

Living Without Work: A Phenomenological Study of the Causes, Socioeconomic Effects, and Coping Mechanisms of Unemployed and Informal Workers of a Local Community

Regine P. Comitan¹ , Mariel M. Villamor¹ , Rhobe Allesandrien P. Galler¹ , Louise A. Lambo¹ ,
Rodel Jean D. Sarino¹ , Jose Benito C. Ronolo^{1*} , Ahmad Fahmi Ramli² 

¹Community Development Department, College of Arts and Sciences, Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines;

²Faculty of General Studies and Advanced Education, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia

*josebenitoronolo@buksu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

The study sought to uncover the lived experiences of unemployed and informal workers in Barangay Capitan Bayong, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Philippines characterized by limited employment opportunities and livelihoods that depend on the seasons. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach; 15 unemployed residents were purposefully selected, and in-depth interviews were conducted with them. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used for analyzing data. Results indicated that factors affecting unemployment are complex and mutually reinforcing, including low education, skills mismatches, seasonal employment, job-seeking limitations due to financial difficulties, and limitations due to health status. Participants described that unemployment is not only about not earning a living, but also negatively impacting food security, children's education, emotional health, family relations, and social involvement. In addition to the difficulties associated with unemployment, there were observations of social stigma, social exclusion, a loss of social trust, and household difficulties due to tensions. Even with these challenges, participants successfully cultivated alternative informal livelihoods, depended on family and community assistance, and made use of psychological and spiritual coping mechanisms. They learned to cope with economic adversity with the help of these adaptive reactions, keeping hope and dignity alive. This study indicates that rural unemployment is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural constraints, social conditions, and individual circumstances. Addressing this requires context-specific, embedded activities to build skills, create livelihood opportunities, strengthen available support systems, and foster inclusive community activities. These can improve employability, decrease vulnerability, and boost community resilience among jobless residents.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 05 May 2026
Revised 17 September 2026
Accepted 01 October 2026

KEYWORDS

Rural unemployment, socioeconomic impacts, lived experiences, coping mechanisms, qualitative phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment continues to be a major social and economic problem that impacts people, families, and communities, including poverty, social exclusion, psychological distress, and decreased quality of life (Giuntoli et al., 2015). Unemployment and underemployment, especially in rural areas in the Philippines, are associated with poor job opportunities, skills mismatches, limited educational attainment, and reliance on agriculture and seasonal jobs (International Labor Organization [ILO] 2023; Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA] 2023). Furthermore, there are many people who, despite being employed, are at risk as they are involved in informal employment in irregular, low-paid and insecure work such as seasonal work, subsistence agriculture, and small-scale livelihood activities. The ILO (2018) highlighted that informal workers and their households are

more vulnerable to economic shocks due to a lack of social protection, unstable incomes, and limited access to decent work opportunities in the informal sector. Such conditions lead to continued job insecurity and perpetuate poverty in rural areas.

Although unemployment has been widely studied, existing research has primarily focused on its economic and labor market dimensions at the national and policy levels. International studies have shown that unemployment affects not only income but also psychological well-being, social participation, identity, and resilience (Jahoda, 1982; Warr, 1987; Autor, 2019). In the Philippine context, reports by the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), the ILO (2023), and the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028 have documented persistent

unemployment and underemployment, particularly among rural workers and those engaged in agriculture, emphasizing structural issues such as limited employment opportunities, skills mismatches, and seasonal work.

However, these studies largely rely on quantitative labor market statistics and provide a limited understanding of how unemployment is experienced by individuals in their everyday lives. Consequently, there remains a paucity of qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of unemployed individuals in rural communities in Mindanao, where employment challenges are shaped by unique socioeconomic and geographic conditions. This study addresses this gap by examining how unemployed individuals in rural Mindanao experience, interpret, and cope with unemployment, thereby contributing context-specific evidence that complements existing labor market research and informs more responsive community development and employment policies.

To address this, the present study aimed to gain insight into the lived experiences of unemployed residents in Barangay Capitan Bayong, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon, Philippines. It specifically explored in depth the factors contributing to unemployment, the socioeconomic and social impacts, and how the affected residents cope. The study captured residents' experiences, which add to knowledge of rural unemployment in the study area and substantiate evidence that can inform livelihood, employment, and social protection interventions in rural communities.

Framework

The study utilized the framework of the dual-sector theory (Lewis, 1954), social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), and empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995), which serve as a comprehensive framework for explaining the structural causes, social consequences, and coping experiences associated with unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong.

Lewis' dual-sector theory (1954) suggests that unemployment and underemployment are problems in many rural areas due to the limited capacity of the traditional agricultural sector to absorb labor. When job opportunities in the modern sector are inadequate, surplus labor is likely to be left in low-productivity, seasonal employment positions during the transition from agriculture to industry. This is especially true in rural areas of the Philippines, where jobs are often seasonal, agricultural investments are not significant, and livelihoods are diversified. The ILO (2020) has identified informal employment, a lack of stable income, and limited access to productive jobs as major constraints to rural employment, with a particular focus on rural women.

