



The Pursuit of Fulfillment: A Phenomenological Study of Street Sweepers in the Philippines

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70922/76xm8z19>

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Other citation formats:

Article History:

Date received: February 3, 2025

Date revised: May 13, 2025



Date accepted: May 20, 2025

How to Cite this paper:

Seclot, J. & Fajardo, D. (2025). The pursuit of fulfillment: a phenomenological study of street sweepers in the Philippines. *Social Sciences and Development Review* (17)1, pp. 75-99. <https://doi.org/10.70922/76xm8z19>

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ABSTRACT

Street sweepers are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers nowadays due to their working conditions, tenure of employment, health issues, and socio-economic status. Nevertheless, they are the driving force behind the maintenance of solid waste management and the cleanliness of cities. Using the Self-Determination Theory as the framework of this study, this paper aims to explore the sense of fulfillment experienced by street sweepers in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. Using a phenomenological research design, eight (8) street sweepers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide questionnaire. The gathered data were transcribed, validated, and analyzed using the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis approach. Results revealed four (4) emerging themes: maintaining community cleanliness and orderliness, upholding professional integrity and work ethic, being acknowledged and respected in the community, and supporting family livelihood and well-being. In conclusion, the sense of fulfillment of street sweepers is driven by their sense of orientation, commitment, and accountability, how the community values them, and how the work sustains the physiological needs of their families. The city government should recognize the invaluable contributions of street sweepers by ensuring fair wages, benefits, job security, and recognition initiatives, which can foster greater motivation and job satisfaction. Future research could explore ways to improve job security and benefits for workers in similar sectors, ensuring their efforts are recognized and adequately rewarded.

Keywords: *fulfillment, happiness, phenomenological study, satisfaction, street sweepers*

INTRODUCTION

In the rage of industrialization, street sweepers played a vital role as they undeniably helped shape the community's progress. Street sweepers are a group of workers hired

to sweep the different kinds of waste thrown on the street (Gebremedhn & Raman, 2020). Generally, street sweepers are cleaners of streets implementing solid waste management systems in which public awareness plays an important role. They are in contract with administrative zones and solid-waste management offices, and are involved in cleaning streets using brooms, dustpans, or plastic garbage bags (Alie et al., 2023). Nevertheless, they play a vital role in safeguarding the health and hygiene of the people living within the cities. Street sweepers help maintain a tidy appearance by removing litter, leaves, and other debris, creating a visually pleasing environment (Zamora et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Khan et al. (2021) stated that some countries have opted for mechanization and vehicles to perform street cleaning tasks. Given the challenges posed by the limited workforce and the expansive geographical areas of metropolitan cities, highways are cleaned by employing specialized cleaning attachments on vehicles. The mechanization of cleaning materials for street sweepers significantly outperformed hand-held brooms in terms of time taken, swept area, output energy, and efficiency, as utilizing these machines is cost-effective and guarantees improved health, comfort, well-being, and safety (Adebesin & Adedeji, 2020). In India, a designed road cleaning machine exhibits low stresses and negligible deformation, confirming that the design is safe in addressing human health risk problems (Tsegay & Dora, n.d.). On the contrary, in some developing countries, such as the Philippines, street sweepers are constantly visible on all streets in the country. However, their job is not easy as it requires considerable physical force to do the tasks (Salve & Chokhandre, 2016). The prevalence of musculoskeletal discomfort (Idrees et al., 2023) and increased risk of sustaining injuries (Park et al., 2020) are high among them.

Numerous global studies have examined the socio-economic circumstances, health issues, and potential risk factors associated with disabilities among street sweepers. Research conducted in South Korea revealed that many street sweepers had limited educational backgrounds, worked on contract or as day laborers, and frequently worked overtime (Park et al., 2020). Similarly, street sweepers occupy a lower position in the occupational hierarchy in India, characterized by lower educational attainment, social discrimination, and economic disadvantage (Ahmad & Shah, 2022). Street sweeping and waste collection are hazardous jobs that expose workers to infections, especially with the little, if any, protective measures they apply (Ewis et al., 2013). In the Philippines, specifically in Davao, Lagura and Ligan (2018) conducted a study revealing that street sweepers face precarious employment conditions, which result in inadequate remuneration and the absence of benefits. Moreover, their work, involving street sweeping and waste collection, exposes them to various health hazards and the risk of infections. A study by Jeong (2017) shows that 'roadway cleaning' was the most common type of cleaning process for injuries, followed by 'sidewalk cleaning,' 'going/returning to work by bike,' and 'lifting/carrying.' They are exposed to many risks, such

as respiratory symptoms and airway obstruction, which increase because of dust inhalation (Habybabady et al., 2018; Mostafa et al., 2015; Van Kampen et al., 2020; Sabde & Zodpey, 2008). Furthermore, around the world, street sweepers are physically burdened and exposed to various hazards (Van Kampen et al., 2020). This kind of job raises the risk of musculoskeletal disorders and related disabilities (Salve & Chokhandre, 2016; Park et al., 2020). In Ethiopia, lack of job satisfaction and cleaning longer distances were identified to be predictors of musculoskeletal disorders among street sweepers and solid waste workers (Alie et al., 2023).

