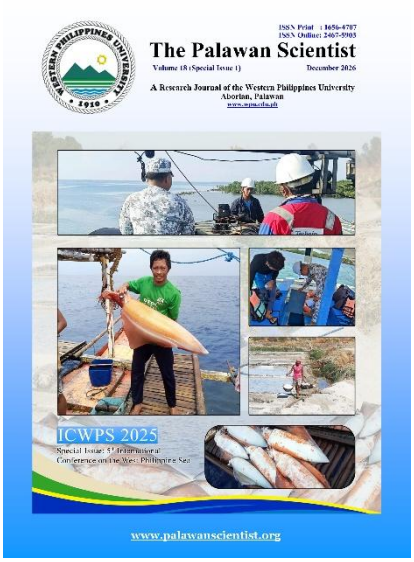

Waves of duty: Lived experiences of Philippine Coast Guard personnel

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel in the performance of their maritime functions in Region VII, Philippines. This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach. A total of ten informants with more than three years of service, participated in the study: four joined individual interviews, while six engaged in a focus group discussion. Data were gathered through a validated interview guide, field notes, and audio recordings, and were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Ten themes emerged. Positive experiences included Pride in Life-Saving Service, Supportive Environment, and Green Education, while negative experiences involved Equipment Gaps and Unpleasant Public Sentiments. In addressing these challenges, themes such as Knowledge-Driven Solutions and Joint Efforts were identified. Moreover, three key themes emerged regarding aspirations for improvement, namely Continuous Growth, Resource Enhancement, and Stronger Partnerships. The study recommended continuous professional development, investment in modern equipment, and enhanced collaboration with the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), the Department of Transportation (DOTr), Local Government Units (LGUs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the academe, and other maritime agencies, alongside stronger community engagement to reinforce the PCG's mission.

Keywords: maritime environmental protection, maritime functions, maritime law enforcement, maritime safety, maritime search and rescue, maritime security

INTRODUCTION

As a cornerstone of maritime governance, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) carries a tripartite mission: strengthening coastal security, ensuring maritime safety, and promoting maritime stewardship. In a nation with vast and porous maritime borders, these maritime functions are not static but are continually shaped by evolving geopolitical tensions and environmental pressures (Kim 2020). However, the Philippines as an archipelagic country, faces a complex matrix of maritime challenges, ranging from geopolitical conflicts in the South China Sea to the operational demands of securing its vast coastline (Abad et al. 2023; PMEP 2022). In Region VII (Central Visayas), the PCG faces ongoing challenges posed by security threats such as terrorism and drug trafficking, as well as environmental crises including devastating oil spills and the ecological degradation caused by unsustainable commercial fishing (Capistrano 2019; Piquero 2024). Furthermore, the escalating impacts of climate change, specifically sea-

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level rise and coastal erosion, necessitate an increasingly swift and vigilant response (Queaño et al. 2021). Together, these multifaceted domestic and international urgencies create a high-stakes operational environment that tests the resilience and adaptability of PCG personnel in the performance of their maritime functions.

While previous studies have examined the role of organizational and operational stressors in the mental health of coast guard personnel (Andrews et al. 2022), the need for continuous training and professional development (Abanilla 2024), psychological resilience during high-risk operations (Santos 2023), and the relationship between courage, personality traits, and organizational commitment among coast guard personnel (Mert and Koksal 2022), no research has comprehensively explored the lived experiences of PCG personnel across the full spectrum of their maritime functions, particularly in Region VII, encompassing search and rescue, environmental protection, maritime security, maritime safety, and maritime law enforcement. This lack of qualitative, experience-based understanding creates a critical gap. Without capturing the voices and narratives of those on the frontlines, policymaking, training programs, and welfare initiatives risk being misaligned with the realities of service.

To bridge this gap, this study explored the lived experiences of PCG personnel in the performance of their maritime functions in Region VII, Philippines. Specifically, it aimed to decribe the experiences of the informants in the performance of their maritime functions, identify how the informants addressed the challenges they encountered in the performance of their maritime functions, and determine the aspirations of the informants for improving their services in the performance of their maritime functions. The findings were expected to provide useful insights to support improvements in maritime operations, training, and personal development, as well as contribute to the enrichment of academic literature on maritime law enforcement. Furthermore, this study served as a basis for understanding the realities of PCG service in the field.

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research method, particularly transcendental phenomenology. This form of inquiry seeks to understand human experience. The goal of this qualitative research methodology is to comprehend how individuals perceive the world. Transcendental phenomenology was particularly suitable for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of PCG personnel in performing their maritime functions, focusing on their positive and negative experiences, strategies used to address the challenges encountered, and aspirations for improvement while minimizing researcher assumptions. This approach helped capture a clearer and more genuine picture of their roles in Bohol Province and Cebu City.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in Region VII, specifically in the provinces of Bohol and Cebu. The primary areas of interest were the main ports of Bohol Province and Cebu City. The Coast Guard Station Western Bohol is situated in Tabilaran City, Bohol, while the Coast Guard District Central Visayas is located in Cebu City. At the time of the study, these stations comprised personnel assigned to maritime safety, security, and law enforcement operations in their respective areas. These stations were chosen because they served as the main headquarters in the region.

