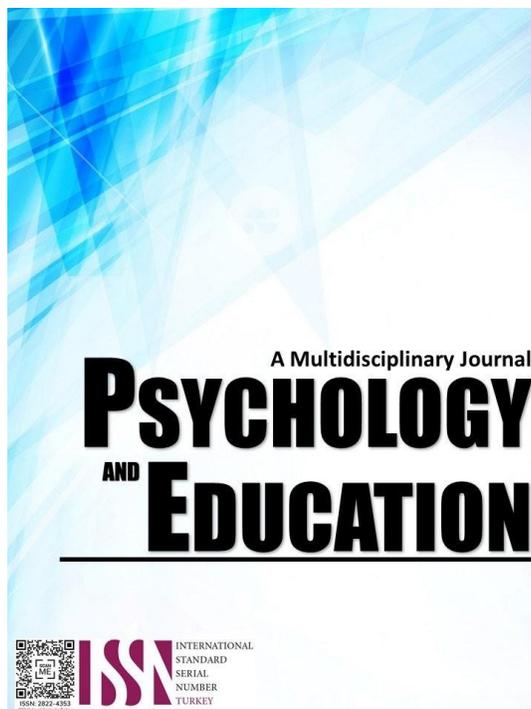


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“Sirengang Magdalena”: A Narrative Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Trans Women

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the experiences of *Sirengang Magdalena*, a trans woman who works in the sex industry and earns income by providing sexual services, by examining their lives before entering sex work, the challenges they face at work, the strategies they use to cope with these challenges, and their aspirations. The researchers used a qualitative–narrative research design to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. Using snowball purposive sampling, they conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with three (3) participants. The data were analyzed using Andrea Bingham’s inductive–deductive analysis method. The results indicated that prior to entering sex work, trans women sex workers had diverse life experiences, such as holding decent jobs, encountering financial difficulties, struggling to secure formal employment, and being influenced by peers to engage in sex work. The study also revealed that they faced several work-related challenges, including physical exhaustion, emotional attachment to clients, and exposure to workplace dangers. Furthermore, the researchers identified various coping strategies used by the participants, along with their aspirations for the future. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the challenges faced by *Sirengang Magdalena* reflect deeper structural issues rooted in stigma surrounding their identities and occupation, as well as limited employment opportunities. Their coping strategies and aspirations demonstrate not only their personal resilience and determination to navigate difficult circumstances but also the lack of accessible and adequate support systems that could address their emotional, social, and economic needs. These findings highlight the need to strengthen legal protections, expand inclusive employment pathways, and develop programs that support the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of trans women in sex work.

Keywords: *trans women, sex workers, reasons, challenges, coping, aspirations*

Introduction

“Sirengang Magdalena,” a local term for trans women sex workers, represents a population that acquires income through sexual services. According to Nuttbrock (2018), various factors influence trans women to enter the world of sex work. Some do so to earn an income or as an alternative to homelessness (Fitzgerald et al., 2015, as cited in Capous-Desyllas & Loy, 2020). In addition, sex work becomes a means of survival due to systemic discrimination and limited access to employment opportunities, as noted by Zoli et al. (2021). Given these conditions, sex work serves as a crucial avenue for sustaining themselves and securing a livelihood.

The lived experiences of *Sirengang Magdalena* also present various challenges. Many trans women sex workers suffer from discrimination and a lack of social acceptance (Sheikhmoonesi et al., 2023). They face barriers to accessing healthcare services, particularly those related to HIV prevention and care (Reback, 2015; Tagliamento, 2016). Furthermore, studies highlight that they often struggle with fluctuating self-perception and discomfort with their bodies (Mitchell, 2023). These challenges emphasize the need for greater societal understanding and acceptance to improve their quality of life.

Correspondingly, *Sirengang Magdalena* employs coping strategies to manage the challenges they encounter. Logie et al. (2017) note that trans women use coping mechanisms to reduce the negative impacts of various obstacles in life. Many rely on resilience as a key factor that helps them “develop endurance” and mitigate minority stress (Hoyos-Hernández et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, some engage in substance use as a way to cope with stress (Reisner et al., 2016). These coping strategies play an important role in empowering them to navigate and survive despite the pressures they face.

Furthermore, the motivations of *Sirengang Magdalena* shed light on their aspirations. Some trans women sex workers remain in the industry for extended periods (Naz-McLean et al., 2021). Others find the sex industry empowering, viewing it as a safer and more affirming space for expressing their gender identity or receiving appreciation (Capous-Desyllas & Loy, 2020; Tsang, 2021). These motivations highlight their aspirations to pursue a future where their identities are valued and respected.

Even though some *Sirengang Magdalena* have found ways to navigate society, their experiences differ widely depending on their environment. In the Philippines, many conceal their work from their families due to fear of judgment and social disapproval, often describing their work as entertainment or waitressing to preserve social acceptability (Parmanand, 2019). In Davao City, despite having 97 LGBTQ organizations with 8,331 members, LGBTQ individuals continue to encounter discrimination, especially concerning respect for their identities (Padillo, 2023). While numerous global studies explore the experiences of trans women, a noticeable gap remains in understanding the experiences of *Sirengang Magdalena* both nationally and locally. This gap motivates the researchers to explore their experiences more deeply to understand their struggles better.

This study focuses on the lives of *Sirengang Magdalena* in Panabo City, Davao del Norte, specifically examining their experiences as

sex workers, including their life before entering the sex industry, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they developed, and their aspirations. Although existing research has examined the lives of trans women sex workers, a critical gap persists in in-depth studies, particularly at the national and local levels, regarding their past and present experiences as well as their plans. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances and underscores the need for localized research.

The lack of localized knowledge hinders efforts to address the challenges they face, such as discrimination, social stigma, and the struggle to express themselves authentically due to fear of societal judgment. By capturing their unique narratives, this study aims to provide insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of *Sire nang Magdalena*. Such insights can foster greater empathy, help reduce social stigma, and educate others about the realities of their lives, thereby dispelling harmful stereotypes.

Moreover, the research process itself carries the potential to empower *Sire nang Magdalena* by giving them a voice in shaping public understanding and advocating for change. Through this study, their experiences are not only documented but also acknowledged, contributing to broader societal recognition and support for their rights and well-being.

Research Questions

This study explored the narratives of *Sire nang Magdalena*. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the central question:

1. What are the lived experiences of *Sire nang Magdalena*?

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, the researchers utilized a qualitative-narrative research design to explore an individual's lived experiences in depth. Tenny et al. (2022) emphasized that qualitative research designs are well-suited for exploring in-depth insights into individuals' experiences, behaviors, and perceptions, thereby delving into real-world issues. In addition, Benjamin et al. (2020) stated that the narrative approach focuses on the lives of individuals in terms of an overarching life story or personal narrative. It posits that people construct their self-concept and identity through these personal narratives. This method focuses on how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences by integrating them into a unified story.