Several studies have been conducted on the topics of street sweepers, but research outlining the very essence of their roles and tasks has been unexplored. Although the study conducted by Lagura and Ligan (2018) shed light on the challenges, coping mechanisms, and job satisfaction of street sweepers in the Davao Region, Philippines, it lacked a specific focus, which is on the life of street sweepers on and behind street sweeping. It provided a general overview of their circumstances without delving into the deeper nuances. Additionally, there is a scarcity of research and literature that genuinely captures the comprehensive nature of street sweepers' lives. Hence, this study adopts a qualitative approach to bridge this gap and explore the positive aspects of being a street cleaner. Phenomenological design is appropriate in this context as it explores the participants' lived experiences regarding the "sense of fulfillment."

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the sense of fulfillment experienced by street sweepers in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. Specifically, the research questions to achieve these goals are:

1. What are the essential roles of the street sweepers in the community building?
2. How do street sweepers perceive their value in the community?
3. How satisfied and contented are the street sweepers in their job?

Theoretical Framework

This study's framework was founded on the self-determination theory of motivation, which was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1985 (Ryan & Deci, 2022). This theory is particularly concerned with how social-contextual factors support or thwart people's thriving through the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, it offers an approach to understanding human motivation and personality, employing empirical methods while emphasizing the significance of humans' inherent inner resources for personal development and behavioral self-regulation (Ryan et al., 1997). This theory's concept has found application in various domains, such as education, work, parenting, exercise, and health.

According to this meta-theory, individuals are viewed as active organisms with curiosity, agency, inspiration, and self-motivation, constantly striving to learn and grow. In other words, a person's intrinsic motivation is determined by their need for growth. Studies have shown that feelings of competence will not enhance intrinsic motivation unless accompanied by a sense of autonomy or by an internal locus of causality (DeCharms, 1968), and the need for relatedness is strongly linked to each other. In competence, individuals need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When people feel they have the skills required for success, they are more likely to take action to help them achieve their goals.

In the context of this study, motivation plays a vital role in the accomplishment of work tasks for street sweepers. Providing them with increased responsibilities, support, encouragement, and meaningful feedback can significantly impact their performance. The workers' attachment to their jobs is primarily influenced by the recognition they receive, as it can fulfill their sense of self-realization and positive self-worth (Simpson et al., 2019). Street sweepers crave recognition, respect, and a sense of environmental responsibility from the community, and it is crucial to nurture these aspects (Lagura & Ligan, 2018). However, there is a paradox in the recognition given to these workers, as it may fail to translate their potential into actualities, potentially harming their self-esteem and self-respect (Slutskaya et al., 2016).

Job satisfaction significantly impacts street sweepers' motivation and ability to fulfill their responsibilities. Those who feel self-determined in their roles experience higher job satisfaction, ultimately contributing to the organization's success. Furthermore, meaningful work is associated with perceiving an authentic connection between one's job and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self (Bailey & Madden, 2017, as cited by Simpson et al., 2019). This sense of meaningfulness precedes income, job security, and promotion for individuals pursuing fulfilling employment (Cascio, 2003, as cited by Simpson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, some street sweepers face challenges related to job security, leading to inadequate compensation and nonexistent benefits. These issues stem from the complex interactions of economic laws and evaluation systems, which allow certain groups to monopolize resources and opportunities, perpetuating inequalities (Slutskaya et al., 2016). Despite the elusive nature of job security, street sweepers exhibit pride and satisfaction in their work (Lagura & Ligan, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to emphasize the exploration of a central phenomenon, beginning with identifying a problem and formulating questions that, if answered, contribute to addressing the problem (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Using in-depth interviews, a phenomenological design was utilized to delve into the personal

experiences of individuals about a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). This study is grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, or interpretive phenomenology, which serves as its guiding methodological framework. This approach is well-suited for exploring the meanings that individuals assign to their lived experiences within their everyday realities (Bynum & Varpio, 2018). Unlike descriptive phenomenology, which seeks to bracket out the researcher's perspective, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes the researcher's role in interpreting the data, allowing personal insights to enrich the analytic process. It is characterized by a continuous cycle of reflection and writing that deepens understanding of participants' narratives.

In the context of this study, this paper explores street sweepers' narratives to understand what they experience on the phenomenon through their responses, and by getting the essence or the truth of the whole experience. Hence, the methodology is appropriate as it aims to capture and interpret the subjective experiences of street sweepers concerning their sense of fulfillment. By engaging with their accounts, the research seeks to uncover the essential meanings and contextual influences that shape their perceptions and daily realities. The present study focuses on capturing street sweepers' perspectives on their "sense of fulfillment," which served as the sole subject of investigation.