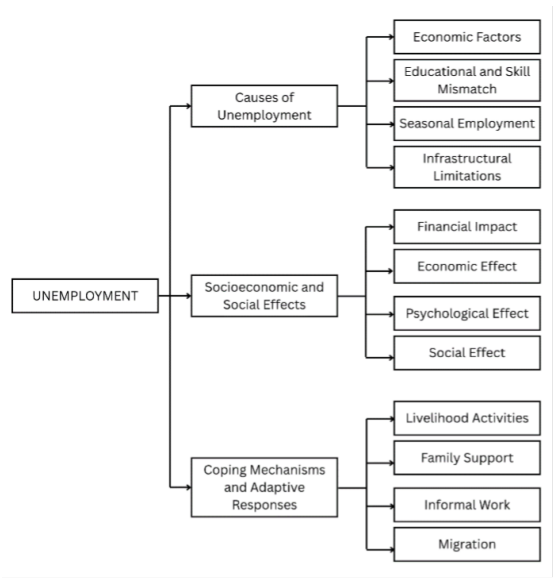
Social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) gives a general explanation for the social impact of unemployment. The theory states that a community in economic deprivation and with less effective social institutions would be more susceptible to social disorganization, characterized by reduced social cohesion, less effective informal social control, interpersonal conflict, and reduced community participation. The theory was initially formulated to explain delinquency, but has been widely used to analyze the impact of economic instability on community relations and social trust. Additional evidence shows that neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy and social cohesion are more effective at controlling social issues, even when faced with economic disadvantage (Sampson et al., 1997), indicating that economic disadvantage affects the functioning of neighborhoods, as well as individuals and families.

The study adopts the empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995) to account for how individuals and families respond to unemployment, which posits that people can gain agency over their lives through participation, access to resources, and collective action. Unlike the unemployed being seen as just victims of economic hardship, the theory centers on their capacity to develop resilience through other livelihood options, family and community support, local organization involvement, skills building, and participation in government and non-government programs.

This view is consistent with the sustainable livelihoods framework of Chambers and Conway (1992) and with the work of the Department for International Development (1999), which suggests that households use a mix of human, social, natural, physical, and financial assets to face shocks and maintain their livelihoods.

These theoretical perspectives together give an understanding of unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong from a multidimensional perspective. Lewis’ dual-sector theory of unemployment describes the structural and economic conditions that give rise to unemployment; social disorganization theory describes how the inability to find employment affects community relationships and social stability; the sustainable livelihoods framework and empowerment theory are complementary theories that explain how individuals and communities draw on existing resources, build their resilience, and access opportunities to enhance their well-being while living in the shadow of unemployment.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of the Study



Lewis’ dual-sector theory of unemployment argue that the cause of unemployment was a surplus of labor in the traditional sector of agriculture, and that the

modern sector had limited capacity to absorb workers. The causes or factors of unemployment and underemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong include dependence on seasonal farming, limited employment opportunities, insufficient skills and educational qualifications, and inadequate infrastructure. According to Lewis (1954), many developing economies have a large reservoir of labor in the agricultural sector, where productivity is low; hence, there is disguised unemployment and limited economic mobility.

The socioeconomic and social consequences of unemployment are explained by social disorganization theory. The theory would predict that economic deprivation will diminish the strength of social institutions, social cohesion, and social stability. The consequences of long-term unemployment include financial difficulties, loss of economic security, psychological stress, strained family relationships, and reduced community involvement. Persistent unemployment in communities can weaken informal social controls and despiritualize community residents, affecting community well-being (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Sampson & Groves, 1989). Empowerment theory provides a lens for viewing how people and families adapt to unemployment through their personal, family, and community resources. According to Zimmerman (1995), empowerment is a process in which people gain more control over the decisions and actions that impact their lives. Faced with limited employment opportunities, residents may pursue alternative livelihoods, rely on family support systems, engage in informal employment, or seek opportunities through migration. Such adaptive responses show agency, resilience, and ability to cope with economic problems in the face of structural limitations (Zimmerman, 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Combined, the three theories depict unemployment in a multidimensional manner. Lewis’ dual-sector theory explains the structural drivers of unemployment; social disorganization theory explains the socioeconomic and social consequences of unemployment; and empowerment theory explains the coping strategies that individuals and families affected by unemployment are likely to use. Combining

these theories offers a more complete picture of the experiences of unemployed workers in Barangay Capitan Bayong and of the relationship between structural conditions, social outcomes, and individual agency.

This study explored the lived experiences of unemployed residents in Barangay Capitan Bayong, particularly the causes of unemployment, its socio-economic and social effects, and the coping mechanisms they employed. This study answered the following specific research questions:

1. What are the main reasons, based on the lived experiences of residents, that contribute to unemployment in the community?
2. How do unemployed residents describe the socio-economic effects of unemployment?
3. What social challenges do unemployed residents encounter in their community?
4. What are their experiences in coping with unemployment?
5. How do unemployed residents perceive existing or potential programs and initiatives aimed at addressing unemployment in their community?

METHODOLOGY

The design of this research was qualitative in nature, using a transcendental phenomenological design, aimed at describing the lived experiences of the participants, who are unemployed residents of Barangay Capitan Bayong. It was appropriate to choose phenomenology, as it would help gain insight into their lives, perceptions, interpretations of unemployment and its effects, and how they cope with it (Garcia et al., 2022). The researchers adopted the strategy of “*epoche*” (bracketing) by using reflexive journaling and peer debriefing to reduce personal interpretation, filter out biases, and remain faithful to the participants’ experiences as expressed in their stories. The emphasis on this approach provided an opportunity to examine unemployment as a lived experience that impacts the economic, social, and psychological life of individuals in a rural

area. A community development perspective was followed, which sees unemployment as a problem that affects individuals, families, and the wider community. The study elicited context-specific insights that help inform livelihood, employment, and social protection interventions in Barangay Capitan Bayong.

Barangay Capitan Bayong serves as the study area. The barangay’s estimated population of 3,751 persons accounted for 3.6% of Impasugong’s total population (PSA, 2021). It is a rural community with a majority of employment in agriculture and small-scale farming, and with trading activities. The livelihood patterns encountered were associated with a majority of informal and seasonal economic systems, which affected employment stability in the area.