Research Informants

The key informants of this study were 10 purposively selected PCG personnel from the Coast Guard Station Western Bohol and the Coast Guard District Central Visayas. A purposive sampling technique was used to select informants who could provide relevant and in-depth information for the study. These informants had been serving in the PCG organization for more than three years. They were grouped into two groups. The first group consisted of four PCG personnel from Cebu who participated in individual interviews, while the second group consisted of six PCG personnel from Bohol who participated in a focus group discussion.

Research Instrument

The researcher developed and employed an interview guide as the study's instrument. It consisted of three parts. Part I focused on the experiences of the informants in the performance of their maritime functions, part II explored how they addressed the challenges encountered in the performance of their maritime functions, and part III focused on the aspirations of the informants for improving their services in the performance of their maritime functions. The interview guide was validated by the panel members before data collection. Participants were formally invited, and their voluntary and unrestricted participation was ensured through informed consent procedures. In addition to conducting interviews, field notes and audio recordings were used to provide more accurate documentation of the informants' responses.

Research Procedure

A transmittal letter, duly signed by the adviser and the dean of the graduate school, was first sent to and received by the heads of each PCG station, requesting permission to conduct the study. This

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transmittal, along with other necessary documents, was submitted to the ethics committee for review. After receiving protocol approval, the researcher identified the key informants and sought permission from selected PCG personnel to participate in the study. Following the identification of the key informants, the potential participants were contacted to confirm their willingness to participate, with a clear assurance that their responses would be kept confidential. The researcher then coordinated the schedule for both the focus group discussion and the individual in-depth interviews. Data collection began only after the request was approved by the station commander.

During the interview phase, the researcher made sure that each session was conducted in a comfortable and suitable environment where participants could freely share their experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended questions designed to gather detailed responses and rich insights into the participants lived experiences. Efforts were also made to build rapport and establish trust to encourage honest and meaningful responses. With the participants' consent, audio recordings were made to ensure accurate documentation of the discussions for transcription and later analysis. All collected data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality and comply with ethical research standards.

After each interview, the researcher expressed sincere gratitude to the participants for their valuable contributions, addressed any questions or concerns they raised, and conducted a brief debriefing.

Data collection

Data were collected through individual interviews and focus group discussions, with informants encouraged to respond honestly and comprehensively. The study involved PCG personnel as key informants. During the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher ensured a comfortable and welcoming environment to help participants feel at ease and encourage open and genuine responses. All responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify common themes and insights.

Data Analysis

The researcher used Colaizzi's method, which involved seven phases designed for flexibility, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the meaning of the phenomenon (Wirihana et al. 2018). First, the researcher transcribed and repeatedly read the interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding, ensuring that participants' statements remained the focus of the analysis. Next, significant statements related to participants' experiences were identified and carefully extracted to maintain context and anonymity. These statements were linked to participant numbers, page numbers, and paragraph numbers. In the third phase, meanings were formulated from these statements. In the fourth step, similar statements and their corresponding meanings were grouped to form theme clusters, which were further organized into broader themes. Data saturation was achieved when recurring patterns and commonalities emerged across participants' responses, and no new themes or significant insights were identified during subsequent analysis. During the fifth step, the researcher integrated the findings by repeatedly reviewing the transcripts, thematic clusters, and identified themes. In the sixth step, a concise description of the essential structure of the phenomenon was developed by removing unnecessary or repetitive details. Finally, in the seventh phase, member checking (participant validation) was conducted to verify and refine the results, ensuring that the analysis accurately reflected the participants' experiences.

RESULTS

Experiences of the Informants in the Performance of their Maritime Functions

The experiences of PCG personnel from Region VII in performing their maritime functions were shaped by both challenges and successes that influenced their professional lives. These individuals encountered a mix of positive and negative experiences, ranging from fulfilling moments of ensuring maritime safety to the difficulties of handling complex rescue and enforcement operations. While their work often involved high-pressure and stressful situations, it also brought a sense of fulfillment from contributing to public safety. The following emergent themes were identified from their experiences:

Positive Experiences

Pride in life-saving service. This theme reflects the service and assistance provided to the people in the community, which brought satisfaction and happiness to PCG personnel.

> "*With regards to the satisfaction of performance of the duty experiences was we successfully rescued a person or a vessel na in distress at sail"* ("With regards to the satisfaction of performance of duty experiences, it's when we successfully rescued a person or a vessel in distress at sea.") Informant 5
>
> *"Upon a responding for more than search and rescue we provide maam maayo nga maam ba good sa pag handling sa pag response nimo unya sa mayo pud nga pag initiate sa trabaho maam mao na nga maam murag ma appreciate pud among trabaho maam maayo na"* ("When responding to more

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than just search and rescue, we provide good handling and response. We also initiate tasks well, and because of that, our work is appreciated.") Informant 9