This study was conducted in Tangub City, a coastal component city in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, known for its strong cultural identity, community-oriented values, and diverse livelihoods. Tangub City is situated along the southern coast of Misamis Occidental, bordered by Panguil Bay to the south and the majestic Mount Malindang to the north, covering an area of approximately 162.78 square kilometers, which comprises 55 barangays. As a locality shaped by both agricultural and urbanizing forces, Tangub offers a socio-economic landscape where individuals, particularly those in marginalized occupations, such as street sweeping, navigate complex layers of meaning in their daily lives. The city's cultural richness, embodied in its vibrant festivals and diverse ethnic composition, intersects with everyday realities shaped by labor, public service, and social recognition.

The identified participants were chosen using purposive sampling and inclusion criteria. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique also known as judgmental or selective sampling, involves the researcher's deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria such as relevance, expertise, or willingness to participate in the study (Rai & Thapa, 2015). Thus, inclusion criteria refer to the specific demographic, clinical, or geographic characteristics that define the target population and ensure the participants are appropriate for addressing the research question (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). There were a total of 21 street sweepers employed by the city during the conduct of the study and these participants were chosen based on the following requirements: (1) 25-65 years of age; (2) job order employees of the city; (3) who have experienced cleaning the street for at least one (1) year already; and

(4) willing to participate in the study. The interview was conducted from September 4 to 8, 2023.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Type of Employment	Years in Service
P1	Female	Job Order	1
P2	Female	Job Order	1
P3	Male	Job Order	1
P4	Female	Job Order	1
P5	Female	Job Order	30
P6	Female	Job Order	7
P7	Female	Job Order	1
P8	Female	Job Order	1

In Table 1, the distribution of the gender, type of employment, and years of service of the street sweepers participating in the research is given. Seven street sweepers participating in the study were female, and one was male. In terms of employment, all of them were job order employees. Six street sweepers had one year of experience, one had seven years of service, and one had 30 years of service. Based on Table 1, it can be observed that most of the street sweepers were female, none held permanent tenure, and the majority of them have just started cleaning the streets for one year already.

Due to the absence of an ethics committee in the institution, this paper underwent a research proposal hearing in the institutional research council before conducting the study. After the approval, the interview guide questionnaire utilized in this study was validated by experts from the teacher education department, and the arts and sciences department, who provided comprehensive feedback and suggestions for its enhancement. To gather data, open-ended questions were employed to elicit responses from the street sweepers. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, which allowed for organic exploration while maintaining a topical focus as the conversation progressed (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). This approach facilitated the discovery of relevant insights that emerged during the interview process (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

To conduct the study, a formal letter was sent to the office of the City Mayor, seeking permission to interview the street sweepers. Approval took four (4) days. Then, another letter was delivered personally to the head of the City Engineering Office, which supervises the

street sweepers, to request face-to-face interviews and inquire about their assigned areas and whereabouts. We had a two (2)-hour informal discussion with the head regarding the study. Next, we visited the participants at their locations in the city proper at 10 a.m., during their rest period. We greeted and introduced ourselves formally, and had informal conversations about their situations. After establishing rapport with them, we explained our objectives and the purpose of recruiting them. Consent forms were provided, and the study's purpose was comprehensively discussed with each item in the form, ensuring participants understood their involvement. After they signed, interviews were scheduled at their preferred time. Some street sweepers were unwilling to cooperate because they feared it was all about political matters and might cause their work termination. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the data collection process, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities. The interviews ranged from 10 to 20 minutes, were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. After interviewing the eight participants, the researchers reached the saturation point of their utterances. The responses were then organized and printed.

The gathered data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six (6) phase process of thematic analysis to generate codes and themes systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers read Byrne's paper (2022), which explicitly provides examples and explanations on how to follow the process of these guidelines. The analysis started with data familiarization, in which the researchers read and re-read the responses of the participants to be fully immersed in their experiences. Thereafter, the researchers generate the initial codes, where we identify the pieces of relevant information that the participants expressed through phrases and short descriptives. After identifying and reviewing the codes, the researchers generated the themes by combining all related codes to interpret all the statements of the participants' responses. Consequently, the researchers reviewed potential themes by analyzing and asking questions on the emerging themes to ensure coherence. Subsequently, the researchers defined and named the themes by extracting the participants' responses to narrate and explain the questions being addressed, aligning with the general themes. Finally, upon analyzing the themes, the researchers produced and wrote the data results by synthesizing and organizing all information and narratives to carefully explain the phenomenon being studied. The transcripts were put in Microsoft Word, and color coding was used to ensure the analytical process was correctly organized and done appropriately. After finalizing the report, the paper was subjected to deliberation and scrutiny by the college's research council during the final research paper presentation. Thereafter, the revised paper, together with the minutes of the presentation, was submitted to the council members for final checking and validation before submission to the publication.