This study employed the purposive sampling method and accounted for 15 unemployed residents from the community. The sampling technique used in this study was suitable for phenomenological research, as it enabled the selection of information-rich participants whose experiences included unemployment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants met the following criteria: (1) residents of the barangay for at least five years; (2) without employment for at least six months at the time of the study; and (3) at least 18 years old and above. In this study, unemployment refers to the condition of individuals who were without stable or formal employment for at least six months prior to the interview. While some participants engaged in occasional livelihood activities such as farming, barbering, or community-based teaching, these activities were primarily informal, irregular, seasonal, or insufficient to provide stable employment. Thus, participants were considered unemployed based on their lack of sustained employment opportunities within the formal labor market.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants’ lived experiences of unemployment, including its causes, effects, coping mechanisms, and suggested interventions. Representative questions focused on participants’ experiences of unemployment, perceived causes, impacts on their lives, challenges in seeking employment,

and coping strategies. Interviews were conducted in Cebuano and Binukid, which were the participants' native languages, to facilitate authentic expression and minimize language barriers. The interview guide explored three key areas: (1) the perceived causes of unemployment, (2) its socioeconomic, psychological, and social effects, and (3) the coping mechanisms and possible solutions identified by participants. Using open-ended questions, participants were asked to describe their experiences of unemployment, explain what they believed were the main causes of unemployment in their community, discuss how they managed its effects, and what interventions could help address the problem.

In-depth interviews were key to data collection, supported by secondary data review and non-participant observation to offer background about the community. The triangulation method in these procedures enabled tri-folding of the data and provided a deeper and more legitimate study. The data collection was undertaken systematically. Formal permission was obtained from the local officials before the data collection. The purpose of the study was well communicated for transparency and to ensure cooperation. Based on the inclusion criteria, potential participants were identified. The researchers went around the community describing the nature and purpose of the study, and asking for their voluntary consent to participate. Interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Cebuano or Binukid), which enabled them to express themselves freely and accurately. Participants' comments were tape-recorded, and written notes were taken, which were used with their consent to ensure accurate and complete data.

Transcriptions of all the recorded interviews were done by sentence, which were then translated into English. The transcribed information was thoroughly examined and further classified into themes that emerged and were linked to the study's research needs. Thematic analysis was conducted using the six-step framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, codes were created, then categorized, and then themes were identified from recurring patterns. Many rounds of

reviewing and refining themes were performed to ensure coherence and consistency with the data. To increase trustworthiness, a consensus process for coding was implemented through "peer debriefing," in which select transcripts were independently reviewed by a subset of the research team and discussed until consensus was reached on codes and theme development. In addition, member checking was conducted by rewording and sharing some transcripts and themes with participants for confirmation (Varpio et al., 2016).

This study followed the ethical guidelines for human participants. Prior to data collection, ethical procedures were followed. The local government officials of Barangay Capitan Bayong were consulted to obtain permission to conduct the study; an informed consent process was used, which explained the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights. There was complete voluntary participation, and participants had adequate time to decide whether to participate. The researchers ensured that participants were not harmed during the research. The study itself was low-key and posed no significant risks, but the researchers ensured participants' psychological and social health was protected, for example by giving them the option to avoid specific questions and conducting interviews respectfully. All participants were told they could leave the research at any time without being penalized or if they experienced any negative consequences. Confidentiality and privacy were given utmost importance. Participants were anonymized using pseudonyms, and any identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports. All data (including audio recordings and transcriptions) were stored in a secure, password-protected database and were accessible only to the researchers. The data were used only for this study's purpose and not shared with any person outside its scope.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the lived experiences of unemployed residents of Barangay

Capitan Bayong, Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. Findings are organized thematically and interpreted in relation to the study's framework and relevant empirical literature. The themes reflect participants' experiences regarding the causes of unemployment, its socioeconomic and social consequences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of existing employment-related programs.

Main Reasons for Unemployment as Described by the Residents

The findings revealed that unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong is shaped by a combination of structural, economic, educational, and institutional factors. Participants commonly described limited educational attainment, skills mismatch, seasonal employment, health constraints, and unequal access to support services as major barriers to securing stable employment. These findings are consistent with the ILO (2020), which identifies inadequate skills, informality, and limited access to productive employment opportunities as key drivers of unemployment and underemployment, particularly in rural communities. The results use P for participant, M or F for sex of participant.

Low Educational Attainment and Skills Mismatch

Participants frequently reported that limited educational qualifications restricted their access to formal employment opportunities. Many indicated that incomplete schooling and lack of technical skills prevented them from meeting employment requirements.

"It is very difficult to find work here in our community, especially if you do not have a diploma." (P13, M, Subsistence Farmer)

"I only finished elementary, Grade 6 only. I do not have qualifications, and I do not have enough knowledge." (P11, M, Subsistence Farmer)

These findings support previous studies emphasizing education as a key determinant of employability (Rutkowski, 2015). Within the framework of Lewis' dual-sector theory (Lewis, 1954), participants' experiences reflect the limited

capacity of rural economies to absorb labor into more productive sectors due to inadequate human capital development.

Costly and Complex Job Application Processes

Participants also described the financial burden associated with securing employment, including transportation costs, application fees, and documentary requirements.

"It is difficult to look for a job if you don't have papers and money." (P6, M, Former Government Employee)

"It's really better if you have a degree, because it helps you know how to properly fill out forms" (P9, M, Former Government Employee/Farmer)

These findings suggest that unemployment is influenced not only by the availability of jobs but also by access to resources necessary to pursue employment opportunities. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (2022) notes that expanding people's capabilities and access to opportunities is essential for improving employment prospects and reducing socioeconomic inequalities.

Limited and Seasonal Employment Opportunities

Participants frequently described employment opportunities as temporary, seasonal, and largely dependent on agricultural cycles.