"Well, sa positive maam based sa experience siguro maam kanang maka ma successful among kintahay makatabang mi sa among tao within term sa mga barko masira ang then ma respondihan namo og dali ang then nindot sa feeling nga kanang after successful rescue. And then, makita nimo nga tao nga luwas lang gyud kaayo sila maam" ("On the positive side ma'am, based on my experience, it feels rewarding when we are able to successfully help people, especially during incidents like when a ship breaks down, and we can respond quickly. The feeling is fulfilling when a rescue operation is successful, and seeing the people we helped is safe.") Informant 2

"Especially when I was assigned in the barko, we have a lot of search & rescue operations so were able to respond to some distress calls of some vessels like there are distress fisherman" ("Especially when I was assigned to the ship, we had a lot of search and rescue operations, so we were able to respond to distress calls from vessels, like when fishermen were in distress.") Informant 3

Support driving environment. This theme reflects the role of positive relationships with stakekolders and shipping companies, which contributed to smooth inspections and efficient performance. Additionally, emotional support from family, camaraderie with colleagues, and a positive work environment enabled PCG personnel to remain focused, motivated, and productive in their duties.

"Before we conduct, that naa mi pulong, pulong sa among kaugalingon kung unsaon namo pag conduct ang situation para lang na ma successful. Nindot sa feeling kay dili lang as personal sa ako, pati pud sa akong kauban nga kami tanan ga team up, teamwork maam" ("Before we conduct, we have a meeting among ourselves to discuss how we will handle the situation to ensure its success. It feels great because it's not just personal for me, but also for my colleagues, as we all team up—teamwork, ma'am.") Informant 2

"*Then sa trabaho pud sa mga stakeholders or sa mga shipping company so maka ingon tag positive kung ilang mga barko is compliant so malipay pud ta during inspection nato is nindut atong performance sa inspection aside pud ana ang barko pud nindut pud og performance sa ilang trabaho compliant pud sila sa mga requirements or kinahanglan para sa coast guard"* ("In terms of work with stakeholders or shipping companies, we can say it's positive when their vessels are compliant. We feel good during our inspections when everything goes smoothly, and our performance in the inspection is solid.") Informant 4

"Nafeel nako nga naa diay mga coast guard personnel nga kauban nako nga kanang ni volunteer, willing gyud sila mutabang sa isig ka coast guard nila. So, nalipay ko ato nga time ka na feel nako nga willing sila mutabang bisag beyond na sa ilang Area of Responsibility" ("I realized and felt that there were PCG personnel with me who volunteered and were truly willing to help their fellow PCG members. I was happy at that time because I saw their willingness to extend help even beyond their designated area of responsibility.") Informant 1

"Same pud sa ilang giingon maam, we are motivated ba to do our tasks. Malipay imong gitabangan so mas ganahan ka mo aw hinuon mandated man gyud na nga trabaho pero naa pay dagdag nga ano ba dagdag push nga mag porsigi gihapon" ("Same as they said, ma'am, we are motivated to do our tasks. Seeing the person you helped happy, makes you want to do more. Although it's part of our mandated job, but there's an extra push that makes us strive even harder.") Informant 10

Green education. This theme reflectss proactive environmental awareness and safety education through active community engagement to promote safe maritime practices.

"So, we go to the islands, and we conducted information and education dissemination that during bad weather, naa mi mga reminders, mga paalala sa mga mangingisda sa panahon nang tag ulan to avoid or to prevent from ahh maritime incidents. So, with that, na inform na namo sila na educate na namo sila not to go at sea during bad weather so we have to monitor at any time thru social media weather update" ("We go to the islands to conduct information and education dissemination. During bad weather, we give reminders to fishermen, especially during the rainy season, to avoid going to sea and prevent maritime incidents. Through this, we inform and educate them not to go to the sea during bad weather. We also monitor weather updates through social media at all times.") Informant 5

"With that, atong malikayan atong mga maritime incidents with that education and information campaign particularly as I have said to the island barangays" ("We can prevent maritime incidents through our education and information campaign,

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particularly in the island barangays.") Informant 2

"Aside sa oil spill, conduct pud mi og coastal clean-up, mangrove planting, conduct pud mi og information education campaign sa mga LGU nga e educate pud namo sila when it comes to solid waste management" ("Aside from addressing the oil spill, we also conduct coastal clean-ups, mangrove planting, and information education campaigns with the local government units (LGUs). We educate them on solid waste management to raise awareness and promote environmental responsibility.") Informant 4

Negative Experiences

Equipment gaps. This theme reflects the PCG's challenges and struggles resulting from the lack of sufficient equipment and resources needed to effectively perform their maritime functions.

"Unfortunately, katong basic lang nga tangke, what do you call this one, oxygen tank. We have limited rescue equipment" ("Unfortunately, the only basic equipment we had was an oxygen tank, and we had limited rescue resources.") Informant 5

"So, again, kulang mi sa water asset or the floating asset, barko, and then the area, the coastal areas from the Province of Bohol, wala mi naka standby gyud nga rubber boats or small boats to respond immediately nga nahitabo sa dagat and to include also sa mga even life jackets night mission, paraphernalia bitao nga maka detect og GPS" ("So again, we lack water assets or floating assets, like ships. In the coastal areas of Bohol, we don't have rubber boats or small boats on standby to respond immediately if something happens at sea. This also includes basic equipment like life jackets, night mission gear, GPS and other paraphernalia.") Informant 6

"Sa law enforcement nako, we don't have equipment like floating asset, lifesaving appliances" ("In my experience in law enforcement, we don't have equipment like floating assets and lifesaving equipment.") Informant 1

Unpleasant public sentiments. This theme reflects the PCG's experiences of being subjected to public misunderstanding, negative perceptions, and unfair criticism despite their efforts to perform their duties.

