women athletes.

2. Methodology

In this section, I presented the research design, locale of the study, sample and sampling technique, data gathering technique, data analysis technique, and trustworthiness of my research.

2.1. Research Design

I used a qualitative single case study design to collect narrative data as it provides a deeper understanding of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). This method allowed me to gather rich, detailed data from a young female athlete who participated in the Palarong Pambansa, which I conceptualized as a "field of empowerment" within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). By drawing on multiple data sources like interviews and observations (Stake, 1995), I provided a thick description of how this participant navigated and derived agency from the national competition, offering contextualized insights into gender and sport in the Philippines.

2.1. Locale of the Study

I conducted this study at Sto. Niño National High School in Barangay Sto. Niño, Talaingod, Davao del Norte. I recognized this school as a meaningful context for exploring women's empowerment through sports, as its women's volleyball team, the Talaingod Lady Wakandas, represented Region XI in the 2023, 2024, and 2025 Palarong Pambansa despite socioeconomic and cultural challenges. I observed that the school was situated in a community historically affected by poverty, militarization, and land disputes—reflecting the risk factors these athletes navigated. At the same time, I identified that the school's national success highlighted protective factors like institutional support and sports programs that fostered resilience and empowerment.

2.2. Sample and Sampling Technique

I used purposive sampling to select five (5) young female athletes from Sto. Niño National High School who participated in the Palarong Pambansa (2023-2025). I included only those aged 13-21 with parental consent (if minors) and clear communication ability. I excluded males, non-athletes, minors without consent, and those unable to communicate clearly. I also selected five (5) key informants (e.g., coaches, teachers) with direct knowledge of the athlete's journey to triangulate data, excluding those without substantial involvement or who could exert undue influence.

2.3. Data Gathering Technique

After I undertook the necessary ethical and administrative preparations and obtained permission to conduct the study, I conducted individual, in-dept, open-ended interviews of five young female athletes and five (5) key informants in private settings, protected anonymity using pseudonyms, sought permission for audio-recording, took field notes for non-verbal cues, and securely stored all data with access limited to myself.

2.4. Data Analysis Technique

After collecting data through in-depth interviews, I transcribed and organized the material. Following Creswell's (2013) framework, I immersed myself in the data and generated initial codes to capture key patterns. I then employed Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to refine codes into broader themes, ensuring credible and grounded findings from the participants' lived experiences

2.5 Trustworthiness

I anchored the trustworthiness of this single-case study in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, focusing on credibility, dependability, and confirmability. I ensured credibility through data triangulation from multiple sources (in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, observations, and photographs) and prolonged engagement with the participant across different phases of the Palarong Pambansa. I maintained dependability by creating an audit trail, using thick description with Cebuano quotes, practicing reflexivity through my reflection (*Ex Fide Ad Veritatem*), incorporating panelist feedback, and conducting iterative coding and cross-checking. I strengthened confirmability through persistent reflexive journaling to bracket my personal biases. Finally, I adhered to the SMILE ethics certificate and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), securing informed consent, using pseudonyms, and ensuring encrypted data storage.

3. Results

In this section, I presented the study's findings on the lived experiences, focusing on the positive outcomes of rural young women athletes in the Palarong Pambansa, followed by a summary of findings and the modified paradigm.

3.1. Resilience Outcomes: Adversity cultivates character, advances growth, and fosters empowerment

The theme resilience outcomes are expressed in the transformations Talaingo Lady Wakandas underwent through navigating material, relational, and psychological adversity. Under this, three (3) domains emerged that capture their adaptive outcomes: character forged in scarcity, empowerment through faith and achievement, and growth through adversity.