RESULTS

This section presents the views regarding essential roles, value in the community, and contentment and satisfaction of eight (8) street sweepers with their jobs. Four (4) themes emerged from their responses, as presented below.

Maintaining Community Cleanliness and Orderliness

This theme emphasizes street sweepers' central role in upholding their community's cleanliness and orderliness. All participants emphasized that ensuring cleanliness is their primary responsibility, a duty entrusted to them by the local government. Their work begins at dawn, well before their official duty hours at 8:00 AM, reflecting their commitment to their roles. Keeping the streets clean and debris-free contributes to the community's hygiene, aesthetic appeal, and overall livability. This sense of responsibility fosters a deep pride in their work among the street sweepers.

Street sweepers' narratives on their essential roles:

P1: "I sweep the streets... towards the bridge; that is where I sweep... My job is probably to serve and make the city orderly and clean."

P2: "I sweep from the gadget store to BDO, Cebuana, Emcor, Manukan ng Bayan, Bookstore, up to the bridge near Prince Hypermart... Yes, the cleanliness in the surroundings because you can see that everything is clean."

P3: "My tasks here include sweeping the streets, mopping, and repairing damaged tables."

P4: "What I do is just cleaning, fulfilling my tasks, and being honest with my work... In one day, I can make a big difference by cleaning my area."

P5: "My first task was to sweep the upper and lower Maloro areas... I sweep and leave when it is time to go home."

P6: "I do tasks like sweeping, mopping, and cleaning tables. Yes, mostly on the streets."

P7: "I sweep the streets, the area around my assigned area, like from Function Hall 1 going to Velasco, down to Migcanaway, and Akawi... The greatest thing I have done is just doing my job—sweeping every day."

P8: "I start sweeping around 6 AM because I want to get things done early to ensure everything is clean... It is a big responsibility now to maintain cleanliness, sir."

Street sweepers are strategically assigned to different areas and corners of the community to ensure comprehensive coverage. Beyond cleaning tasks, many participants juggle multiple responsibilities, such as mopping floors, repairing public infrastructure, and maintaining facilities like restrooms and benches. Their contributions extend beyond physical labor and assist community members and visitors by providing directions and information. This multifaceted role highlights their function as custodians of cleanliness and as stewards of public spaces and informal liaisons between the city and its residents or guests. Their work elevates the city's image as a clean, organized, and welcoming environment.

Street sweepers' narratives on additional responsibilities:

P3: "My tasks here include sweeping the streets, mopping, and repairing damaged tables... There was a time I worked on benches, those seating areas."

P4: "I maintain the women's restroom... and distribute chairs because people borrow benches... Visitors would ask, 'Ma'am, where is the...? Or 'Ma'am, can I ask where this is? Does it have a fee?'"

P5: "When people ask, 'Where is this? Ma'am, where is this, and is there a fee?' I answer them... Sometimes, they ask where they can get their MDR."

P6: "I watered the plants, mopped the floor, wiped the tables, and swept the streets."

These narratives collectively illustrate the street sweepers' dedication to maintaining their community spaces' cleanliness, functionality, and hospitality. Their work addresses practical needs and fosters a positive and orderly community atmosphere.

Upholding Professional Integrity and Work Ethic

Integrity and a strong work ethic form the foundation of the street sweepers' professional identity, enhancing their credibility and the trust they foster within their community. Participants consistently emphasized that being responsible and trustworthy in one's duties is vital in fulfilling their roles and contributing to the city's progress. They exhibit professionalism through punctuality, honesty, and diligence, ensuring the reliability of their services. Returning lost items and adhering to their schedules are key examples of their commitment to ethical standards. Furthermore, the participants view their work as a significant contribution to the city's development, motivated by external supervision and their

internal sense of responsibility. As noted, their performance, monitored by their supervisors, serves as the basis for renewing their six-month contracts.

The importance of being committed to their job is reflected in the participants' narratives:

P1: "We just need to be honest and hardworking, so we will not cause trouble for our supervisor."

P2: "We just need to be honest in our work and come in at the right time for our duty... I applied for this job."

P3: "I need to be serious about my work; that is my investment as an employee. I must be honest because if my performance is not good, my contract will not be renewed, since it is only for six months... Even though we only earn 375 pesos, I am content because I work for the government."

P4: "It gives a good reputation to the city to have workers who are good at cleaning... I give my service; I do not ask for payment because I am already getting paid by the government."

P5: "I am proud that I have clean areas... I do my job properly because we will not be hired elsewhere if we do not work seriously."

P6: "We are given simple tasks, but do them sincerely. You will not be renewed if you are dishonest and serious about your work... It is just being honest, like returning a wallet that I found... It is all about being honest in your work."

P7: "We start at 5 AM... Then we stop at 10 AM and return at 2 PM because it is too hot... I do my work honestly... I feel ashamed if others see me resting while there is work to do... I want them to see that I am doing my work properly... Sometimes, I return to pick up the trash I missed to ensure everything is clean."