"Most of the work here is just manual farm labor." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

"The real problem for the farmer is the rising and falling prices; it's never steady." (P3, F, Former Daycare Teacher/Subsistence Farmer)

This finding strongly supports Lewis' dual-sector theory, which argues that traditional agricultural communities often experience surplus labor and limited opportunities for stable employment outside farming activities. This perspective is supported by the ILO (2020), which highlights that rural workers in developing economies often experience

vulnerable employment due to limited access to diversified livelihood opportunities, informal work arrangements, and inadequate employment protection.

Health and Age Constraints

Health conditions and aging were also commonly described as barriers to employment. Participants explained that many available jobs required physical labor that exceeded their current capabilities.

"I can no longer continue working because of my illness." (P10, F, Former DOLE Employee)

"My illness really affects me in a way that prevents me from working." (P8, F, Housewife)

Participants experienced health conditions and aging as significant barriers that limited their ability to engage in physically demanding work and reduced their opportunities for employment. Their narratives reveal that unemployment was not only a consequence of limited job availability but also of declining physical capacity, which affected their independence and ability to contribute economically to their families. This finding is supported by the ILO (2020), which noted that health limitations and age-related challenges can increase vulnerability to unemployment, particularly among workers engaged in physically demanding and informal occupations.

Unequal Access to Government Support

Several participants expressed concerns regarding unequal access to livelihood assistance and employment-related programs. These perceptions contributed to feelings of exclusion and reduced confidence in institutional support systems.

"Everything really depends on who is on the list and who is close to the barangay officials." (P11, M, Subsistence Farmer)

"We participate in the meetings, but we haven't really been included in the aid." (P6, M, Former DOLE Employee)

Participants experienced unequal access to government support as a source of exclusion and diminished trust in institutional programs. Their accounts reveal that unemployment was influenced not only by personal circumstances but also by perceived barriers in accessing livelihood opportunities and social assistance. This finding is consistent with the World Bank (2023), which highlights that unequal access to employment support and social protection programs can limit opportunities among vulnerable populations.

Socioeconomic and Social Consequences of Unemployment

The findings indicate that unemployment extends beyond economic deprivation and significantly affects household stability, emotional well-being, and social relationships.

Household Financial Strain and Food Insecurity

Household financial strain emerged as a dominant theme across participants' narratives. Participants described difficulties meeting daily expenses, paying bills, and securing adequate food.

"There are times when we cannot pay for our basic household needs because there is no work." (P7, F, Former Farmer)

"It is hard when there is no regular income; we are always worried about daily expenses." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

Participants experienced unemployment as a constant struggle to provide for their families, marked by uncertainty in meeting daily needs and securing sufficient food. The loss or absence of stable employment reduces household income and limits families' capacity to meet essential needs, including food, housing, utilities, and other daily expenses (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Their narratives reveal how financial hardship was not merely an economic condition but a lived experience that challenged their sense of responsibility and ability to care for their households.

Educational Disruption

Participants reported that financial difficulties often affected children's education through delayed payments, lack of school supplies, and absenteeism. For participants, unemployment was experienced through the painful reality of being unable to fully support their children's educational needs. Their accounts reflect feelings of concern and helplessness as financial limitations hindered their aspirations to provide opportunities and a better future for their children.

"Sometimes we struggle with what we are going to eat." (P5, M, Former Farmer/School Guard)

"There are days when we only eat once a day." (P7, F, Former farmer)

The participants' narratives reveal that unemployment was experienced not simply as the absence of work but as a painful inability to meet their families' basic needs, particularly food and their children's education. These struggles created worry, helplessness, and diminished hope, reflecting the broader impact of unemployment on household security and well-being, as highlighted by the report of the ILO (2020). This aligns with evidence from the Philippines showing that children from poorer households are less likely to be enrolled in school or to reach age-appropriate grade levels, while prolonged income loss may compel vulnerable households to adopt adverse coping strategies, including reducing food consumption (Belghith et al., 2022).

Emotional and Psychological Distress

Participants frequently described stress, anxiety, shame, and feelings of hopelessness associated with prolonged unemployment. Participants described unemployment as an emotionally taxing experience characterized by persistent worry, shame, and declining hope. These lived experiences reveal how prolonged joblessness affected not only their financial circumstances but also their self-perception, emotional well-being, and sense of purpose within their families and communities. These findings align with previous studies linking

unemployment to diminished psychological well-being and reduced self-esteem.

"It is very stressful to always think about where to get money." (P3, F, Daycare Teacher/Farmer)

"There are times when you lose hope because you have been unemployed for so long." (P8, F, Housewife)

This finding is supported by McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that unemployment is associated with poorer psychological and physical well-being. The process of unemployment was a scary and painful experience for the participants, during which they were constantly worried, embarrassed, and losing their hope and confidence to perform their duties in the family. To them, unemployment was not just a lack of income; it was a serious threat to their dignity, self-esteem, and purpose in life.

Reliance on Family Support Systems

Participants described family support as a vital source of survival during periods of unemployment. Faced with limited income-generating opportunities and financial uncertainty, many relied on their children, relatives, and extended family members for material, emotional, and financial assistance.

"My children are the ones helping us now." (P4, M, Former Farmer)

"When there is nothing left, family is the only support we have." (P10, F, Former DOLE Employee)

The participants' reliance on family support reflects a lived experience of both resilience and vulnerability, as kinship networks provided assistance while also creating feelings of dependency and uncertainty. This finding aligns with the sustainable livelihoods framework of Chambers and Conway (1992), which emphasizes the importance of social resources and relationships in helping individuals cope with economic challenges. Research on livelihood strategies likewise emphasizes that households facing economic insecurity may rely on social networks and interpersonal relationships to access resources, assistance, and other forms

of support needed to cope with livelihood challenges (Scoones, 1998).