Character Forged in Scarcity. This theme captures how the Lady Wakandas' material deprivation became the crucible for their inner strength. The participants spoke of humility not as weakness, but as a quiet armor. Chronic hardship did not break them, but it built their resilience. As one of the participants declared:

"Ang pagiging humble gyud sir kay bisan unsa nimo ka kusog sir tapos kung hambog ka nga pagkatao murag sa panan-aw sa tao sir murag wala ra... ma-amaze sila nga, 'Wow. Kani na mga player humble.'" (Being humble really matters, sir. No matter how strong you are, if you're arrogant, people won't appreciate it—but they're amazed when they see players who remain humble.)

— Main Participant 1

No matter how strong they were, Main Participant 1 understood that skill without humility is noise. Trainer 3 offered the simplest, most beautiful definition of humility:

"Dili sila materialistic. Dili sila sige pangayo ug daghan kaayo nga butang. Murag kontento lang sila kung unsa ang naa." (They're not materialistic. They don't constantly ask for things—they're content with what they have.)

— Trainer 3

They are content. No demands for new shoes, new jerseys, new equipment. I realized that developing humility is not about shrinking. It is about standing firmly on the ground you actually have.

Empowerment Through Faith and Achievement. This embodies how the Lady Wakandas converted relational adversity into sources of inner power. When others doubted them, their success became proof; when

support was absent, their faith became anchor. The participants spoke proudly of rural women not as victims of circumstance, but as warriors of quiet conviction as one participant affirmed:

"Gi-prove nako sa ilaha nga kaya nako ni buhaton like kanang kung usay kaya buhaton sa mga lalake, kay kaya pud namo buhaton as a young women po." (I proved to them that I can do it—that whatever men can do, we as young women, can do as well.)

— Main Participant 5

With words full of pride, they forged their own validation. Every achievement that led them to participate in *Palarong Pambansa* are carved into their hearts. Then Teacher Coach 2 spoke of the importance of faith:

"Kung naa sila'y problema, ginatudloan nako sila nga mag-open up ug mag-ampo. Kay kabalo ko nga si God naa gyud para sa ilaha." (When they have problems, I teach them to open up and pray, because I know that God is always there for them.)

— Teacher Coach 2

The deep understanding that faith is a listening ear, and a presence that does not leave when the game ends is truly profound. I realized that drawing mental strength from faith is not about asking God to win but for persistence.

Growth Through Adversity. This encapsulated how the Lady Wakandas transmuted psychological and role-based burdens into opportunities for holistic development. What could have broken them instead shaped them. As one of the participants attested:

"Mu-ingon sya [ang trainer] nga kaning akong ginabuhay sa inyoha, dili ni kanang ika-down gani namo sir—which is tama man pud gyud sila nga kanang mu-grow gyud mi." (They tell us that what they're doing isn't meant to bring us down—and they're right, because it really helps us grow.)

— Main Participant 2

They chose to believe that the coach's sharp tongue had a purpose to cultivate them and push them further. Growth lives on the other side of discomfort. Then Teacher Coach 2 broadened the perspective into:

"Dili lang man gud physical training ang importante. Kinahanglan pud natong tan-awon ang emotional ug mental aspect sa mga athletes." (Turn the negative into something positive, so the direction of your life will also become positive.)

— Teacher Coach 2

This testifies that harsh feedback, without care, can destroy. So they developed ears that could hear past the tone, into the truth. They learned to separate what was said from how it was said. And they chose to let the hard words make them harder to break. As I reflected, I realized that this is not submission but a quiet, fierce wisdom carved, perhaps too young, into the minds of the young women athletes of Talaingod.