To explore the experiences of *Sire nang Magdalena* in depth, the researchers adopted a biographical narrative inquiry, which centers on a person's life history. This approach was appropriate for understanding their experiences because it examines each participant's past experiences, present circumstances, and plans. The study aimed to recognize the experiences of *Sire nang Magdalena*, specifically their life before becoming sex workers, the challenges they encountered, their coping strategies, and their aspirations. Additionally, it sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, enabling the researchers to interpret the significance of these experiences and identify the diverse factors that influence their lives. This study involved gathering rich, in-depth information and personal perceptions through qualitative methods, including interviews, and presenting the findings from the participants' perspectives.

Participants

This study employed snowball purposive sampling for participant selection. Snowball purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that includes adding new units to a sample through referrals from existing units (Nikolopoulou, 2023b). This study had three (3) participants in total who are trans women sex workers. According to Renwick (2022), for qualitative research methods such as usability testing and interviews, starting with three participants and adding more as needed, based on the subject's complexity, is a suitable approach. The selected number of participants for this study enabled the researchers to gather sufficient information for in-depth understandings, explorations, and findings about *Sire nang Magdalena*'s experiences.

The inclusion criteria of this study were transgender women within the age range of 23 to 40 years old who have engaged in sex work for five years or more, are residents of Panabo, Davao del Norte, and treat sex work as one of their sources of income. Furthermore, the exclusion criteria for this study were individuals who do not identify themselves as trans women, those who are currently undergoing gender transition, have been sex workers for less than 5 years, and who are ages 22 and below, and 41 and above.

Instrument

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide served as the primary instrument for the study. The interview guide contained a total of fourteen (14) questions centered on the participants' experiences. To explore past experiences, four (4) questions focused on their life before entering sex work. To examine present experiences, four (4) questions aimed to gather essential information on the challenges encountered by the participants, and another three (3) questions sought to understand the diverse coping strategies they used to manage these challenges. Finally, to explore plans, three (3) questions delved into the participants' aspirations in life. A translator assisted in translating the questions into Cebuano to help participants effectively convey their thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, to ensure the validity of the interview guide, the researchers sought evaluation from three qualified professionals: a registered psychometrician, a registered psychologist, and a registered guidance counselor.

Procedure

Initially, the researchers obtained a letter of approval from the college dean and their thesis adviser to gather the necessary information for the study. Through online communication, specifically via Facebook Messenger, the researchers sent the necessary information via chat, conducting a preliminary assessment of the participants to gather their age and years of experience in sex work.

Then, the researchers drafted a semi-structured interview guide to gather data for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of trans women sex workers. After drafting the interview guide, the researchers sought validation from three research experts: a registered psychometrician, a registered psychologist, and a registered guidance counselor, to ensure that the research instrument could gather the necessary data for the study.

After the research experts completed the validation process, the researchers sought a translator to ensure that participants clearly understood the questions and could respond effectively. A pilot interview was then conducted in Panabo City, Davao del Norte, to determine whether the research instrument could effectively gather the necessary data from participants and to identify the most effective interviewing methods. The pilot interview included two participants. Moreover, the researchers applied all necessary processes observed during the pilot interview to the final research instrument.

The next step was administering the validated research instrument to the chosen participants. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the three (3) selected participants in Panabo City, Davao del Norte. Participants signed an informed consent form written in English, ensuring their voluntary participation and providing them with comprehensive information about the study. During the interview, the researchers initially asked structured questions in English, which were subsequently translated into Cebuano or presented in a mix of English and Cebuano if participants required assistance in understanding. Additionally, follow-up questions were asked in Cebuano, guided by participants' responses, to gain a deeper understanding of their narratives.

Lastly, the researchers used an inductive–deductive method by first identifying themes that emerged from the participants' narratives and then comparing these themes with existing literature and frameworks to interpret their experiences. As part of the ethical considerations, the researchers ensured confidentiality and anonymity after the interview, keeping the responses accessible only to the researchers to protect and respect participants' identities. The researchers stored the collected data in Google Drive, accessible only to them, to ensure its security. The responses were kept private to prevent any unauthorized dissemination or misuse. Upon completing the study, the data would be deleted one month later to ensure proper handling and disposal.

Data Analysis

The researchers used Andrea Bingham's inductive-deductive method to interpret the data accurately. The Inductive-Deductive Method is suitable for executing systematic and transparent qualitative data analysis. It can support analysis processes specific to particular methodologies, including narrative inquiry (Bingham, 2023). This method follows a five-phase qualitative analysis process: organizing the data, sorting the data, understanding the data, interpreting the data, and explaining the data.

Researchers used strategies to organize and manage data in the first phase. This phase involves 'attribute coding', which helps to sort the data into categories and develop an organizational schema. The first step in this phase is to create attribute codes that identify data type and source. This process of organizational attribute coding makes it easier for the researcher to keep track of the data and identify sources of evidence.

In the second phase, the researchers sorted the data. In this phase, the researchers developed topic codes aligned with the study's purpose and research questions and then read the data carefully to sort and organize it. These topic codes, or descriptive codes, reflected broad categories of interest that represent the researcher's purpose and the research questions aligned with that purpose. The codes helped maintain focus on the research questions, making it easier to identify pertinent data.

In phase three, the researchers analyzed and understood the data. The researchers conducted open coding, which involves reviewing the data in the topic codes applied during the first and second phases. This phase involves the process of constant comparison, where the researchers analyze the data and develop codes to describe it. Compares the newly analyzed data with the previously analyzed data to determine whether existing codes can describe the data or whether new codes should be created. This process helped to identify emerging topics or concepts, which can later form themes and findings.

Afterwards, the fourth phase requires pattern coding to identify and connect themes into the findings. The researchers began by reviewing the data coded in the third phase. This review aimed to identify patterns within and across data sources to develop themes. Researchers can present the themes using one word, a short phrase, or complete sentences.

Lastly, the fifth phase combines inductive and deductive analytic practices to support the discussion of findings. The researchers first generated data-driven themes and then systematically compared each theme with existing literature and the study's theoretical framework. This comparison involved examining whether the themes supported, contradicted, or expanded upon previous studies, as well as assessing how the participants' experiences aligned with key concepts from the existing theory. Through this process, the researchers identified points of convergence and divergence between the participants' narratives, prior research, and theoretical constructs. Overall, the researchers thoroughly analyzed the data using this method and remained unbiased to understand the



participants' subjective experiences better.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the study, the researchers ensured their dedication, honesty, and responsibility, safeguarding participants' information with confidentiality and anonymity while seeking informed consent. The anonymity of research participants is crucial for ethical research practices, as mandated by the Data Protection Act (Grinyer, 2009). During the research process, clear instructions were provided to ensure the safety and well-being of *Sirengang Magdalena* and to protect their identities.