"Naa nay nakasampa na mga pasahero and then the thing is kung dili nimo sya payagan, panaogon ang mga pasahero diba, so karon na age of technology nga dali ra kaayo ang mga pasahero mureklamo "unsa mani, tungod ni sa coast guard", "wala nami naka byahe, nadelay mi" ("The passengers are already onboard. If departure is not allowed, the passengers must be disembarked. In today's age of technology, it is easy for passengers to complain, saying things like, "What's going on?" or "It's because of the PCG, our trip was delayed.") Informant 3

"Negative comments of the passengers, stranded passengers everytime nay PAGASA bitao, gail warning nga dili pwede mo byahe bitao. Tapos ilang mga negative comments is nganong dili magpa larga ang mga coast guard and uban stranded passengers kay dili kasabot nga nag implement raman pud unta mi sa among trabaho para mao lagi na malikayan ang mga maritime incidents so mao na sya ang usa sa mga negative" ("One negative aspect is the criticism from stranded passengers whenever Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) issues a gale warning and travel is prohibited. This feedback often comes from passengers who do not understand that the PCG is simply performing its duty to prevent maritime incidents.") Informant 6

"Naay mga feedback sa uban like social media like news maam nga nagkulang ang coast guard. Kita mig comment maam ba nga "asa mag mga coast guard" ug mga basher" ("Sometimes, we see public feedback on social media and in the news where people say that the PCG is lacking. There were comments such as "Where are the PCG?" and other negative remarks.") Informant 2

Addressing the Challenges Encountered in the Performance of Their Maritime Functions

Knowledge-driven solutions. This theme reflects the importance of utilizing expertise, insights, and informed decision-making to address challenges and improve outcomes. It highlights the role of knowledge in formulating effective strategies and solutions that enhance performance and contribute to improved service delivery.

"So, I study, I conduct a research and then tanang mga maritime laws akong gibasa then I seek advice sa mga lawyers" ("I studied and conducted research, ma'am. I read all the maritime laws, and I also sought advice from lawyers to guide me and help me with my concerns.") Informant 1

"You deal with them based on existing policies gyud existing regulations & policies, law, statues, any regulations, memorandum circular, issued by the Department of the Transportation and the National Headquarters kay you based your action lang naman doon sa existing policies" ("To address incidents and accidents, the PCG strictly

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follows existing laws, regulations, and memorandum circulars issued by the Department of Transportation and the National Headquarters.") Informant 3

"So, dili muabot sa punto maam nga ma discourage, but those negative comments, sa comments sa mga tao, will bring it to our office and we will discuss it unsa atong failures unsa atong mga gikinahanglan. Then, we have to level it up so that the moment nga maka encounter mig balik, so naa na mi solution" ("We do not allow ourselves to become discouraged. Instead, the negative comments are brought to our office, where we discuss our shortcomings and identify what needs improvement. We then work on these areas so that when similar situations arise, we already have solutions in place.") Informant 5

Joint efforts. This theme reflects the importance of collaboration and teamwork in achieving common goals, particularly in addressing challenges and improving performance. It emphasizes the value of working together with various stakeholders, such as LGUs, agencies, and communities, to develop effective solutions and enhance overall outcomes.

"We have also our PCGA, Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary natin yung volunteer organization under PCG na grabe pud na kaayo silag support sa atoa for the performance in our functions and the mandated functions like pahuwam silag mga floating assets, persons with the certain skills needed, mga divers mga swimmers, mga nurses apil sila ana specially katong sinulog ma'am" ("We also have, the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary (PCGA). It's a volunteer organization under the PCG, and they provide tremendous support for us in performing our functions and mandated duties. They lend floating assets, as well as personnel with specific skills, like divers, swimmers, and even nurses.") Informant 3

"Then, niduol ta sa LGU, they provided floating asset for us. Their own motorbangka ba like lifesaving appliances, may e rescue operation, ilang ipagamit ang ilahang pagamit lang kay sa LGU" ("We approached the LGU, and they provided us with floating assets, such as their own motorized boats. These include lifesaving appliances that they allow us to use during rescue operations. The equipment is provided for our use, but it remains under the LGU's ownership.") Informant 1

"Pananglitan katong Odette, nahutdan mig uban material so ang uban nga barko or vessels nga naka dock, ilang materials ang ilang gipagamit so ang mga ship owners open pud na sila nga mo tabang everytime nay mga incidents, especially pag makita mig nay oil spill nya makakita mig barko nga nay naka dock so ilang gamit ilang ipagawas" ("For example, during Odette, we ran out of some materials, so the other ships or vessels that were docked offered their materials for us to use. Ship owners are very open to helping, especially when they see an oil spill and notice that there are ships docked. They would then provide their materials for use.") Informant 4