3.2. Summary of Findings

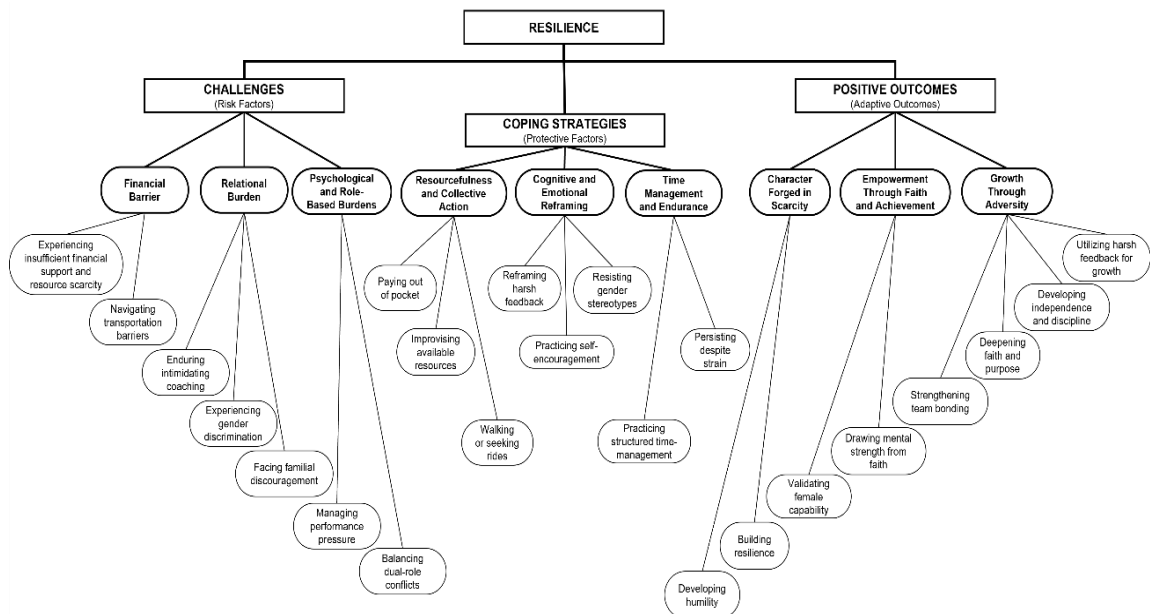
The Lady Wakandas faced challenges across three domains: financial barriers (insufficient support, resource scarcity, transportation constraints), relational burdens (intimidating coaching, gender discrimination, familial discouragement), and psychological and role-based burdens (performance pressure, dual-role conflicts). These reflect Norman Garmezy's (1991) risk factors and underscore the layered adversities encountered by rural female athletes prior to the *Palarong Pambansa*.

Coping strategies emerged across three domains: resourcefulness and collective action (out-of-pocket spending, material improvisation, transport seeking), cognitive and emotional reframing (reframing feedback, resisting stereotypes, self-encouragement), and time management and endurance (structured scheduling,

persistence under strain). These align with Norman Garmezy's (1991) protective factors, reflecting adaptive resourcefulness, cognitive resilience, and perseverance.

Adaptive outcomes manifested across three domains: character forged in scarcity (humility, resilience), empowerment through faith and achievement (validation of female capability, faith-based mental strength), and growth through adversity (team bonding, deepened purpose, independence, and growth from feedback). These outcomes align with Norman Garmezy's (1991) framework, indicating that adversity fosters transformation among rural female student-athletes.

3.3. Modified Paradigm



4. Discussion

In this section, I presented the findings of this research based on the themes generated from the results. I also presented the implications and future directions of this research.

4.1. Challenges and Barriers of Young Woman Experienced within the Palarong Pambansa

My findings align with dual career and rural sports literature by showing overlapping academic, athletic, and resource barriers, while extending this through “triple-role” conflicts involving intensive family responsibilities (De Maio et al., 2025; Du Grosriez et al., 2024) and by confirming that transportation, infrastructure, and isolation constrain participation yet enable coping such as walking long distances as social bonding (Müller et al., 2024; Pelletier et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2026). My findings also support faith as a legitimate source of mental toughness (Bakır, 2025).