In our contemporary ethical framework, research involving human subjects has to receive prior approval from the subjects themselves, typically obtained through informed consent (Manti & Licari, 2018). Before conducting the research, the participants received informed consent to understand the study's nature and objectives. They were provided with an explanation of the researcher's study purpose. Furthermore, *Sirengang Magdalena* was able to ask questions before the interviews commenced, and the researchers addressed any concerns they had. This ensured that they were free to choose whether they wished to participate in the study.

Confidentiality involved the researchers' responsibility to protect the dignity and autonomy of participants by using information obtained from or disclosed by them in a manner that respected their privacy and did not harm their interests or those of their communities (Bos, 2020).

In this study, the rights of *Sirengang Magdalena* to their data were protected and respected. The researchers complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, guaranteeing that all gathered data, including personal profiles and responses, remained confidential. Information will only be shared or distributed with the participant's consent. The confidentiality of the study was ensured at all times during the survey, data processing, and distribution of the findings.

Results

This section outlines the findings of the study based on the gathered data.

Table 1 presents the different themes that describe the experiences of trans women before becoming *Sirengang Magdalena*. In total, four (4) key themes were identified, reflecting the lives of trans women before entering the sex industry as *Sirengang Magdalena*.

Table 1. *Life before Becoming Sirengang Magdalena*

Codes	Themes
Salon Business Owner	Working in Decent Jobs
Educator	
Family Business	
Family and Relationship Struggles	Living a Difficult Life
Financial Struggles	
Failed to Finish Education	Difficulty in Securing a Job
Lack of Career Options	
Influenced by Friends	Considering Sex Work Due to Situational Factors
Motivated by Personal Loss	

Table 2 outlines several themes that capture the various challenges faced by trans women sex workers. Six (6) distinct themes emerged, highlighting the difficulties they encountered while working in the sex industry.

Table 2. *Challenging Experiences as a Sirengang Magdalena*

Codes	Themes
Mentally Disturbing Situations	Dealing with their Mental Health
Health Anxiety	
Pressure to Secure Clients	
Strain from Sex Work	Experiencing Physical Exhaustion
Sleep Deprivation	
Maintaining Professional Boundaries	Worker-Client Relationship
Developing Emotional Attachment	
Neighborhood Gossip	Public Criticism
Being Disparaged Publicly	
Client Expectations in Role Performance	Dealing with Clients
Inability to Choose Clients	
Coercion by Clients	
Potential Risks in the Workplace	Dangers Attributed to Work
Fear for Safety	
Fear of Getting Infected	

Table 3 highlights the different themes representing the various coping strategies employed by *Sirengang Magdalena*. A total of five (5) themes arise, illustrating how they manage and alleviate the challenges they encounter.

Table 3. *Coping Strategies of Sirenang Magdalena*

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Seeking Divine Guidance	Spiritual Coping
Relying on Faith	
Optimism	Practicing Self-Care
Uplifting Oneself	
Prioritize Physical Rest	
Emotional and Financial Support from Loved Ones	Support Systems
Appreciation from the Family	
Seeking Comfort in Family	
Firm Attitude	Psychological Fortitude
Ignoring Unwanted Opinions	
Embracing the Reality of Sex Work	Acceptance
Understanding the Situation	

Table 4 illustrates the various themes that reflect the different aspirations of *Sirenang Magdalena* over the years of their work. In total, three (3) themes represented the aspirations they hold for their roles as *Sirenang Magdalena* within the sex industry.

Table 4. *Aspirations of Sirenang Magdalena*

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
To Continue Sex Work to Achieve Goals	Remaining Active in Sex Work
External Validation	
Increased Self-Worth	
Give Entrepreneurial Opportunities	Venture into Business
Sustainable Income	
Learn to Save Money	Striving for Life Stability
Pursuing a Skill-Based Job	
Secured and Sustainable Lifestyle	

Discussion

This section provides a comprehensive discussion of the experiences of *Sirenang Magdalena*, focusing on key aspects such as their life before entering the sex industry, the challenges they encountered within the industry, the coping strategies they employed to manage these challenges, and their personal aspirations:

Life before Becoming Sirenang Magdalena

Before being involved in the sex industry, *Sirenang Magdalena* experienced a different life outside of sex work. The study has generated a total of four (4) themes based on the interviews with the participants that recounted their life experiences before becoming *Sirenang Magdalena*:

Working in Decent Jobs. *Sirenang Magdalena* all worked on decent jobs before entering the sex industry, demonstrating their participation in other fields prior to sex work. They were previously employed in various roles, such as being a salon owner, educator, and being involved in a family business. These jobs provided financial support for trans women before they entered the sex business. The jobs that trans women had served as proof that before they became *Sirenang Magdalena*, they were employed in different fields of work.

Moreover, Briana, a trans woman sex worker for more than five years, expressed how she used to own a salon before becoming a sex worker. She openly stated with regret and dismay that she had to close her business because of failure, and her boyfriend, a job that had provided her with the income needed to support both her personal needs and her family. As supported by the study of Hoang and Oosterhoff (2016), they noted that the jobs of trans women not only provided enough income to meet their own and their families' needs but also served as a means to demonstrate their worth and gain social acceptance, as many worked hard to contribute financially despite not always securing well-paid positions, allowing them to show their value to loved ones. The experiences trans women had with these jobs provided them with enough skills and knowledge for their future endeavors.

Working in decent jobs not only contributed to their income but also shaped their identity and resilience before they faced difficulties that led them into the sex industry. These jobs enabled them to earn enough income for themselves and their families. The jobs of trans women highlighted the diverse employment experiences of trans women before entering the sex industry. These roles, including positions in education, small businesses, and family enterprises, provided financial stability and opportunities for skill development.

Living a Difficult Life. Before entering sex work, *Sirenang Magdalena* experienced a difficult life. They faced numerous difficulties and hardships that affected their well-being and state of life. Trans women experienced situations such as having a family member fall sick and struggling when it came to earning money. This created a set of challenges that made it complicated for them to navigate life.

These situations compelled them to go through various significant struggles.

Moreover, Pia, a trans woman sex worker for more than five years residing in Panabo City, expressed with deep sorrow how she lived a hard life before becoming a trans woman sex worker. She shared that she experienced the problematic situation of having her father fall into a coma, and she described this situation as complicated and complex. A study by Kusila and Huwae (2023) stated that trans women go through difficult life experiences with significant influences from family, work, mindset, attitude, and personality in shaping their journey toward purpose and fulfillment. While another study by Magalhães et al. (2020b) noted that several life challenges impact the mental health of trans women significantly. The challenges faced by trans women can hurt their lives and overall well-being, which calls for a better understanding. This underscores the challenging situations trans women have faced, significantly shaping and influencing the course of their lives.

Difficult life circumstances experienced by trans women significantly impact the quality of life, influencing their emotional, social, and economic well-being. These challenges play a vital role in shaping how they perceive life, influencing their outlook, resilience, and future decisions. Despite coming from different backgrounds and living diverse lives, they all faced significant hardships that defined their journeys. The shared struggles of trans women highlight the challenges they encounter, which force them to navigate complex realities.