Mga local residents maam, sa akong experience maam, makaduol gyud sa LGU and other agencies. Pero naay mga times gyud nga kailangan sya og quick response ba so syempre ang among office naka station sa duol dagat. Kung kinsa tong mga residente duol sa dagat, maoy ma dali dali og pangayog assistance" ("Also, from my experience ma'am, we can coordinate with the LGU and other agencies. However, there are times when quick responses are needed. Since our office is situated near the sea, the residents living close to the coast are the ones we can ask for assistance.") Informant 5

Aspirations of the Informants to Improve their Services in the Performance of their Maritime Functions

Continuous growth. This theme reflects the PCG's commitment to ongoing professional development, the acquisition of new skills, and adaptation to evolving challenges in maritime operations.

"High quality of service, mao ra gihapon, to study kay diman ta kahatag og saktong serbisyo kung wala tay idea. Pagtuon, pagpractice kung unsay natun-an then mangopya og mga idea sa ubang agency" ("A high quality of service can only be provided if we study, because we cannot give proper service without knowledge. We need to study, practice what we learn, and adopt ideas from other agencies.") Informant 1

"Continue professional development maam and then seeking mentorship and guidance in terms of professional development" ("Continuous professional development and seeking mentorship and guidance in terms of professional development is essential for improving skills and knowledge in the maritime security field.") Informant 2

"Sa training pud kay diman gyud ingon nga bag o graduate ma absorb dayon ang mga balaod mga pamaagi or pag enforce sa mga balaod so dapat naa gyud mga regular training sa coast guard personnel para pareho og stand gani with it comes to enforce law" ("In terms of training, it's not expected that

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fresh graduates can immediately absorb all the laws, procedures, or how to enforce them. So, it's crucial to have regular training for PCG personnel to ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to law enforcement.") Informant 4

Resource enhancement. This theme reflects the aspirations of PCG personnel to acquire essential assets, resources, and equipment that are necessary to stregthen their capacity to effectively perform their maritime functions.

"As I have said, limited lang atong gamit. So, with that mga panghitabo, siguro mahatagan ta anang dugay ra namong gipangayo nga madungagan unta tungod kay wala namo na perform perfectly or medyo more than half sa among performance of duty" ("Our equipment is limited. So, with these incidents, we are hoping that we will be provided with the resources we have long been requesting. We were not able to perform our duties perfectly due to the lack of necessary equipment.") Informant 5

"Actually, there are a lot of aspects or factors for the PCG to improve. Para mas ma perform namo properly among maritime functions in terms of logistics, assets, personnel, infrastructure, daghan kayo" ("Actually, there are a lot of aspects or factors that need improvement for the PCG. To perform our maritime functions properly, we need improvements in terms of logistics, assets, personnel, and infrastructure—there's really a lot to work on.") Informant 3

"Sa maritime security, lifesaving equipment, floating assets" ("In maritime security, lifesaving equipment and floating assets are essential.") Informant 9

"Sa maritime security maam, pila mi kabuok, equipment maam, more on assets" ("In maritime security, ma'am, it's not just about the number of personnel, but also the equipment and assets we have.") Informant 10

"Kuan maam like technology, update like karon naa nay drone, need kaayo namo" ("Like in terms of technology, updates such as drones, we really need those") Informant 2

Stronger partnerships. This theme reflects the importance of collaboration and cooperation with various stakeholders, such as LGUs, private sector organizatoons, and other maritime agencies. It emphasizes the value of cultivating relationships that contribute to enhancing service delivery, resource sharing, and joint efforts in addressing maritime challenges effectively.

"Sample sa law enforcement namo ang expert ana gani, mas expert pa ang police so mao na, handling of evidence so need gyud mi mu coordinate nila kay para mas mugaan ang trabaho. Daghan ang joint operation ba" ("In our law enforcement operations, the experts, such as the police, are more experienced in handling evidence. Therefore, coordination with them is important to make our tasks easier. Many joint operations are conducted as well.") Informant 1

"We are in our developing stage. So, inter-agency collaboration, interoperability with our partnered agencies- LGU's, NGO's, private stakeholders, mas nakatabang sya in our performance sa functions kay if we have meager resource, kulang imong floating assets, pwede ka nila pahulamon. So, mas naka perform ka more" ("We are in our developing stage, so inter-agency collaboration and interoperability with our partnered agencies—LGUs, NGOs, and private stakeholders—really help improve our performance. If we have limited resources and lack floating assets, they can lend us theirs. This way, we can perform our functions more effectively.") Informant 3

"Kinahanglan gyud nga ipa lig-unon gyud ang tie up with other agencies" ("It is essential to strengthen the tie-up with other agencies.") Informant 2

"Dapat man gud sad regular ang meeting sa mga inter agency, coast guard, Navy, PNP, maritime. So, kana sila involved nana sila sa atong jurisdiction sa atong dagat" ("Regular meetings should be held between inter-agency groups like the PCG, Navy, PNP, and maritime agencies. They are all involved in our jurisdiction over the seas, and coordination between them is fundamental.") Informant 4

DISCUSSION

Experiences of the Informants in the Performance of Their Maritime Functions.