Social Challenges Experienced in Seeking Employment and Livelihood Opportunities

Participants described various social challenges arising from prolonged unemployment, including experiences of stigma, social exclusion, reduced community participation, and strained interpersonal relationships. These challenges influenced how participants viewed themselves and interacted with others, highlighting the broader social consequences of unemployment within the community. The themes presented below reflect the lived social experiences of unemployed residents and illustrate how unemployment shapes their sense of belonging, social identity, and community engagement.

Social Judgment and Stigma

Participants described experiencing social stigma and negative labeling as a consequence of unemployment. Beyond financial hardship, they encountered judgment, criticism, and gossip from members of the community, which often affected their self-esteem, confidence, and sense of social belonging.

"You will really be called lazy by your neighbors if you don't have a job." (P2, F, Housewife)

"Neighbors talk behind your back when you are unemployed." (P13, M, Subsistence Farmer)

Participants described feelings of embarrassment, social exclusion, and diminished self-worth as they became subjects of judgment and negative assumptions within their community. The stories of unemployment, therefore, extend beyond the absence of work, affecting how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. These experiences reflect the social stigma commonly associated with unemployment. Research has shown that unemployed individuals are often subjected to negative stereotypes that portray them as lazy, unmotivated, or personally responsible for their situation, regardless of the actual structural and economic factors

contributing to their unemployment (Dougherty et al., 2017; Krug et al., 2019). Such experiences of unemployment stigma may also affect individuals' psychological well-being and sense of social identity (O'Donnell et al., 2015).

Social Exclusion and Isolation

Participants described social exclusion and isolation as significant challenges associated with unemployment. Many shared that they intentionally avoided social gatherings, community meetings, and interactions with others because of feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy, and fear of being judged.

"I feel shy to join gatherings because I do not have a job." (P12, M, Occasional Laborer)

"I avoid community meetings because I am unemployed." (P15, M, Subsistence Barber/Farmer)

Participants experienced unemployment as a source of social withdrawal and reduced community participation, as feelings of shame and inadequacy affected their sense of belonging. These narratives show that joblessness extends beyond economic hardship and can weaken social connections, consistent with the report of the ILO (2020), which highlights the broader social and psychological consequences of unemployment. Similarly, a systematic review found a consistent association between unemployment and increased loneliness, suggesting that the consequences of joblessness may extend into individuals' social and relational lives (Morrish & Medina-Lara, 2021).

Family Tension Arising from Financial Stress

For many participants, unemployment was not experienced in isolation. Its effects extended into the home, where the struggle to manage scarce resources often created emotional strain and interpersonal conflict. P11 reflected on how the absence of income led to frequent misunderstandings with his spouse.

"Sometimes my wife and I argue because there is no money." (P11, M, Subsistence Farmer)

"We fight over how to spend what little we have." (P3, F, Former Daycare Teacher/Subsistence Farmer)

Across these accounts, unemployment emerged as a shared family experience rather than an individual condition. This finding is consistent with the family stress model, which explains how economic hardship and financial pressure can negatively affect emotional well-being and subsequently contribute to tension and conflict within family relationships (Conger et al., 2010). Research has likewise shown that financial strain and economic pressure can contribute to marital conflict and difficulties in family functioning, particularly when couples must manage limited household resources (Gudmunson et al., 2007). The pressure of meeting daily needs without a stable source of income often generated frustration, anxiety, and conflict among household members. What participants feared was not merely the lack of money itself, but the gradual strain it placed on family relationships.

Community Safety Concerns Associated with Unemployment

Participants perceived unemployment as a condition that extended beyond individual and household hardships, influencing the broader social environment of the community. Several participants associated the lack of employment opportunities with an increase in minor theft and property-related incidents, particularly during periods of economic difficulty.

"There are thieves here because some have no jobs." (P3, F, Former Daycare Teacher/Subsistence Farmer)

"Small thefts happen in the neighborhood when jobs are scarce." (P5, M, Subsistence Farmer/Formal School Guard)

Participants perceived unemployment as affecting not only financial security but also community stability and social well-being. Their narratives reflect how economic insecurity may create uncertainty and concerns about safety, consistent with Sampson et al. (1997), who emphasized that socioeconomic disadvantage can influence social cohesion and collective

capacity within communities.

Loss of Social Trust

For some participants, unemployment was accompanied by a gradual erosion of trust within the community. They perceived that being unemployed affected how others viewed them, often leading to doubts about their reliability, credibility, and ability to fulfill obligations. Other participants described how unemployment affected their ability to seek assistance from others.

"You won't even be allowed to borrow money anymore." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

"Neighbors don't trust unemployed people." (P2, F, Housewife)

Participants experienced unemployment as more than income loss; it became a challenge to their social identity, trustworthiness, and sense of belonging within the community. Their narratives reveal that joblessness may weaken social relationships and increase feelings of exclusion, consistent with the report of the ILO (2020), which highlights the social and psychological consequences of unemployment beyond economic hardship. Research has found that unemployment is associated with lower levels of generalized social trust, suggesting that prolonged or individual experiences of unemployment may extend beyond economic deprivation into the social-relational domain (Azzollini, 2023).

Coping Experiences of Unemployed Residents

Despite the challenges associated with unemployment, participants demonstrated resilience through various coping strategies. Their experiences reflected efforts to sustain daily needs, seek support from family and community networks, maintain physical and emotional well-being, and remain hopeful amid uncertainty.

Taking Initiative and Side Jobs

Participants described actively seeking alternative sources of income to cope with unemployment. Rather than remaining

passive, they engaged in various side jobs, small businesses, and livelihood activities to support their daily needs and provide for their families. Participants mentioned nearly the same coping strategies to help them survive.