Difficulty in Securing a Job. Struggles in securing a job were one of the experiences of *Sirenang Magdalena* before being involved in the sex industry. These difficulties were caused by both unfinished academic pursuits and limited employment opportunities, making it almost impossible for *Sirenang Magdalena* to find an immediate job. Being employed in any formal job was also a struggle that *Sirenang Magdalena* had to go through. This shows that there are barriers that trans women face in securing any job, which contributes to their vulnerability in the labor market.

Moreover, Briana, a sex worker for over five years residing in Panabo City, shared that she felt she had no choice but to enter the sex industry due to the lack of other job opportunities. Alongside her friends, she made the difficult decision to settle for the only available option to earn a living and support herself financially. Leppel (2019) expressed that both trans women and trans men exhibit a high percentage of the population that is either employed or actively seeking employment; however, trans women experience a higher unemployment rate and are less likely to be employed or be part of the workforce compared to trans men. While Da Silva et al. (2020) stated that trans men are more likely to hold formal jobs than trans women, likely because their appearance after hormone use aligns more with their gender identity, making them less recognizable as trans and reducing discrimination. This emphasizes the barriers trans women face in securing any job, which contributes to their vulnerability in the labor market.

The struggles faced by *Sirenang Magdalena* in securing employment highlight the systemic barriers that trans women encounter in the labor market. Challenges such as unfinished academic pursuits and limited job opportunities severely restricted their ability to find stable, formal employment, forcing many into vulnerable positions. The struggles faced by trans women cause them to settle for the only available job that is within their grasp. This highlights the need for inclusive policies and support systems that address educational gaps, expand career opportunities, and reduce the stigma surrounding trans women in the workforce.

Considering Sex Work Due to Situational Factors. *Sirenang Magdalena* revealed that they were influenced by various factors that led them to consider entering sex work and ultimately becoming part of the sex industry. Among the most significant factors was their social circles, particularly their friends. Family also significantly influenced the decisions of *Sirenang Magdalena* to engage in sex work. For some, the loss of a family member can act as a powerful motivator, pushing them to commit to the sex industry fully. This shows how influential external influences are in the decision-making process of trans women.

Moreover, Blonde, a trans woman sex worker for over five years residing in Panabo City, expressed how her friends and situations regarding her family influenced her to enter the sex business. Her social circle supported her, and she had an idea of what being a sex worker was like. Sausa et al. (2007) emphasized that social networks, alongside cultural expectations, immigration challenges, and experiences of discrimination such as racism, sexism, and transphobia, collectively influenced trans women's decisions to enter sex work and shaped the risks they encountered within the industry. Fauk et al. (2021c) also highlighted that death within the family, feelings of obligation to support their families, combined with the hardships of family poverty, limited job prospects, and low educational attainment, often drive trans women toward sex work as a viable means of survival. This highlights how trans women all had influences that pushed them to pursue sex work.

A combination of influential situational factors shaped the decision of *Sirenang Magdalena* to engage in sex work. Social circles, particularly friends, played a pivotal role in providing insights and encouragement that guided their choices. Family influences, such as the loss of a loved one, also served as powerful motivators, pushing some to commit to the sex industry fully. These findings highlight the significant impact of external influences on the decision-making process of trans women, emphasizing the need to address the social and emotional factors that contribute to their life paths.

Challenging Experiences as a *Sirenang Magdalena*

The narrative of *Sirenang Magdalena* is one marked by numerous challenges inherent to their profession. Through a detailed analysis of their experiences, this study has identified six (6) themes that summarize the difficulties they face regularly. These themes are further

elaborated in the following paragraphs, providing a comprehensive overview of the complexities of their work, including the personal and social challenges that define their lived realities:

Dealing with their Mental Health. For *Sirenanng Magdalena*, the challenges posed by sex work were deeply impactful on their mental health. Various circumstances have surfaced, emphasizing the ongoing struggle *Sirenanng Magdalena* faces and the significant impact these challenges have on their mental health. Throughout the interviews, they recounted how the nature of the sex industry exposed them to situations that made them uncomfortable, leading to feelings of anxiety, pressure, and mental distress. They described how the constant demand to engage with various clients took a toll on their mental well-being as the nature of their work became overwhelming.

In connection, Pia, one of the participants, shared her experience that affected her mental health due to being in a disturbing situation, specifically dealing with a client's fetishes, such as allowing a married couple to watch them while having sex. Aggarwal et al. (2020) emphasized that, regardless of the factors leading many trans women into sex work, substantial evidence indicates that engaging in sex work poses significant physical and mental health risks for trans women. This situation highlights the emotional toll and psychological distress that arise from fulfilling clients' unconventional demands and demonstrates how the dynamics of sex work can erode self-esteem and personal boundaries, leaving workers feeling disempowered or exploited. The normalization of such unsettling encounters within their line of work perpetuates cycles of mental harm, as they are often unable to refuse clients due to this being a part of and a reality of sex work.

Additionally, Blonde experienced health anxiety while working as a sex worker. She explained that she was always worried whenever she got sick because it might be HIV, so she always got herself checked by a doctor and took tests that could assess if she was infected or not. This narrative aligns with the findings in the study of Fisher et al. (2021), which stated that depression and anxiety were the most frequently reported mental health concerns among transgender women involved in sex work. Blonde's experience illustrates how health-related fears significantly contribute to the psychological toll of sex work, with constant worry about contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) exacerbating existing mental health challenges. Accepting the reality of sex work means accepting the risk of infection, which further amplifies the anxiety *Sirenanng Magdalena* faces while dealing with their mental health.

As they reflected on the struggles of navigating this line of work, being in disturbing situations, experiencing health anxieties, and feeling the pressure to secure clients created an ongoing cycle of stress that profoundly impacted their mental well-being. Such experiences reveal a broader pattern of how the unique demands of sex work adversely affect the mental health of trans women. It became evident that the mental strain was not merely an occasional burden but a constant challenge they had to manage while engaging in the realities of sex work. These findings highlight the urgent need for advocacy efforts and mental health interventions specifically designed to address their experiences and provide targeted support.

Experiencing Physical Exhaustion. Sex work not only presented mental health challenges but also took a significant toll on *Sirenanng Magdalena's* physical well-being. Their bodies were central to their livelihood, and the constant demands placed on them often resulted in severe physical strain and sleep deprivation. Long working hours and the need to cater to diverse client preferences exacerbated the physical toll, leaving them with little time for rest or self-care. The repetitive nature of the work, combined with the mental and emotional exhaustion of managing complex interactions with clients, led to fatigue, which hindered their ability to recover and maintain their physical health.