Positive Experiences

Pride in life-saving service. This theme reflects the strong sense of pride and fulfillment that PCG personnel feel when providing life-saving services to the community. Successfully rescuing individuals in distress during critical situations gives them a deep sense of achievement and satisfaction. Their involvement in search and rescue operations not only boosts their confidence but also reinforces their commitment to their duties. Moreover, the appreciation and recognition they receive from the community further strengthen their sense of value and accomplishment. The pride they derive from successfully carrying out rescue missions creates a strong emotional connection to their role, which fosters a deep sense of purpose in their work.

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Philippine Coast Guard personnel feel a deep sense of pride in saving lives and responding to distress calls, which enhances their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. This feeling of success not only boosts their morale but also strengthens their commitment to their duties, directly reflecting of Herzberg's assertion that motivation is driven by the meaningfulness and impact of the work itself (Herzberg 1959). Likewise, Abad et al. (2023) emphasized that being devoted to a cause involves commitment and prioritizing objectives, often putting others first before oneself. Similarly, PCG personnel experience a strong sense of fulfillment and satisfaction because they consider their work to be more than just a job (Palconit and Sabijon 2025).

Furthermore, McClelland's Theory of Acquired Needs explains motivation based on socially learned needs, including the need for achievement, affiliation, and power. In the context of this study, these needs help explain the motivation of PCG personnel, as their sense of fulfillment may be driven by achievement in saving lives, working together as a team, and taking responsibility for performing their duties within a challenging environment (McClelland 1961).

Support driving environment. This theme reflects how positive relationships with stakeholders, shipping companies, and internal team members contribute to the effective performance of PCG personnel. Emotional support from family, camaraderie among colleagues, and a positive work environment play a crucial role in empowering personnel to stay focused, motivated, and productive. Effective collaboration with stakeholders and shipping companies creates a strong support system that enhances personnel's sense of empowerment in performing their duties. Additionally, the spirit of volunteerism and willingness to help among colleagues create a supportive environment that strengthens their resolve, enabling them to carry out their tasks with dedication and commitment.

According to the need for affiliation proposed in McClelland's Theory of Acquired Needs, individuals with a strong need for affiliation prioritize maintaining social connections, joining groups, and seeking positive interactions. In the context of PCG personnel, the emotional support from family, camaraderie among colleagues, and positive relationships with stakeholders and shipping companies all play a key role in fostering a supportive environment. This sense of belonging and connection enhances the personnel's motivation and job satisfaction, making them more engaged in their work. The support system created through teamwork and collaboration strengthens their resolve and ability to perform their duties with dedication, reflecting McClelland's idea that individuals who value social connections contribute to collective success and are more likely to excel in group settings (McClelland 1961). Furthermore, Humphrey et al. (2009), through Team Performance Theory, emphasized that teams with individuals who have different areas of competence and expertise are more likely to perform better because of their collaborative efforts.

Green education. This theme reflects the proactive environmental awareness and safety education initiatives undertaken by PCG personnel. They promote safe maritime practices and environmental responsibility by actively engaging with the community. These efforts raise awareness about the importance of protecting marine ecosystems and help individuals understand their role in safeguarding the environment.

This theme is closely related to the study conducted by Empinado et al. (2023), which emphasized the PCG rescuers' commitment to both personal and professional development. One of the main components of this expansion is their dedication to community outreach and education activities, which are consistent with the concept of Green Education—education aimed at encouraging environmental awareness and sustainable habits. In their research, rescuers emphasized the necessity of participating in public awareness campaigns and educating the community about safety and resilience, reflecting Green Education's role in encouraging environmental stewardship. In addition, Palconit and Sabijon (2025) emphasized the importance of strengthening information-sharing and community initiatives. These efforts demonstrate the role of education in promoting awareness and preparedness, which can enhance community understanding and response during maritime emergencies.

Equipment gaps. This theme reflects the struggles and challenges faced by PCG personnel due to insufficient equipment and resources. The lack of proper tools and gear hinders their ability to effectively perform their maritime functions, particularly during high-pressure situations such as rescue operations. These limitations hinder operational readiness and often result in slower response times, which can significantly impact the outcome of critical missions. The need for improved resources is evident, as having better equipment would enhance their ability to carry out their duties more effectively and safely.

According to Weilant (2024), the Coast Guard faces operational risks due to shortages in both personnel and equipment, which hinder its ability to meet domestic and international demands. These capacity issues limit the service's ability to achieve strategic objectives and maintain stakeholder confidence. Despite ongoing recruitment and recapitalization efforts, shortages in both personnel and platforms are expected to persist for years. The PCG's strong culture of mission commitment often leads it to take on tasks even when resources, including equipment, are insufficient, which stakeholders

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recognize as a long-standing challenge requiring increased personnel and assets across the service. Palconit and Sabijon (2025) also found out that PCG personnel encountered operational challenges, including limited personnel and equipment, such as floating assets, as well as a lack of comfortable facilities for personnel. Similarly, Tomi (2025) significant challenges, including limited funding, inadequate facilities, and insufficient training duration, which hinder the effectiveness of the PCG training program.