"I'll take on any side job as long as it isn't dishonest." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

"I sell food and small items just to earn extra money." (P5, M, Subsistence Farmer/Former School Guard)

Participants demonstrated resilience by engaging in alternative livelihoods to sustain their families and preserve their sense of dignity despite unemployment. These experiences show that coping with joblessness involved not only income generation but also maintaining purpose and self-worth, consistent with the sustainable livelihoods framework of Chambers and Conway (1992), which highlights the importance of livelihood strategies and available resources in responding to economic challenges. More recent evidence from the Philippines likewise shows that livelihood diversification is commonly used by farm households to reduce income variability and maintain a minimum level of income and food security (Pede et al., 2024).

Relying on Family Support

For many participants, family served as the most immediate and dependable source of support during periods of unemployment. When income became insufficient or employment opportunities were unavailable, participants turned to their children, spouses, and relatives for financial assistance and basic necessities.

"My children are the ones supporting me." (P3, F, Former Daycare Teacher/Subsistence Farmer)

Participants experienced family support as a vital source of resilience during unemployment, providing both material assistance and emotional security amid uncertainty. These narratives highlight the role of social networks in coping with economic hardship, consistent with the sustainable livelihoods framework of Chambers and Conway (1992). In the Philippine context, social

relationships and community networks have also been identified as important dimensions of social inclusion, particularly among economically disadvantaged households (Tabuga & Cabaero, 2020), which identifies social resources and relationships as important assets in sustaining livelihoods during periods of vulnerability.

Managing Health and Self-care

Participants described managing their health and physical limitations as an important way of coping with unemployment. For some, chronic illnesses, aging, and reduced physical capacity influenced not only their ability to work but also how they organized their daily lives.

"I am just at home because I have illnesses - diabetes, and high blood pressure." (P8, F, Housewife)

"I pace myself and take rests because of my old age and weak body." (P7, F, Former Farmer)

These accounts reveal that coping with unemployment was closely intertwined with managing health-related challenges. Rather than focusing solely on finding work, participants often prioritized maintaining their physical well-being and adapting to the realities of illness and aging. These narratives reveal that participants coped with unemployment by adapting to health limitations, consistent with the report of the ILO (2020), which identifies health and age-related challenges as factors contributing to labor market vulnerability. Similarly, research has shown that poor health and chronic disease can influence individuals' transitions out of paid employment, including transitions into unemployment and disability-related work exit (van Rijn et al., 2014).

Participation in Community Programs and Support Initiatives

Participants viewed community activities and government-assisted programs as important sources of support during unemployment. Beyond the immediate benefits they received, these programs provided opportunities to access resources, develop skills, and remain connected to community life.

"I am even one of those helping with HKJ Livelihood

Program.” (P2, F, Housewife)

“I attend barangay seminars to learn new skills and access resources.” (P6, M, Former DOLE Employee)

Participants actively coped with unemployment by engaging in community programs and training opportunities, reflecting empowerment through participation and access to resources as emphasized by Zimmerman (1995). In the Philippine context, Ballesteros et al. (2018) found that DSWD livelihood beneficiaries viewed skills training as beneficial for income generation, employment opportunities, and productivity.

Psychological and Spiritual Coping

Amid the uncertainty and hardships brought about by unemployment, participants drew strength from their faith, personal resilience, and acceptance of their circumstances. For many, coping was not limited to practical efforts to secure income but also involved sustaining hope, enduring difficulties, and finding meaning through spiritual practices and positive thinking.

“It’s really difficult when there’s no one to help, so sometimes all you can do is endure. Keep striving and persevere through prayer.” (P7, F, Former farmer)

“I pray every day and try to accept the situation as it is.” (P15, M, Subsistence Barber/Farmer)

Participants coped with unemployment through prayer, acceptance, and positive thinking, which provided emotional strength and hope amid uncertainty. These experiences reflect resilience through psychological and spiritual resources, consistent with Zimmerman (1995), who emphasized the role of personal agency and internal strengths in overcoming challenging life circumstances. Similarly, Shams (1993) found that religiosity was associated with psychological well-being and appeared to buffer some of the psychological effects of unemployment.

Residents’ Experiences with Government Programs and Initiatives Addressing Unemployment

Participants described mixed experiences

with programs and initiatives intended to address unemployment. While some found financial assistance, livelihood opportunities, and skills development activities beneficial, others encountered difficulties related to limited access, insufficient information, eligibility restrictions, and inconsistent implementation. As a result, many continued to rely on personal efforts and family support despite the availability of assistance.

Direct Financial Assistance

For some participants, direct financial assistance provided temporary relief during periods of unemployment. Cash aid, allowances, food assistance, and holiday gifts helped address immediate needs and eased the burden of daily expenses, particularly when other sources of income were unavailable.

“Sometimes, the salary actually comes from the officials’ own pockets; there are giveaways, but that was from the mayor.” (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

“We sometimes get allowances or gifts during holidays, like rice or cash from the barangay.” (P2, F, Housewife)

These experiences suggest that financial assistance served as an important buffer against immediate economic hardship. Although participants recognized that such support was often temporary and limited, they viewed it as a valuable source of relief that helped them meet basic needs and feel remembered during difficult times. These experiences reflect the importance of social protection in reducing economic vulnerability, as emphasized by the ILO (2020). It also shows the role of social safety nets in helping Filipino households cope with economic shocks and maintain stable consumption despite income disruptions (Reyes et al., 2020).