This fatigue was closely tied to the demanding nature of their work, as Tocci (2024) emphasized, noting that the well-being of individuals in sex work is heavily influenced by both the physical demands placed upon them and the health of their clients. Being a self-described workaholic, Pia shared her experience of needing to ejaculate 10 times in one day, and her struggle to fulfill clients' requests, such as peeing on them when she physically could not, resulted in significant discomfort. She described feeling intense pain that began at her knees and traveled up to her brain, illustrating how the physical demands of sex work can cause pain. This highlights the lack of boundaries in the work environment, where sex workers are often pushed to their physical limits, further intensifying the toll on their bodies and exacerbating feelings of exhaustion and distress. This is the reality that *Sirenanng Magdalena* faces when their needs and well-being are disregarded in favor of meeting client expectations.

Similarly, Blonde explained her eagerness to make money, and the availability of numerous clients led her to sacrifice essential rest. This decision to push through fatigue ultimately impacted her physical well-being, manifesting as vertigo, which she described as a direct result of insufficient sleep and high physical exertion. Ramos et al. (2022) found that sex workers experience more fatigue, worse physical functioning, and sleep disorders. *Sirenanng Magdalena* often becomes sleep-deprived at work, which can further lead to being physically exhausted. The lack of sleep not only exacerbates physical exhaustion but also compromises cognitive functions and overall health, creating a vicious cycle where the body's physical limits are tested daily. This cumulative sleep deprivation compounds the stress and exhaustion already associated with sex work, making it even more challenging for *Sirenanng Magdalena* to maintain a healthy balance between work and well-being.

The experiences of *Sirenanng Magdalena* were a testament to this reality, as they endured continuous strain from sleepless nights and long working hours to meet financial needs. This underscores the harsh realities of sex work, where being hardworking in this field often leads to the neglect of basic needs like sleep and self-care. The constant push to take on more clients, often at the expense of health and well-being, is standard for *Sirenanng Magdalena*, which prioritizes financial gain over their physical health. Overall, it

acknowledges that this physical exhaustion not only affected their ability to perform but also increased the health risks they faced.

Worker-Client Relationship. Sex work, by its very nature, involves close physical contact, which presents a challenge for *Sirenang Magdalena* in maintaining professional boundaries with clients. One of the key struggles they face is the development of emotional attachment during their work. Despite the expectations within the sex industry, which discourage any romantic or sympathetic feelings toward clients, *Sirenang Magdalena* found it hard to separate their emotions from the physical connections they formed. This emotional involvement not only complicates their professional role but also intensifies the emotional strain they experience in their work.

As mentioned by Pia, a trans woman sex worker with over five years of experience, she reflected on her journey; she shared that initially, she viewed sex work purely as a financial means. However, over time, she began to develop sympathy for her clients, which complicated her understanding of the work. Abel (2011) noted that sex workers often form emotional attachments to their clients, even though they recognize the rarity of reciprocation. Similarly, Dutton (2014) argued that without the protection of emotional labor, prostitutes could begin to care too much for specific clients, thus risking emotional attachment that is not allowed in their business dealings. Most *Sirenang Magdalena* feel emotional involvement because they are still human beings who may feel attracted or caring toward their clients, even though they are already aware of the consequences and the taboo of being emotionally attached in the sex industry. This illustrates the complexity of the emotional labor in sex work, as how emotional involvement challenges their professionalism and the nature of being a human to feel emotions towards contact with others.

Sirenang Magdalena recognized that "work is work," yet they admitted it remains a challenge to avoid emotional attachment. The nature of the work often blurs the line between personal and professional interactions. This ongoing struggle highlights the emotional complexities that come with their role as they strive to navigate both the demands of their profession and their emotional boundaries. With that, it makes *Sirenang Magdalena* necessary to guard themselves against becoming emotionally invested.

Public Criticism. One of the significant challenges *Sirenang Magdalena* faces in the sex industry is criticism from the broader community. Their work, which is often viewed as outside the societal norm, exacerbates the gossip directed toward them and leads to them being disparaged publicly. The fact that sex work is stigmatized amplifies the discrimination they face as trans women. This combination of struggles creates a harsh and challenging environment for them to navigate.

Briana shared an experience where she was labeled a prostitute and subject to gossip in her neighborhood, which deeply affected her, especially as the perceptions of her neighbors shifted. This situation exemplifies how *Sirenang Magdalena*, like many trans women in the sex industry, is vulnerable to societal judgment and the stigmatization that comes with their work. According to Milner et al. (2019), trans women involved in sex work report lower levels of social support and quality of life, coupled with heightened stigma, discrimination, and greater exposure to abuse and violence compared to those not involved in sex work. The societal rejection they face is not just verbal but also relational, as their social connections often deteriorate or become strained due to the negative stereotypes associated with sex work. The criminalization of sex work makes it even more challenging for them to maintain a sense of community and well-being.

Furthermore, Pia shared that there are people who openly claim that she will only end up being a sex worker, reinforcing the negative perceptions surrounding her choice of work. Similarly, a study by Jose (2016) highlights that trans women sex workers often face increasing levels of societal stigma, which contribute to their gradual alienation from their surroundings. Pia's experiences underscore how society devalues and diminishes the worth of individuals in the sex industry, particularly trans women, simply because of the stigmatized nature of their work. This pervasive belief that sex work limits a person's potential leads to further marginalization, making it difficult for *Sirenang Magdalena* to escape the cycle of societal judgment and to be seen for their full humanity beyond their occupation.

As a result, *Sirenang Magdalena* endures significant judgment and marginalization from the community solely because of their chosen career path. Being a trans woman sex worker is particularly challenging in a society that is rife with judgment, where their worth is often diminished due to their involvement in a profession considered outside the norm. This highlights the intersectional challenges they face, being marginalized not only for their gender identity but also for their involvement in sex work. The combined stigma from both aspects of their identity intensifies the criticisms they encounter in their daily lives.

Dealing with Clients. For *Sirenang Magdalena*, dealing with and entertaining clients presents significant challenges in their work. They frequently face difficulties when feeling anxious about the roles they are expected to perform based on client requests, their inability to choose clients, and experiencing coercion from clients. These factors create considerable stress, making it challenging to navigate their interactions. With that, the added pressure negatively impacts the overall well-being of *Sirenang Magdalena*.

Pia shared her concerns about meeting her clients' demands, particularly when they request actions such as slapping or choking. She worries about whether she can meet these expectations and provide satisfaction. This narrative illustrates how *Sirenang Magdalena* often finds themselves uncertain about whether they can fulfill their clients' desires and give pleasure from these interactions. Fernandez (2024) notes that some trans women sex workers are forced to engage in activities beyond their comfort zone, such as being subjected to surprise genital exposure or allowing clients to call them derogatory names as part of the clients' fetishes. Despite feeling discomfort, they often perform these actions to attract and satisfy clients, further highlighting the coercive nature of client interactions. These experiences not only affect their emotional well-being but also highlight the ongoing struggle for control in a profession where the

power dynamics heavily favor the client.