P8: "We start our shift at 4 AM, before sunrise... I continue sweeping until 10 AM... When you are working in your area, you need to focus."

In addition to fulfilling their essential responsibilities, participants often expressed a willingness to exceed expectations by starting work earlier or volunteering extra hours to ensure tasks are completed. This voluntary commitment reflects their dedication and fulfillment in meaningfully contributing to their community.

Participant narratives on voluntary commitment:

P1: "I always make sure it is clean; sometimes I even go further than needed to clean.... I ensure I do not just wander around and that I do not get removed from my job because this is my livelihood."

P3: "We also help clean each other's areas."

P4: "We volunteer to work early because it is already crowded in the morning with people."

Participants also highlighted their gratitude and happiness for their roles. Despite the contractual nature of their employment and modest earnings, they viewed their positions as vital to their well-being. This gratitude stresses their positive outlook and sense of contentment.

Participant narratives on gratitude:

P2: "I am happy to have been accepted because it is tough to find a job."

P5: "I am happy with my job. I may not have achieved much, but I am content."

P6: "Right now, our employment is just contractual, but we do not wish for something greater, even if it is a maintenance position. If there is a steady job, that is all we hope for... I am very thankful to God for helping us with our lives... I am grateful."

P7: "I am also happy that I got this job because I do not have any other work, no other job. I am grateful that they accepted me... I am not looking for anything else because I do not have many other job options."

The participant's commitment to professional integrity and work ethic ensures the effective delivery of their responsibilities and contributes to their satisfaction and the community's trust. Their narratives highlight how values such as honesty, diligence, and gratitude reinforce their roles as vital contributors to urban cleanliness and orderliness. These traits reflect the essential link between individual work ethics and community progress.

Being Acknowledged and Respected in the Community

This theme highlights the appreciation and recognition that participants receive from their community and supervisors. Such acknowledgment is a vital source of motivation, fostering a sense of belonging and validation for their efforts. Recognition, whether through tangible gestures, verbal praise, or displays of respect, significantly boosts morale and sustains the workers' dedication to their roles. These findings underline the importance of

community engagement in promoting a positive work environment and reinforcing the value of the participant's contributions.

Tangible Acts of Gratitude

Participants reported experiencing a deep sense of value and belonging within their community when receiving tangible tokens of appreciation. These gestures, often small but meaningful, affirmed their role despite the perceived social hierarchy of professions. Receiving necessities or tokens of gratitude eased daily burdens and was an essential motivator to continue their work.

One participant reflected on the impact of these acts:

P1: "When they give you something, it is a big deal to me. During birthdays, the celebrants prepare food to eat for everybody. They always gave me food."

Another participant shared a similar sentiment:

P3: "The vendors of the fish section always gave us fish to be grilled. They sometimes give us grilled fish as a token of appreciation. They gave it with willingness."

Others emphasized the significance of receiving gifts during special occasions, which strengthened their sense of worth:

P5: "Yes, like at Christmas, they give me something, and they also give gifts during Christmas, even from the city. They also give, especially from the wealthy ones."

P6: "I was thrilled when they gave me enough groceries. It will be of big help since payday is on the 15th day of the month. We get bonuses from the city mayor."

These expressions of gratitude relieved financial pressures and reinforced the participants' perception of their importance within the community.

Verbal Expressions of Appreciation

Beyond material gifts, participants highlighted the profound impact of verbal acknowledgment and encouragement. Simple words of gratitude, compliments, and greetings significantly uplifted their morale and validated their efforts. These verbal expressions served as affirmations of the street sweepers' contributions to the cleanliness and harmony of the community.

One participant shared:

P1: "They always say, 'Your area is really clean; you are hardworking.'"

Another participant noted the importance of being appreciated by their supervisors:

P3: "Our head is happy when they see our clean area. It feels good to be appreciated; it makes me happy to hear that."

Expressions of gratitude from the community also played a significant role:

P4: "Some people express gratitude, but I do not ask for anything. People praise my work, saying that I am doing well. I always keep my area clean when they appreciate me for keeping the comfort room clean."

Participants emphasized the sincerity of simple greetings, which reflected respect and acknowledgment:

P7: "When they see us working, they always show their respect to us by greeting us 'Good morning.'"

P8: "Our mayor and other officials even shake hands with us and ask, 'Are you okay, ma'am?' or they would say, 'Good morning!'"

These interactions cultivated a sense of connection and mutual respect, reinforcing the participants' motivation to continue their work.

Recognition and Respect for Good Work

Recognition and respect emerged as essential elements in fostering a positive work environment. Participants valued being treated with kindness and politeness, as these interactions enriched their relationships with community members and enhanced their work experiences. The sense of being respected and acknowledged encouraged participants to maintain high task standards.