Unpleasant public sentiments. This theme reflects the experiences of PCG personnel who were subjected to public misunderstanding, negative perceptions, and unfair criticism despite their continuous efforts to carry out their duties. Despite their commitment to ensuring safety and enforcing necessary protocols, personnel were sometimes met with resistance or misunderstanding from the public, especially during challenging operations or when resources were limited. Public criticism, particularly from individuals who may not fully understand the complexities of maritime safety or the importance of certain regulations, placed an emotional burden on personnel.

The theory that best relates to this theme is Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theory (Herzberg 1959). This theory distinguishes between motivational factors that lead to job satisfaction and hygiene factors that, if absent, can cause dissatisfaction. Motivational elements—such as acknowledgment, recognition for a job well done, personal accomplishments, opportunities for advancement, and promotions—enhance fulfillment when present but do not necessarily cause discontent when lacking (Herzberg 1959). However, hygiene factors like working conditions, job security, and interpersonal relationships must be adequately addressed to prevent dissatisfaction. In this case, unpleasant public sentiments represent a deficiency in hygiene factors, specifically those related to working conditions and interpersonal relationships, which can significantly lower morale and emotional well-being. In addition, Palconit and Sabijon (2025) found that PCG personnel experienced negative community perceptions, with some members of the public questioning their honesty and integrity in performing their duties.

Addressing the Challenges Encountered in the Performance of Their Maritime Functions

Knowledge-driven solutions. This theme emphasizes the importance of utilizing expertise, insights, and informed decision-making to effectively address challenges and improve outcomes in the performance of maritime functions. The PCG personnel actively engage in research, consult with legal experts, and follow established policies to ensure that their actions align with maritime laws, thus enhancing their decision-making capabilities. Furthermore, adherence to existing regulations provides a clear framework for addressing maritime incidents, reducing the likelihood of errors. The continuous learning from negative feedback allows personnel to improve their strategies and solutions, ensuring that they are better prepared for future challenges.

The theme is aligned with McClelland's Knowledge-Driven Solutions aligns with the Theory of Acquired Needs (McClelland 1961), particularly the need for achievement, which is marked by individuals' desire to set and attain challenging goals and their commitment to high performance. When it comes to marine operations, PCG members demonstrate this quality by conducting extensive study, seeking legal advice, and rigorously following established guidelines and maritime regulations. These behaviors reflect the characteristics of achievement-motivated people, including a strong desire to make well-informed decisions and minimize errors. Additionally, their readiness to learn from criticism and continuously improve their strategies shows a dedication to both individual and group achievement, which McClelland highlights as essential to successful problem-solving and teamwork.

Joint efforts. This theme highlights the collaborative nature of maritime operations, emphasizing the importance of cooperation between various stakeholders, including LGUs, shipping companies, the private sectors, local residents, and volunteers. LGUs provide essential resources like boats and lifesaving equipment, while shipping companies and agencies provide additional equipment and support in addressing crime-related issues. Ship owners lend materials during emergencies, such as oil spills, showing their commitment to maritime safety. Private stakeholders offer boats for search and rescue, and the PCGA contributes specialized skills and assets. Local residents, particularly those living near the coast, also provide immediate assistance during emergencies, strengthening the community's response to maritime challenges.

This theme is supported by Team Performance Theory (Humphrey et al. 2009). This theory emphasizes that team roles, collaboration, and the composition of roles within a group significantly influence overall performance. In the context of maritime operations, the cooperation among LGUs, private stakeholders, shipping companies, volunteers, and local residents reflects the essence of team role composition and interdependence. Each stakeholder contributes uniquely by providing equipment, skills, or quick response, reflecting the theory's assertion that the synergy of diverse yet complementary roles is critical for team effectiveness and mission success, particularly in high-stakes, complex environments like maritime safety and emergency response. On top of that, Aliyah et al. (2024) stressed the need for fostering partnerships with educational institutions. Similarly,

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McCabe (2019) pointed out that international partnerships have improved the maritime security sectors of coastal states.

Aspirations of the Informants to Improve Their Services in the Performance of Their Maritime Functions

Continuous growth. This theme points out the importance of continuous learning and professional development in maritime operations. Personnel emphasize the need for ongoing education, training, and mentorship to ensure high-quality service and effective performance. The lack of adequate training can hinder personnel's ability to handle tasks, making regular training sessions essential for them to stay updated on laws and procedures. Self-education, through studying circulars and other references, helps avoid mistakes and ensures compliance with maritime regulations. Overall, continuous growth is key to enhancing the effectiveness and readiness of maritime personnel in fulfilling their duties.

Abanilla (2024) stressed the importance of professional development and training, improved legal foundations, operational competence, and adaptability for PCG personnel to enhance their effectiveness in maritime law enforcement. To address these needs, the study recommended revising the Program of Instruction for the Maritime Security and Law Enforcement Course, aiming to better equip personnel for their roles. These improvements are vital for reinforcing governance and upholding the rule of law in maritime domains. Furthermore, strengthening training programs supports global maritime security initiatives and aligns with international maritime standards. Similarly, Aliyah et al. (2024) emphasized the need to modernize training programs by integrating digital technologies, cybersecurity, and contemporary maritime operations to better equip Bakamla (the Indonesian Coast Guard) personnel to address current and future maritime challenges. Moreover, Tiongson (2025) concluded that targeted training is essential to ensuring operational effectiveness among sea marshals.