Additionally, according to Naz-McLean et al. (2021), transgender women sex workers often attempt to gather information about potential clients to minimize risks. However, when such information is unavailable, they are forced to take risks. Fernandez (2024) also points out that trans women sex workers often face threats from clients or aggressive individuals. Briana shared her experience of feeling unsafe whenever a client threatened to report her to the police, coercing her into returning the money the client had paid. As clients feel a sense of dominance and power during these interactions due to their financial payment, *Sirenang Magdalena* often has little choice but to comply with their demands, especially when threatened, as their safety is at risk. This situation underscores the power imbalances that *Sirenang Magdalena* faces, as they are forced to navigate both the negative attitudes and unsettling demands of clients, often without having the ability to choose or control whom they work with.

In conclusion, *Sirenang Magdalena* faces significant challenges in interacting with clients, particularly when clients exhibit negative attitudes or threaten them. The inability to choose clients undermines their autonomy, making it difficult to establish and maintain healthy professional boundaries. Additionally, the constant pressure to meet client demands can heighten feelings of anxiety, diminishing both job satisfaction and personal safety. The power imbalance created by clients' excessive control over interactions contributes to the overall difficulties *Sirenang Magdalena* encounters, severely impacting their well-being.

Dangers Attributed to Sex Work. Working in the sex industry has constantly exposed *Sirenang Magdalena* to various dangers, and these risks weigh heavily on their mind. They spoke about the fear they carry with them, knowing that their line of work comes with significant personal and physical risks, emphasizing the anxiety that comes with each encounter. The potential risks in the workplace, fear for safety, and fear of getting infected are some challenges attributed to sex work that *Sirenang Magdalena* had to face. The environment they work in often exacerbates this danger, making them more vulnerable to harm. This ongoing exposure to danger underscores the constant worries they endure in their line of work.

As Briana mentioned, sex work is inherently risky, especially when meeting new clients, as they may pose a threat to her safety, even to the point of life-threatening harm. This narrative depicts the constant sense of insecurity and the risk-taking nature of the profession that *Sirenang Magdalena* must endure. Lyons et al. (2017) suggest that this vulnerability, particularly for transgender women, is tied to the workplace conditions surrounding sex work. Whether it is the deceptive removal of condoms, being forced into unprotected intercourse, or enduring uncomfortable sexual practices, these risks are an unfortunate reality for many in the industry (Bungay & Guță, 2018). Transgender women sex workers are at an elevated risk of facing various life-threatening situations, underscoring the dangerous and often hostile environment that is an inescapable aspect of this profession. It is a troubling reality that the sex industry has normalized these risks, often leaving *Sirenang Magdalena* vulnerable to harm without adequate protection.

For *Sirenang Magdalena*, every interaction with clients was fraught with these dangers, compelling them to evaluate the risks involved continuously. As they recounted their experiences, it became evident that each encounter required them to confront their fear, aware of the potential for unpredictable outcomes. These dangers are an unavoidable aspect of their work, leaving them in a constant state of vigilance. Despite this, they persist in navigating the complexities of their profession.

Coping Strategies of Sirenang Magdalena

Throughout their careers in the sex industry, the women of *Sirenang Magdalena* developed a variety of coping strategies to navigate the unique challenges they faced. These strategies were vital in managing the emotional, psychological, and social struggles that often accompanied their work. Through in-depth conversations with the participants, the researchers identified five (5) themes, each representing a different way the trans women sex workers coped with the pressures of their profession:

Spiritual Coping. The work of *Sirenang Magdalena* often brings immense stress, physical exhaustion, and emotional strain, compelling them to seek solace in a spiritual connection with God. This reliance on divine guidance provides a profound sense of comfort, helping them cope with the pressures of their work and offering a pathway to resilience. For the participants, spirituality becomes a haven, allowing them to process their struggles while fostering hope. This theme highlights the transformative role of faith in mitigating the emotional toll of their circumstances and fortifying their resolve. By anchoring their lives in spiritual practices, they are able to face challenges with a renewed sense of strength and purpose.

The participants' narratives underscore the pivotal role of prayer and faith in their coping strategies. Pia shared how beginning her day with prayer keeps her centered, enabling her to approach stressful situations with a calmer disposition. She reflected that her prayers provided her with the ability to "relax herself" in moments of intense pressure. Similarly, Briana expressed that faith and a positive mindset—what she referred to as the "law of attraction"—enhanced her resilience, helping her attract blessings even during trying times. These personal accounts align with the findings of Levine (2008) and Rijal and El-Rumi (2019), who observed that spirituality and religious practices are crucial tools for managing mental health and overcoming societal marginalization, particularly in vulnerable communities like sex workers. Such spiritual practices act as both psychological shields and sources of empowerment for the participants, guiding them through their most difficult moments.

For the *Sirenang Magdalena*, their spiritual connection with God transcends mere religious observance. It is a basis of their emotional and mental well-being. This connection allows them to navigate their lived realities with hope and optimism, bolstering their ability to

persevere despite the adversity they face. It also fosters a sense of control, as their faith reassures them that they can influence their lives positively through divine intervention and personal effort. Through their spiritual connection with God, the *Sirenanng Magdalena* finds a source of unyielding strength, enabling them to withstand the demands of their work and continue forward with resilience.

Practicing Self-Care. *Sirenanng Magdalena* demonstrates a profound sense of agency and resilience through their dedication to self-care, which emerges as a crucial tool for coping with the complexities and uncertainties of their profession. Their personal narratives reveal how cultivating optimism and engaging in self-care practices help them navigate the emotional and physical demands of sex work. Briana's unwavering belief in her ability to attract clients reflects the power of a positive outlook, which fuels her confidence and hope for future opportunities. This mindset not only enhances their sense of self-worth but also acts as a protective factor, enabling them to approach challenges with a proactive and empowered attitude. As such, self-care practices serve as a core in maintaining their well-being and fortifying their ability to confront adversity.

The respondents articulated various practices that reflect their self-care strategies. Briana, for instance, highlighted the power of optimism, expressing a firm belief in her ability to attract clients and maintain her livelihood. Her reliance on positive thinking, which aligns with Garrosa and Moreno-Jiménez's (2012) findings on the benefits of optimism, enables her to perceive challenges as manageable and opportunities as attainable. Pia, on the other hand, described how rejecting societal stereotypes about submission allowed her to redefine her role and assert control over her circumstances, reinforcing her confidence. Meanwhile, Blonde underscored the importance of physical rest, stating that prioritizing sleep and taking simple walks served as her primary methods for coping with stress. These individualized approaches to self-care resonate with broader research, such as Winiker et al. (2022), which emphasizes the adaptive behaviors and resilience commonly observed among transgender women. Their ability to integrate self-care into their daily routines illustrates the significance of maintaining balance in an often demanding and stigmatized profession.

For the *Sirenanng Magdalena*, self-care is not merely a response to the challenges they encounter but a deliberate act of empowerment. Their narratives illustrate how maintaining optimism, uplifting oneself, and prioritizing rest become essential tools for enduring the hardships of their work. These practices allow them to preserve their mental and physical health while fostering a sense of hope for the future. In doing so, they demonstrate remarkable strength and determination, serving as a testament to the transformative power of self-care in fostering resilience and well-being.