One participant expressed how their efforts were noticed:

P2: "I think they see me as a good person because they noticed that I clean well."

Others shared stories of being treated with care and respect:

P5: "They are kind to me and ask if I have eaten. They care about me. They say, 'Have you eaten already?' Moreover, they treat me well."

P6: "I just feel thankful for the kindness and sincerity of others. I am thankful because of the kindness of our mayor."

The importance of everyday gestures of politeness was also emphasized:

P7: "They greet us with a 'Good morning' and ask for respect."

Such recognition and respect fostered a sense of dignity and pride in their work, strengthening their connection to the community and their commitment to their roles.

Supporting Family Livelihood and Well-Being

This theme emphasizes the sense of fulfillment and contentment street sweepers experience in supporting their families through work. Despite limited financial resources and the modest income associated with their jobs, the participants consistently expressed satisfaction, gratitude, and a deep sense of purpose in their roles. Their work enables them to address family needs, achieve financial stability, and maintain a sense of independence. The participants' narratives reflect an intrinsic motivation rooted in familial obligations and the desire to ensure a better future for their loved ones. Many shared how their earnings help pay debts, cover their children's school expenses, and provide for daily necessities, thus creating a ripple effect of stability and security within their households. Even with financial challenges, their resilience and resourcefulness allow them to adapt and remain content. Beyond financial gains, the participants emphasized the value of consistency in their employment. Having a regular income, no matter how modest, offers a sense of security and accomplishment. For some, the job represents a long-awaited opportunity to work for the government, adding to their pride and motivation.

The participants' testimonials provide a vivid account of their contentment and commitment to their work, as highlighted below:

P1: "Yes, I am contented. Whenever payday comes, I can pay off my debt, buy rice... I am content with my job. Yes, I can even dress well... Also, I can provide for the expenses of my students whom I send to school and buy things they need at school...Even though we are just job-order employees, I am already so grateful for what we have."

P2: "Yes, it is fine, sir, because I can still manage my problems, such as buying household items and food. Yes, I can manage it for my family and grandchildren, especially since their father has no stable job...It is fine, and I do not have any complaints."

P3: *"I am content with my job, even though we only earn 375 pesos. If you calculate it, it is not enough because everything is expensive now. However, it is okay because there are lending options here. My family can still get by. Of course, we would all like higher salaries, but it is not always possible. I am content because I am working in the government."*

P4: *"I am happy with this job because I have long dreamed of working for the government. I have a college student so that I can provide for their needs...I am content with my job because it allows me to provide for our needs, even if it is just a small amount, as long as it is consistent. I have a salary to look forward to. When my family needs something, I work hard to meet those demands, even before payday."*

P5: *"I am just happy that I do not have to depend on my children because I earn my income, sir. I am truly grateful to God for this job. I have prayed to Him for good health so I can continue working and supporting myself... I am happy with my job. I may not have achieved much, but I am content... It helps my family, sir, because I am a widow now. I do not have a husband anymore...I am happy I do not have to depend on my children."*

P6: *"Still, we are happy and content with what we have. It has solved our problems, especially with food and other necessities. Even if it is just a small amount, we make it work because we would not even be able to borrow money if we did not have jobs...There have been significant improvements in my life. For instance, I have been able to buy small things and repair my house. This year has brought me so much joy because of my job. I am truly grateful."*

P7: *"I am okay with it. I do my work every day, and even when I am tired, I do not mind because I am focused on my goal: supporting my child's education. I have a third-year college student, and I work hard to ensure she can continue her studies."*

P8: *"Yes, I am content, sir. I am okay. Even with a small salary, it is still helpful. That is how it is. I am fine with it, sir. I can contribute to our household. For example, my husband might ask me to buy additional fishing nets if we are short on supplies."*

While their earnings may be modest, the participants' ability to provide for their families fosters a sense of accomplishment and pride. Their intrinsic motivation, driven by familial obligations, reflects the values of hard work and perseverance. It also serves as a testament to their integral role in building a resilient and cohesive society.

DISCUSSIONS

Despite the inherently challenging nature of their job, street sweepers shed light on its positive aspects through their lived experiences. Emerging themes reveal that participants view their work as essential to fostering a clean and well-maintained urban environment. Street sweepers are critical in promoting environmental health by maintaining cleanliness and contributing to a visually appealing and orderly urban setting (Habybabady et al., 2018; Johnson & John, 2020). Removing litter, leaves, and other debris helps uphold the city's aesthetics and hygiene (Zamora et al., 2018; Kabir et al., 2015). This highlights the indispensable role of street sweepers in preserving their environment's hygiene, organization, and visual appeal. Their contributions form the backbone of a clean and well-maintained community, significantly impacting public health by preventing waste accumulation and mitigating potential hazards. The daily routine of street sweepers starts as early as 4 to 5 in the morning to avoid the sun's intense heat. The street sweepers' dedication is evident in their early work hours and unwavering commitment to community standards, reflecting not just physical labor but also a profound sense of purpose and responsibility. Their responsibilities include cleaning designated areas and adhering to scheduled rest periods. Their efforts extend beyond basic cleaning tasks, including mopping, repairing infrastructure, watering plants, and managing public facilities. Their multifaceted roles position them as vital custodians of public spaces and key intermediaries between the city administration and its residents. These contributions resonate far beyond their immediate tasks, enhancing the city's image as a clean, welcoming, and organized destination, fostering community pride, supporting tourism, and elevating the quality of life for its inhabitants. Despite the physical demands and early hours, street sweepers recognize their vital role in the community, reflecting intrinsic motivation derived from their perceived competence in performing a valued task. According to the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), fulfilling the need for competence enhances intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. This alignment between their duties and community value reinforces their sense of pride and accomplishment, contributing to their well-being.