Participation in Livelihood Programs

Participants described livelihood programs as opportunities that enabled them to generate income, develop small businesses, and improve their economic situation despite unemployment. These initiatives provided

not only financial assistance but also a sense of productivity and hope for a more stable livelihood. Participants shared:

"I am actually the president of that HKJ livelihood here. I was given 15k, and I used it for a rice business." (P2, F, Housewife)

"Through the TUPAD program, I was able to earn some money by helping in community projects." (P5, M, Subsistence Farmer/Former School Guard)

Their stories suggest that livelihood programs served as more than temporary economic interventions. For participants, they represented opportunities to regain a sense of purpose, self-reliance, and control over their circumstances, consistent with Zimmerman (1995), which emphasizes individuals' capacity to gain greater control over their circumstances. In the Philippine context, Ballesteros et al. (2018) found that beneficiaries of the DSWD Sustainable Livelihood Program reported benefits related to income generation, employment opportunities, and productivity.

Government Support and Aid Distribution

Participants expressed mixed experiences regarding government assistance and community support programs. While they acknowledged the importance of these initiatives in helping unemployed residents, they also highlighted concerns related to limited resources, beneficiary selection, and unequal access to available assistance.

"Even if they want to provide jobs, if the budget is lacking, there's nothing, no work." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

"Participation depends on the lists; sometimes you are in, sometimes not." (P13, M, Subsistence Farmer)

Taken together, these experiences reveal that participants viewed government support as both valuable and limited. While assistance programs provided opportunities for relief and support, concerns about fairness, accessibility, and resource constraints shaped how residents experienced and evaluated these initiatives. In the Philippine context, Albert et al. (2024)

found that although the 4Ps system demonstrates substantial targeting effectiveness, challenges remain in maintaining accurate and updated beneficiary information.

Social and Community Support

Beyond formal assistance programs, participants relied heavily on the support of family members, neighbors, and community groups during periods of unemployment. These social networks served as important sources of help, particularly when financial resources were scarce and immediate needs had to be met.

"Sometimes we run to our relatives; they do give something eventually." (P1, M, Subsistence Carpenter/Farmer)

"Even the community tribe helps us when there's a need, like during planting season." (P10, F, Former DOLE Employee)

These narratives reveal that coping with unemployment was not solely an individual effort but a shared social experience. Participants experienced coping with unemployment as a collective effort supported by family, neighbors, and community networks. These experiences highlight the importance of social capital and reciprocal relationships in sustaining individuals during hardship, consistent with Chambers and Conway (1992), who identified social resources as essential livelihood assets.

Limitations and Challenges in Program Access

While participants recognized the value of government and community programs, they also described various barriers that limited their participation and access to available opportunities. Age, health conditions, limited resources, and the temporary nature of some programs influenced their ability to benefit fully from these initiatives.

"I no longer join barangay activities or livelihood programs, because I am already old." (P7, F, Former farmer)

"I cannot participate fully because of my sickness and lack of energy to go to the meetings." (P6, M, Former

DOLE Employee)

These experiences suggest that access to support programs is shaped not only by their availability but also by participants' capacity to engage with them. For many, unemployment was compounded by barriers that limited their participation, creating a gap between existing assistance and their ability to fully benefit from it. In the Philippine context, Reyes et al. (2020) identified issues of exclusion and unequal access to social protection, particularly among vulnerable groups affected by illness, disability, and limited labor force participation.

The findings reveal that unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong is a multidimensional lived experience shaped by limited educational attainment, skills mismatch, seasonal employment, health constraints, financial barriers, and unequal access to support programs. In line with Lewis' dual-sector theory (Lewis, 1954), participants' experiences reflect the structural limitations of a rural economy heavily dependent on agriculture and informal labor, resulting in unstable employment opportunities.

Beyond economic hardship, participants described food insecurity, educational disruption, emotional distress, social stigma, exclusion, family conflict, and loss of social trust. These findings support social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), which explains how prolonged unemployment can weaken social relationships and community cohesion. Similar to previous studies, unemployment affected not only financial well-being but also individuals' sense of dignity, belonging, and social participation.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through side jobs, family and community support, participation in livelihood programs, and psychological and spiritual coping strategies. These adaptive responses align with empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1995), highlighting individuals' capacity to cope with adversity and sustain hope despite limited opportunities.

The study addresses a gap in the literature by providing a phenomenological and

context-specific understanding of unemployment in a rural Mindanao community. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on labor market trends and statistics, this study demonstrates that unemployment is not merely an economic condition but a lived social experience that shapes family life, community relationships, and individual resilience.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by the extent of education, lack of skills, seasonal jobs, health problems, and differential access to support services. Unemployment was seen to have a wider impact than just on income levels, interfering with food security, children's education, emotional well-being, family relations, and social participation. Nevertheless, residents demonstrated key resilience attributes through alternative livelihood activities, family and community support, uptake of available programs, and psychological and spiritual coping. The results validate Lewis' dual-sector theory, social disorganization theory, and empowerment theory in their depiction of the structural causes, social consequences, and adaptive responses of unemployment. Overall, the study provides an understanding of rural unemployment from a context-specific perspective and identifies the need for community-responsive interventions that enhance livelihood opportunities and community resilience.

RECOMMENDATION

The results indicate that targeted, needs-based measures are needed to help alleviate unemployment in Barangay Capitan Bayong. There is a need to enhance the skills training, Alternative Learning System (ALS), and livelihood programs of Local Government Units (LGU), Public Employment Service Office (PESO), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and educational institutions to respond to the job opportunities available in

the area. Local agencies can offer employment facilitation services, skills testing, and/or help with qualifying for employment requirements to minimize employment impediments. To support sustainable livelihood and microenterprise programs during the seasonality of employment and income, LGUs, PESO, TESDA, and community organizations may encourage and assist in the implementation of programs that involve agriculture and small businesses. Also, Barangay officials and community groups should support inclusive activities that minimize social stigma, enhance social support networks, and involve community members who are not employed in Barangay activities. Local health units and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should increase access to health and psychosocial support services due to health, emotional, and psychological issues faced by participants. Lastly, the government and the barangay officials must enhance the transparency, availability, and continuity of employment and assistance programs to ensure that the support is delivered to those most in need.