Support Systems. For the *Sirenanng Magdalena*, the judgment and stigma often associated with sex work are softened by the unwavering support they receive from their loved ones. These support systems, comprising friends, partners, and family members, play a pivotal role in their ability to cope with the challenges of their profession. Despite societal criticism, the *Sirenanng Magdalena* draws strength and stability from these relationships, which act as emotional anchors and sources of encouragement. This reliance on their loved ones underscores the importance of community in fostering resilience, offering them a safe space to navigate the complexities of their lives. Support systems not only help them persevere but also validate their experiences and choices in a world that often marginalizes their identities.

Briana shared how her best friends and partners provide her with both financial stability and emotional encouragement, helping her manage the stress and unpredictability of sex work. This experience reflects findings by Budge et al. (2017), who observed that trans women frequently depend on the support of others as a vital coping mechanism throughout their identity journey. Pia, on the other hand, finds strength in the gratitude expressed by her nieces and nephews and the appreciation of her family for the work she does. This familial validation transforms her difficult experiences into positive motivations, encouraging her to keep moving forward. Blonde emphasized the sense of safety and comfort she feels whenever she is with her family, describing her home as a sanctuary where she can experience peace and security. Such narratives are consistent with Yang et al. (2016), who highlight that reducing stigma and strengthening social support are crucial for enhancing the mental health of trans women. The experiences of *Sirenanng Magdalena* reinforce the idea that social support is a vital foundation for resilience, enabling them to thrive despite the challenges they encounter in their professional and personal journeys.

Ultimately, the strong support systems surrounding *Sirenanng Magdalena* form the foundation of their resilience, enabling them to navigate both the emotional and physical demands of their work. The encouragement and validation they receive from their loved ones affirm their choices, reinforcing their ability to withstand societal judgment and stigma. Through these relationships, they find not only comfort and stability but also the courage to continue forging their paths with hope and determination. Their stories demonstrate the transformative power of supportive communities in fostering resilience and well-being, especially for marginalized groups facing significant challenges.

Psychological Fortitude. Trans women sex workers exhibit extraordinary psychological fortitude as they navigate the demanding nature of their work and the societal scrutiny they face. Their ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity is a testament to their mental strength and determination. This fortitude is characterized by their ability to block out negative judgments, focusing instead on their self-worth and personal goals. For Pia, this resilience stems from a deep understanding of her clients' needs and the realities of her work, which has allowed her to develop a strong mental framework that supports her confidence and perseverance. VerBurg (2024) emphasizes that psychological fortitude is the capacity to endure setbacks with adaptability, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than defeat. Through their fortitude, *Sirenanng Magdalena* exemplifies how trans women sex workers can thrive despite the inherent challenges of their profession.

Pia's narrative reflects a profound understanding of the emotional and psychological demands of her profession. She shared how her work has not only deepened her comprehension of clients' desires but also strengthened her personal resilience. This awareness has enabled her to accept the realities of her situation and approach challenges with greater confidence. Pia's pride in her psychological fortitude highlights how cultivating a firm attitude allows her to overcome difficulties and maintain a sense of self-worth. Blonde, similarly, exemplifies this strength by ignoring unsolicited public comments, reinforcing her self-esteem, and maintaining focus on her personal goals. This aligns with the findings of Ganju and Saggurti (2017), who highlighted how transgender sex workers in India use similar coping strategies to deal with the stigma and violence they face. For *Sire nang Magdalena*, ignoring unwanted public opinions acts as a powerful defense mechanism, enabling them to preserve their emotional well-being and stay resilient in a challenging environment.

In conclusion, psychological fortitude serves as a foundation of resilience for *Sire nang Magdalena*, enabling them to endure the emotional and social challenges of their work. Through a combination of understanding, adaptability, and the ability to block out negativity, they develop a sense of inner strength that allows them to navigate their profession with confidence. The experiences shared by Pia and Blonde emphasized the importance of psychological fortitude in building resilience, underscoring how these empower trans women sex workers to overcome adversity. As shown by their stories, psychological fortitude is not merely about enduring hardship, but about thriving in the face of it, using each challenge as a catalyst for growth and personal development.

Acceptance. The ability to accept their roles within the sex industry is a crucial coping mechanism for the *Sire nang Magdalena*, enabling them to navigate the complexities of their work with a sense of clarity and purpose. This acceptance involves recognizing the dynamics of their profession and embracing their position within it, without falling into self-judgment or guilt. Pia's acknowledgment of her role as a secondary choice reflects a deep awareness of the realities of sex work and a mature acceptance of the complexities of her situation. According to Alford (2021), acceptance involves acknowledging a situation in its entirety, including its challenges, without being hindered by negative emotions or self-blame. This perspective not only enhances their emotional resilience but also allows them to find empowerment within the work they do.

Pia's acceptance of her role as a secondary choice in the context of sex work highlights the importance of self-awareness in overcoming the stigma associated with their profession. Her understanding of the dynamics at play in sex work helps her embrace her role without feeling ashamed. Blonde echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need to accept that it is impossible to please everyone. This acknowledgment of the limitations and expectations placed upon them allows the *Sire nang Magdalena* to cultivate a sense of peace within themselves. Furthermore, the insights from Arístegui et al. (2017) highlight the significance of social support and legal legitimacy for marginalized groups, such as transgender women, in fostering acceptance and resilience. By embracing their situation with understanding and self-compassion, the *Sire nang Magdalena* transforms what could be sources of distress into affirmations of their worth and identity.

Acceptance plays a vital role in the resilience of the *Sire nang Magdalena*, helping them navigate the challenges of their profession with confidence and clarity. By fully understanding and embracing their roles, they are able to shift away from societal judgment and self-doubt, instead finding strength in their own sense of purpose. This process of self-acceptance, coupled with the support of their communities, enables them to redefine their experiences and reinforce their identity. Through their narratives, *Sire nang Magdalena* demonstrate that acceptance is not a form of resignation but a powerful tool for resilience, allowing them to thrive in the face of adversity.

Aspirations of Sire nang Magdalena

Over the years of working in the sex industry, *Sire nang Magdalena* has undergone various experiences that have given them valuable aspirations. From the gathered data, the following three (3) themes for the aspirations were identified among *Sire nang Magdalena*:

Remaining Active in Sex Work. *Sire nang Magdalena* see themselves remaining active in sex work in the sex industry after a few years. Remaining in sex work is influenced by personal choice, financial need, and external validation. Some stay for the autonomy or financial benefits, while others continue due to the validation they receive from clients or society. For many, self-esteem is tied to the independence and control that the work provides.