Moreover, besides maintaining cleanliness, participants emphasize the centrality of personal values such as integrity, honesty, and diligence in defining the professional identity of street sweepers. They narrated the importance of commitment to their job as another way to help the community. Subsequently, they emphasized their responsibility to deliver high-quality service, recognizing that their performance impacts the city's reputation and job security. Additionally, they must be hardworking, responsible, and honest. Since all the participants are on a job order, individual performance is crucial for renewing their contract. Indeed, they are working with no tenure security, which leads to meager compensation and nonexistent benefits (Lagura & Ligan, 2018). Despite modest financial compensation, street sweepers find

immense personal fulfillment in their roles, expressing gratitude and satisfaction with their work. Their willingness to volunteer extra hours or begin tasks earlier illustrates an intrinsic motivation rooted in a sense of duty and pride. Nevertheless, one participant mentioned that doing their job well is a form of investment. Hence, having a sense of commitment to their task is the least they could contribute towards the city's progress. Despite challenging conditions such as non-permanent contracts, commitment to their work can be understood through the Self-Determination Theory's need for autonomy. While street sweepers have little control over their employment security, their internal commitment and dedication to their work reflect an internalization of their role. This internal commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities despite external constraints is an example of intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation is derived from their belief in the value of their work and the personal satisfaction they derive from performing their duties diligently.

Through participants' efforts in doing their daily tasks, they are appreciated by the people in the community. Simpson et al. (2019) claimed that workers' attachment to their jobs is primarily influenced by the recognition they receive, as it can fulfill their sense of self-realization and positive self-worth. Being acknowledged and respected in the community reveals the profound impact of recognition and appreciation on the morale and dedication of street sweepers. Tangible acts of gratitude, such as food, groceries, or bonuses, alleviate financial burdens while affirming their importance to the community. Verbal expressions of appreciation, including compliments and greetings, provide emotional validation and a sense of respect, thereby, fostering a positive work environment. A central belief of SDT is that the best way to get human beings to perform tasks is to reinforce their behavior with rewards (O'Hara, 2017). These gestures enhance their self-esteem and reinforce their commitment to maintaining high standards. A study in Indonesia would agree that street sweepers' loyalty is based on fulfilling rewards following expectations. If their work climate is improved, they could have a good quality of work life (Salmah et al., 2021). They felt a sense of belonging since people approached and welcomed them willingly and openly. This experience strongly resonates with the theory's component of relatedness, which emphasizes the importance of feeling connected and valued by others. These tokens made the cleaners feel valued and respected, strengthening their connection to the community. Positive social interactions and a sense of appreciation satisfy the need for relatedness, a critical factor for motivation and psychological well-being (Baard et al., 2004). This social validation is crucial for satisfying the need for relatedness, as it helps street sweepers feel integrated into the community. In contrast to other studies where street sweepers feel marginalized and unrecognized (Gidwani, 2015; Goswami & Divi, 2019; Olafimihan et al., 2020), the experience of the cleaners demonstrates that positive community interaction can enhance their sense of fulfillment and well-being, thereby, reinforcing their motivation and dedication to their work. Participants shared how acknowledgment from community members and supervisors created a culture of mutual