REFERENCES

- Albert, J. R. G., Mendoza, R. U., Cabalfin, D. L. D., Mahmoud, M. A., & Muñoz, M. S. (2024). *A process evaluation of the Philippine Alternative Learning System* (Discussion Paper No. 2024-31). Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2024.31>
- Autor, D. H. (2019): Work of the past, work of the future. *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, 109, 1–32.
- Azzollini, L. (2023). Scar effects of unemployment on generalised social trust: The joint impact of individual and contextual unemployment across Europe. *Social Science Research*, 109, 102787. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2022.102787>
- Ballesteros, M. M., Orbeta, A. C., Jr., Corpus, J. P., & Ancheta, J. (2018). *Assessment of implementation issues and livelihood success on the Sustainable Livelihood Program of the DSWD* (Discussion Paper Series No. 2017-54). Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2017.54>
- Belghith, N. B. H., Fernandez, F. C. C., & David, C. C. (2022). *Overcoming poverty and inequality in the Philippines: Past, present, and prospects for the future*. World Bank.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chambers, R., & Conway, G. R. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century* (Discussion Paper No. 296). Institute of Development Studies. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/775>
- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes, and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 685–704. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00725.x>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Department for International Development. (1999). *Sustainable livelihoods guidance sheets*. UK Department for International Development.
- Dougherty, D. S., Rick, J., & Moore, P. (2017). Unemployment and social class stigmas. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 45(5), 495–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2017.1382708>
- Garcia, S. R., Felonia, J. P., Lim, W. C., Pascua, P. K., & Quiwa, J. E. (2022). Living in the shadow of unemployment: A phenomenological study amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Psychology and Counseling*,

- 12(1), 32–58. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.18480503.v1>
- Giuntoli, G., Hughes, S., Karban, K., & South, J. (2015). Mental health and well-being effects of employment transitions. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 19(4), 389–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459314554314>
- Gudmunson, C. G., Beutler, I. F., Israelsen, C. L., McCoy, J. K., & Hill, E. J. (2007). Linking financial strain to marital instability: Examining the roles of emotional distress and marital interaction. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 28, 357–376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-007-9074-7>
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). *World employment and social outlook: Trends 2018*. International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *World employment and social outlook: Trends 2020*. International Labour Office.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2023). *World employment and social outlook: Trends 2023*. International Labour Office.
- Jahoda, M. (1982). *Employment and unemployment: A social-psychological analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, W. A. (1954). Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour. *The Manchester School*, 22(2), 139–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9957.1954.tb00021.x>
- McKee-Ryan, F., Song, Z., Wanberg, C. R., & Kinicki, A. J. (2005). Psychological and physical well-being during unemployment: A meta-analytic study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(1), 53–76. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.1.53>
- Morrish, N., & Medina-Lara, A. (2021). Does unemployment lead to greater levels of loneliness? A systematic review. *Social Science and Medicine*, 287, 114339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114339>
- O'Donnell, A. T., Corrigan, F., & Gallagher, S. (2015). The impact of anticipated stigma on psychological and physical health problems in the unemployed group. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1263. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01263>
- Pede, V. O., Mohammed, S., Valera, H. G., Ibrahim, M., & Antonio, R. J. (2024). Livelihood diversification and household welfare among farm households in the Philippines. *Agricultural Economics*, 55(6), 1040–1056. <https://doi.org/10.1111/agec.12864>
- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569–579. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506982>
- Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). (2021). *2020 Census of Population and Housing (2020 CPH)*. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2020-census-population-and-housing-2020-cph-population-counts-declared-official-president>
- Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). (2023). *Employment rate in October 2023 was estimated at 95.8 percent (Labor Force Survey)*. <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/labor-force-survey/node/1684061704>
- Reyes, C. M., Asis, R. D., Arboneda, A. V., & Vargas, A. R. P. (2020). *Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on poverty* (Discussion Paper Series No. 2020-55). Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2020.55>
- Rutkowski, J. (2015). *Employment and poverty in the Philippines*. World Bank.
- Sampson, R. J., & Groves, W. B. (1989). Community structure and crime: Testing social-disorganization theory. *American*

Journal of Sociology, 94(4), 774–802.

- Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277(5328), 918–924. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.277.5328.918>
- Scoones, I. (1998). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: A framework for analysis* (IDS Working Paper 72). Institute of Development Studies. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12413/3390>
- Shams, M. (1993). Religiosity as a predictor of well-being and moderator of the psychological impact of unemployment. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 66(4), 341–352. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8341.1993.tb01760.x>
- Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tabuga, A. D., & Cabaero, C. C. (2020). *The structure of social relations in the community: An empirical analysis for achieving social and economic inclusion* (Discussion Paper Series No. 2020-49). Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <https://doi.org/10.62986/dp2020.49>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Human development report 2021/2022: Uncertain times, unsettled lives: Shaping our future in a transforming world*. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22>
- van Rijn, R. M., Robroek, S. J. W., Brouwer, S., & Burdorf, A. (2014). Influence of poor health on exit from paid employment: A systematic review. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 71(4), 295–301. <https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2013-101591>
- Varpio, L., Ajjawi, R., Monrouxe, L. V., O'Brien, B. C., & Rees, C. E. (2016). Shedding the cobra effect: Problematising thematic emergence, triangulation, saturation and member checking. *Medical Education*, 51(1), 40–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13124>
- Warr, P. (1987). *Work, unemployment, and mental health*. Oxford University Press.
- World Bank. (2023). *Philippines jobs report: Shaping a better future for the Filipino workforce*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/publication/philippine-jobs-report-shaping-a-better-future-for-the-filipino-workforce>
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 581–599. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506983>