Moreover, Blonde's decision to continue sex work is influenced by external validation, particularly compliments on her appearance from clients. Despite being able to stop, she feels motivated to keep working whenever she receives affirmations of beauty, which boost her confidence and sense of worth. This validation reinforces her commitment to the work, highlighting the impact of external feedback on her continued involvement in sex work. As supported by the study of Capous-Desyllas and Loy (2020), note that trans women often stay in sex work because it offers more acceptance and validation than other environments. For *Sire nang Magdalena*, the external validation they receive, primarily through compliments about their beauty and self-empowerment, provides them with renewed strength. This sense of appreciation and stability, often missing in traditional jobs or social circles, makes sex work a more appealing long-term choice for them. Another study by Benoit et al. (2017) found that the relationship between sex work and self-esteem is complex, with participants highlighting both positive and negative impacts on their self-worth. Both positive and negative effects shape the relationship between sex work and self-esteem. Participants' self-worth was influenced by factors like their social background, work location, and personal life experiences, highlighting that self-esteem is complex and multifaceted in the context of sex work.

Sire nang Magdalena's decision to remain active in sex work is influenced by the challenges they face in finding stable, traditional employment. They encounter difficulties in securing regular jobs, which may offer lower pay, less flexibility, or limited growth opportunities. In contrast, sex work provides better financial prospects, with the potential to earn more money in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, in sex work, they may feel a greater sense of appreciation, either from clients or the autonomy the job offers. This appreciation, combined with the financial rewards and the perceived stability that sex work provides, especially compared to the uncertainty of other job markets, encourages them to stay in the industry despite the difficulties.

Venture into Business. Trans women sex workers express a desire for business ownership as a means of financial independence, following their career dreams, and self-affirmation. *Sire nang Magdalena*'s decision to venture into business reflects a desire for long-term financial stability and independence beyond sex work. Given the challenges of securing regular employment, they may look to use the skills, knowledge, or capital gained from sex work to explore entrepreneurial opportunities.

Moreover, Pia states that she already started a piggery and now she wants to expand it. Fletcher et al. (2024) state that being an LGBT entrepreneur is both possible and fulfilling, empowering individuals to embrace their identity while following their business goals and contributing positively to society. This notion also resonates with trans women sex workers, who envision new career paths that provide personal rewards and the opportunity to pursue their aspirations. Additionally, Patil (2024) states that the transgender community is empowered through activities that foster creativity, work motivation, and public confidence, enabling them to become successful entrepreneurs. By challenging stereotypes, they are redefining their roles in society and breaking the misconception that they are not involved in entrepreneurial ventures. As a result, they have created a platform for economic success, and their opportunities for advancement have notably increased. The transgender community is gaining empowerment through entrepreneurship, driven by creativity, motivation, and public confidence. By challenging stereotypes, they are redefining their societal roles and establishing themselves as a force for economic success with improved opportunities for advancement.

Trans women sex workers often aspire to own businesses as a path to financial independence, pursuing their career goals, and affirming their self-worth. *Sire nang Magdalena*'s decision to explore entrepreneurship highlights a desire for lasting financial stability and autonomy beyond sex work. Faced with challenges in finding stable employment, they aim to leverage the skills, knowledge, or resources acquired throughout their life in order to explore business opportunities for themselves and for others.

Striving for Life Stability. Most trans women sex workers aspire to achieve a stable and secure life, often viewing their current work as a temporary means to reach that goal. For *Sire nang Magdalena*, this aspiration is reflected in their efforts to save money and pursue skill-based jobs that can provide long-term stability. This forward-thinking approach highlights their desire to transition into a future where they no longer rely on sex work. It also underscores their determination to build a life of financial independence and security.

Blonde echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of saving as one of the most valuable lessons she has learned. She reflected on how quickly time passes and how vital it is to prioritize savings, as "easy money tends to be spent just as easily." This underscores a common recognition among sex workers of the fleeting nature of financial gains in their line of work, coupled with the urgency to prepare for the future. As Fernandez (2024) notes, digital platforms have provided a temporary sense of empowerment for trans women sex workers, offering them opportunities to be authentic, expand their social networks, and achieve a degree of financial stability. These platforms, while not a permanent solution, serve as a stepping stone, giving them the chance to work toward their aspirations of securing ideal jobs and transitioning into a more secure, sustainable lifestyle. Similarly, Rice et al. (2021) highlight that trans women often engage in activities that allow them to see themselves as progressing and working toward stability. For *Sire nang Magdalena*, saving money and aspiring for skill-based employment is not just a strategy for survival but also a means of reclaiming agency and envisioning a life of dignity and security.

Overall, this reflects the broader ambition of trans women sex workers to save, plan, and work toward a future beyond their current circumstances. *Sire nang Magdalena* envisions a path of financial saving, skill development, and sustainable living as steps toward achieving stability. This forward-looking perspective demonstrates their resilience and determination to create a more secure and fulfilling life. Their aspirations embody a desire to move beyond the challenges of their current work and build a stable future.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of *Sire nang Magdalena* in Panabo City, focusing on their lives before entering sex work, the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed, and their aspirations for the future. The findings reveal that while each *Sire nang Magdalena* had a distinct life trajectory prior to entering the sex industry, many experienced overlapping structural barriers, including limited educational attainment, financial instability, and scarce employment opportunities, that constrained their options and ultimately pushed them toward sex work. These narratives highlight how systemic inequities shape life decisions long before involvement in the sex industry begins.

The study also found that *Sire nang Magdalena* faces persistent emotional, psychological, and social challenges within their work environments. These include discrimination, public ridicule, safety risks, and ongoing fears during client interactions, all of which negatively affect their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. These experiences align with Goffman's (1963) Social Stigma Theory, which explains how individuals who deviate from normative expectations, including trans women and sex workers, are

subjected to societal stigma that undermines their sense of worth. Their accounts demonstrate how stigma manifests in daily life and become a powerful force shaping their identities and social interactions.

In response to these stressors, *Sirenang Magdalena* relies on a variety of coping strategies, including self-care practices, spiritual grounding, and strong support systems that help preserve their psychological well-being. These strategies reflect both conscious and unconscious efforts to manage stigma through impression management, resilience, and selective social belonging. Their narratives strongly resonate with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2015). Autonomy is reflected in their capacity to make personal decisions about their livelihood; competence is demonstrated in their ability to navigate and thrive despite occupational and gender-related barriers; and relatedness emerges through their reliance on supportive networks that reinforce emotional resilience. These psychological needs help them maintain dignity and a sense of control amid systemic marginalization.

Finally, the study uncovered meaningful aspirations among *Sirenang Magdalena*. Despite the hardships they face, many hold goals that reflect personal growth, community contribution, and a desire for social acceptance. Their aspirations reveal a profound sense of purpose, whether in helping acquaintances, building community connections, or striving to improve their future circumstances. These aspirations demonstrate how marginalized individuals can transform their lived struggles into motivation for empowerment.

Overall, this study deepens the psychological understanding of trans women sex workers by highlighting the interplay between stigma, resilience, and self-determination. It underscores the critical role of supportive relationships, culturally competent mental health resources, and community-based structures in fostering well-being. Most importantly, the findings affirm that the voices of *Sirenang Magdalena* are central in shaping more inclusive and empathetic community responses.

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