However, my research findings diverge from literature on harmful coaching and gender inequality by showing athletes tendency to reframe harsh feedback and downplay discrimination (Jauvin et al., 2025; Bernache-Assollant et al., 2025; Parsons et al., 2025; Gemar et al., 2025; Vai et al., 2025; Grundy & Shackelford, 2025), underscoring the role of cultural context, protective factors, and meaning-making in resilience.

4.2. Coping Mechanisms of Young Women Athletes to Overcome Challenges

My research findings documented several coping strategies that verified the claims with sport psychology literature, as athletes' use of positive self-talk and cognitive reframing reflects evidence-based approaches such as Psychological Skills Training and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for enhancing well-being (Mao, 2025; Mansell et al., 2024), while their reliance on faith and structured time management supports findings on religious coping and dual career development (Keskin, 2025; Mao, 2025; Earle et al., 2025; Linnér et al., 2024; De Maio et al., 2025).

However, the my study's findings deviate from literature on controlling coaching and gender inequality by showing athletes reframing harsh feedback and downplaying discrimination (Jauvin et al., 2025; Kong et al., 2025; Lefever et al., 2025; Bernache-Assollant et al., 2025; Keskin, 2025; Popescu et al., 2024), suggesting that cultural context, relational dynamics, and agentic meaning-making shape coping and resilience.

4.3. Key Insights of Young Women Athletes as a Result of their Adaptive Outcomes

My research findings resonates with literature showing that resilience protects against burnout and supports positive adaptation through individual and environmental factors (Gupta, 2022), while faith strengthens mental toughness (Bakır, 2025), supportive relationships foster team resilience (Van Puyenbroeck et al., 2025), and sport participation promotes overall well-being and development (Bengtsson et al., 2025).

However, they differ from pieces of literature which indicated that controlling coaching harms performance and well-being and that compassionate coaching is more effective (Lefever et al., 2025; Backman, 2024), thereby extending Garmezy's (1991) resilience theory by highlighting culturally embedded, collective, and faith-driven protective processes.

4.4 Implications

Reflecting upon the the narratives of the young women athletes in a rural community, resilience in resource-limited contexts like Talaingod is a collective and spiritual practice, not merely individual. Coaches must go beyond technical training and should foster supportive relationships, teach cognitive reframing, and recognize faith as a coping resource. Schools must adopt flexible policies for student-athletes to accommodate student-athletes balancing academic, athletic, and domestic responsibilities, while policymakers should invest in rural sports infrastructure and transport support. Critically, while ignoring gendered stereotypes and reframing harsh feedback proved adaptive, these strategies should not substitute for systemic change. Practitioners must distinguish genuine resilience from accommodation to harm.

4.5. Future Directions

While my qualitative design captured lived experiences, it did not establish causality; I recommended longitudinal studies to test whether coping strategies predicted long-term outcomes. I also observed divergence from Western perspectives, prompting inquiry into how cultural values shaped athletes' perceptions. I identified key gaps regarding the role of faith and the long-term effects of ignoring gender stereotypes, which may reinforce structural inequality. I therefore recommended examining these boundaries and conducting replication studies across diverse marginalized contexts to strengthen the cultural grounding of resilience in sport.

Acknowledgement

My deepest appreciation is extended to Maribeth Q. Galindo, PhD, for her invaluable mentorship and expert guidance throughout the research process. Sincere thanks are also given to the panelists, headed by the panel chair, Dr. Arvin B. Gutang of Holy Cross of Davao College, for their insightful comments and constructive recommendations that significantly enhanced this work.

I likewise acknowledge the LYDO Talaingod and Sto. Niño National High School for the prompt approval and support in facilitating the conduct of this study, and to the young women athletes of Talaingod who continue to amaze me with their resilience and dedication to their craft.

A heartfelt gratitude is extended to family, friends, and classmates, especially to my beloved partner, whose steadfast support and belief served as a constant source of strength and motivation.

Above all, the researcher offers profound gratitude to Almighty God, whose divine guidance, strength, and providence made the completion of this study possible.

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