respect, motivating them to sustain their diligence. When workers feel that their contributions are recognized and valued by others, it fosters a stronger sense of community and enhances their overall job satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the street sweepers expressed contentment with their jobs as they could provide for their families despite the low pay and lack of job security. This reflects the fulfillment of competence in the Self-Determination Theory in a broader context, where their ability to sustain their families contributes to their self-worth and job satisfaction. Indeed, there is pride and satisfaction in being a street cleaner (Lagura & Ligan, 2018). Their happiness and joy while on the job signify the contentment and satisfaction it brings to their lives. Hence, although the street sweepers are not permanent in their tenure, the salary they could receive every first and second half of the month would help provide necessary things for their families. As they shared, despite modest earnings, participants consistently expressed satisfaction with their jobs, valuing financial stability, independence, and the ability to meet household needs. Their work enabled them to pay off debts, support their children's education, and manage daily expenses, underscoring the critical role of consistent employment in fostering household resilience. Consequently, 97.81% of sweepers in Ethiopia had no job satisfaction (Gebremedhn & Raman, 2020), waste workers are poorly compensated in India (Gidwani, 2015), and have meager compensation in the Philippines (Lagura & Ligan, 2018). Nonetheless, the ability to meet their family's needs, even with limited resources, gives street sweepers a sense of achievement and fulfillment. The participants' narratives revealed their resourcefulness in managing limited resources and their gratitude for the independence afforded by their work. This perseverance reflects a broader social value, as their dedication contributes not only to their family's well-being but also to the overall stability and functionality of the community. This result highlights how competence in economic contribution and self-sufficiency is key to their satisfaction and well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken because there is a lack of research literature that genuinely captures the comprehensive nature of street sweepers' lives and the positive aspects of being on the job. Hence, street sweepers are pivotal to maintaining public spaces' cleanliness, orderliness, and functionality. Their work is instrumental in achieving community hygiene and aesthetic standards and is critical to urban governance and public welfare. Their commitment to their duties, underpinned by values of honesty, responsibility, and dedication, contributes significantly to the community's trust and efficient delivery of urban cleaning services. The street sweepers' voluntary commitment to exceeding expectations and their positive outlook on their work, despite the challenges posed by contractual employment and modest earnings, reflect the essential role of intrinsic motivation in fostering a dedicated

workforce. Furthermore, being acknowledged and respected by the community significantly enhances their morale and commitment to their work. These scenarios not only motivate the participants to uphold high standards of service but also strengthen their connection to the community, contributing to a more harmonious and productive urban environment and fostering a sense of belonging and validation. Lastly, street sweepers derive significant satisfaction and fulfillment from their work due to their ability to support their families despite the modest financial rewards. Their sense of contentment stems from the stability, independence, and financial relief their jobs provide, allowing them to meet family needs and secure a better future for their loved ones. Their intrinsic motivation is driven by a deep sense of responsibility and care for their families, ultimately fueling their commitment to street sweep roles. Overall, applying the context of Self-Determination Theory as a framework for this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the street sweepers' sense of fulfillment. Despite the challenges associated with their job, the fulfillment of their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness through their work and community interactions contributes significantly to their motivation and overall well-being. These results are highlighted by Bailey and Madden (2017), as cited by Simpson et al. (2019), that meaningful work is associated with perceiving an authentic connection between one's job and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self. A study by Cascio (2003), as cited by Simpson et al. (2019), further explained that this sense of meaningfulness precedes income, job security, and promotion for individuals pursuing fulfilling employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers acknowledge certain limitations of the study. A majority of participants had only one (1) year of work experience, primarily due to the non-renewal of contracts among long-serving street sweepers following a change in political administration. Consequently, some participants struggled to elaborate on their lived experiences in depth. It is, therefore, recommended that a similar study be conducted in a different setting, specifically involving participants with at least five (5) years of work experience as street sweepers. This would likely yield more contextually rich and comprehensive narratives. Additionally, the present study did not undergo ethical review from a local ethics committee due to its absence in the area. However, the researchers sought guidance and critique from academic experts and the college research council, including during the faculty research presentation. To enhance data interpretation and reporting, the researchers also used ChatGPT for suggestions and language refinement, which were later cross-validated by experts.

Based on the study's findings, several action-oriented recommendations are put forward. The city government is encouraged to recognize the essential contributions of street sweepers by ensuring fair wages, adequate benefits, and stable job security, particularly for

those who have served for decades. Specific programs should be institutionalized to uphold their dignity and motivation, such as the introduction of performance-based recognition systems like “Employee of the Month” awards, “Service Excellence” citations, and incentives during community or city-wide events, which boost morale and emphasize their value to the community, can foster greater motivation and job satisfaction. To address the issue of employment instability arising from political transitions, the study recommends the establishment of a “Security of Tenure Framework” for job order employees, including street sweepers. This could be institutionalized through local ordinances or administrative policies that protect long-serving employees from arbitrary dismissal due to political turnover. The framework could include criteria-based contract renewals, grievance mechanisms, and the creation of plantilla (permanent) positions for qualified workers.

Future research could explore ways to improve job security and benefits for workers in similar sectors, ensuring their efforts are recognized and adequately rewarded. Hence, future research is encouraged to explore benchmarking practices from both local private organizations and international models where sanitation workers receive employment protections, health and welfare benefits, and career development programs. These models can be adapted and contextualized to suit the Philippine local government setting and could inform the crafting of inclusive labor policies for marginalized urban workers. Finally, building upon the qualitative findings of this study, future researchers may adopt a quantitative approach to determine the extent to which the themes uncovered are experienced by a broader population of street sweepers. Such empirical validation may help in crafting data-driven policy decisions aimed at improving their work conditions and overall sense of fulfillment.

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