Resource enhancement. This theme demonstrates the need to improve and expand the resources available for maritime security operations. This includes acquiring more equipment, assets, and technological tools to ensure that personnel can perform their duties efficiently and respond to emergencies effectively. Enhancements in infrastructure, including better office spaces and specialized vessels, are also crucial for supporting maritime functions. There is a strong call for investments in both human and material resources, as the lack of proper equipment and facilities hinders the overall performance of maritime agencies.

The theme of Resource Enhancement is best supported by Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theory (Herzberg 1959), which emphasizes the significance of hygiene factors—such as working conditions, equipment, and infrastructure—in preventing employee dissatisfaction. In maritime security operations, the lack of proper tools, advanced technologies, and adequate facilities negatively impacts personnel efficiency and morale.

Moreover, this aligns with the findings of Sunko et al. (2018), who found a considerable rise in maritime operations, underlining the necessity for continued investment equipment and human resources to maintain maritime safety. Palconit and Sabijon (2025) revealed that the PCG substations need of additional personnel, equipment, and facilities to ensure the safety and security of maritime operations. Likewise, Tomi (2025) emphasized the need to enhance training facilities, increase budget allocation, and standardize policies to effectively institutionalize human resource development.

Stronger partnerships. This theme depicts the pivotal role of collaboration among various agencies in the performance of maritime functions. Inter-agency cooperation ensures a more effective response to emergencies and incidents by combining the expertise and resources of different organizations. Agencies can share essential assets and equipment by working together, which is particularly important during periods of resource limitations. Regular communication and coordination through seminars and meetings help align enforcement practices and avoid confusion. This collaborative approach enhances overall performance and bolsters the collective capacity to effectively tackle challenges in maritime functions.

This theme is supported by Team Performance Theory proposed by Humphrey et al. (2009), which emphasizes that collaboration, coordination, and the integration of diverse skills and resources among team members and organizations lead to effective performance. The concept stresses that collaboration and partnership are essential to enhancing operational effectiveness, especially in resource-limited environments. In this study, inter-agency cooperation at the local level strengthens the PCG's capacity to perform maritime functions by maximizing available resources, sharing expertise, and fostering collective responsibility in addressing maritime challenges.

Similarly, this practice is evident in the global context. McCabe (2019) presents significant findings on the enhancement of maritime security and governance in the region, highlighting how international partnerships and capacity development have bolstered the maritime security sectors of coastal states. In Kenya, initiatives like the establishment of the Coastguard Service and the coordination of the blue economy coordination reflect a strategic shift towards more secure and sustainable maritime practices.

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Overall, this study revealed that the lived experiences of PCG personnel in Region VII encompassed both rewarding and challenging aspects of the performance of their maritime functions. The informants expressed pride in their life-saving services, supportive driving environment, and environmental education initiatives as sources of fulfillment, while also highlighting equipment gaps and negative perceptions and criticism as significant obstacles. To address these challenges, they emphasized the importance of knowledge-driven solutions and joint efforts. Their aspirations for continuous growth, resource enhancement, and stronger partnerships underscore the need to strengthen both individual competencies and institutional capacities. These findings provide a deeper understanding of the realities experienced by coast guard personnel and reflect the importance of integrating personnel perspectives into organizational planning, policy development, and maritime governance.

In view of these findings, the PCG may further strengthen continuous professional development through regular training, simulation exercises, mentoring programs, and community engagement initiatives while prioritizing investments in modern equipment, vessels, and operational infrastructure. Likewise, stronger collaboration with relevant government agencies, local government units, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other maritime stakeholders is encouraged to enhance resource sharing, coordinated responses, maritime education, and environmental protection. Public awareness initiatives should also be intensified to strengthen community trust and understanding of the PCG's mandate. Although this study offers meaningful perspectives into the lived experiences of PCG personnel, its findings are limited to a small group of participants from Region VII and may not represent other operational contexts. Future studies may explore experiences across different coast guard districts, inter-agency collaboration, work-life balance and family support, particularly among female personnel, or employ mixed-methods and comparative designs to further enrich the understanding of maritime service and organizational development within the PCG.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study strictly adhered to established ethical research standards to ensure the protection, privacy, and dignity of all informants. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the University of Cebu Academe Research Ethics Committee, University of Cebu–Main Campus, under approval number GS(1)-2025-03-106.

All participants, who are active PCG personnel, voluntarily took part in the study and signed an Informed Consent Form, signifying their willingness to participate without any form of coercion or threat. Their identities were kept strictly private, and all collected data were handled with the utmost care.

Participant validation (member checking) was conducted by returning the summarized findings and identified themes to the informants, allowing them to review, confirm, or clarify the interpretations to ensure accuracy and credibility of the findings. Throughout the research process, participants were continuously reminded of the voluntary nature of their involvement and the confidentiality of the information they shared.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author declares no competing interests.

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