

# Enhancing Safety and Security at Sea: Experiences of the Philippine Coast Guard Personnel in Eastern Visayas, Philippines

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## Abstract

This research explored the experiences of the Philippine Coast Guard personnel in enforcing maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, the study investigates the challenges encountered by the PCG personnel and the strategies employed in addressing them. The researchers employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, using a validated interview guide. An in-depth interview and focus group discussion were conducted with 18 permanent PCG personnel with more than three years of working experience. Colaizzi's approach was employed to analyze the data comprehensively. The findings revealed the positive workforce dynamics, operational challenges, and strategic approaches to maritime safety and security of the PCG personnel. However, national and local government units should allocate funds for the PCG personnel for professional development, such as comprehensive training programs and mental and psychological support, resource allocation for equipment and infrastructure, and community awareness campaigns. International, national, and local collaborations should also be strengthened to maintain maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas. Future research should explore the effects of resource constraints and the emotional toll on PCG personnel's well-being and performance, as well as the effectiveness of implemented strategies on maritime safety and security indicators in Eastern Visayas.

**Keywords:** Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Coast Guard personnel, maritime safety, maritime security, Eastern Visayas, Philippines



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## INTRODUCTION

The implementation of maritime search and rescue, maritime law enforcement, maritime safety, maritime environmental preservation, and maritime security is all under the purview of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). Like coast guard forces worldwide, the PCG is in charge of implementing statutes inside the territorial waters of the Philippines, including protecting people and property at sea and protecting the marine environment and resources through maritime security activities. It is affiliated with the Department of Transportation and is acknowledged as the Philippines' third armed, uniformed service (OWWA Member, 2022).

Moreover, maritime incidents occur unexpectedly despite the efforts of the PCG to enforce the safety and security of their assigned

naval areas. The Insurance Information Institute (2024) reported that the Philippines is one of the regions, including South China, Indochina, and Indonesia, with eight shipping losses overall in 2023, and over the last ten years, these regions have had the most shipping losses.

Likewise, in Eastern Visayas, Philippines, there were records of sea accidents, including fishing vessels, passenger vessels, and transport vessels, such as the sinking of the ship M/B Kim Nirvana (Dioquino, 2015) and M/V Lite Ferry in Ormoc City (Meniano, 2021), the sinking of boats in Leyte (Joves, 2021), the capsizing of boats (Meniano, 2022), and the sinking of cargo ships in Northern Samar (Sadongdong, 2024). These incidents frequently end in terrible loss of life and considerable property damage. The PCG's exhaustive hard work to ensure people's safety through vessel inspections is hindered by some

factors. Furthermore, there is also a serious risk due to the widespread illicit fishing industry (Layson, 2024) in the region, which is frequently carried out by boats with subpar safety standards and disdain for the law. On the other hand, accidents are also caused by certain boat operators' ignorance of and disrespect for safety rules (Meniano, 2025) imposed by the PCG, especially in the maritime and small-scale fishing industries (Reyes, 2021). The issue is made worse by the community's propensity to disregard PCG warnings and cautions during unfavorable weather conditions, resulting in maritime catastrophes (The Philippine Star, 2022).

Hence, the PCG personnel in Eastern Visayas always encounter varied challenges in fighting maritime crimes as well as preventing and responding to maritime accidents and maintaining the safety and security of the assigned maritime domain; therefore, a comprehensive investigation into this matter is necessary to acknowledge the complexity and importance of PCG personnel's work. The researchers looked into this matter to delve into the PCG personnel's experiences in enforcing laws and maintaining the safety and security of the territorial waters of the entire region of Eastern Visayas.

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of the PCG personnel in enforcing maritime safety and security. This research provides information on the various experiences of the PCG personnel, specifically on their positive and negative experiences and strategies to maintain the safety and security of the maritime areas of their assigned stations.

**Conceptual Framework.** Husserl's phenomenology is the basis for exploring the PCG personnel's experiences, particularly concerning implementing maritime safety and security. In addition, Smith (2003) said that phenomenology is the study of how consciousness works, what it means to have intention, and how consciousness is linked to an object, which is what the experience developed. Additionally, Creswell (2013) explained that phenomenology can extract the comprehensive

essence of a phenomenon from the different lived experiences of an individual or group of people. In addition, Qutoshi (2018) said that phenomenology used in social science provides a way to study human phenomena at a deep level of consciousness.

Husserl (2012) emphasizes in favor of the epoché, which separates the natural attitude and provides access to the deeper structures of consciousness. To demonstrate the noetic-nematic correlation, which illustrates how consciousness intentionally produces the world, Husserl also establishes phenomenological reduction. According to Moran (2002) and Husserl and Moran (2012), phenomenology is a technique for attentively analyzing lived experience, following its development, and elucidating important ideas like intentionality and phenomenological reduction. They underlined how important it is to comprehend how consciousness affects our reality. Therefore, this study seeks to bracket preconceived notions, assess the essential structures of PCG personnel's experiences, and investigate how these individuals constitute their operational realities, transcending subjective impressions to reveal universal structures of experience. Also, Dewey's (2012) idea of experience describes how people change and interact with their surroundings. It explains the role of the PCG personnel by affecting or being affected by their maritime background, and it also supports this study.

However, Szanto and Moran (2015) emphasized that intersubjectivity and our shared experiences of existing in this world are a big part of sociality and essential to the human experience. It is shown in the personal experiences of the PCG personnel, who understand that their shared maritime interactions and experiences are related to how they see their roles and responsibilities.

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method, with specific application of the descriptive phenomenological approach, was utilized in this study. A total of 18 participants were purposively chosen to

participate in the study. All the participants are personnel of the PCG with more than three years of working experience in enforcing maritime safety and security. In gathering the qualitative data, the researchers employed a verified, approved, and validated interview guide to get the necessary data from the participants.

In-depth interviews were done with the six (6) participants while a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was undertaken with twelve (12) participants, with a total of 18 PCG personnel. The researchers used this approach to guarantee the validity and dependability of the interview process as well as the participants' reliable answers, which produced precise and trustworthy study results.

The study followed Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis. First is familiarization, in which researchers review and examine the interview transcript. The second is identifying significant statements through coding essential statements from the participant interview transcript. Thirdly, formulated meanings were made through the coded significant statements. Fourthly, cluster themes are developed from the formulated meanings. Fifthly, the creation of exhaustive descriptions or emergent themes from the cluster themes. Then, seeking verification of the emergent themes. The researchers presented the emergent themes to the participants for validation and comparison with the descriptive results made by the researchers to describe the participants' experiences as the phenomenon of this study.

## RESULTS

The Experiences of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Personnel. The experiences of the PCG personnel provide an understanding of the enforcement and maintenance of maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas. Through an inclusive investigation of the experiences of the PCG personnel, three convincing themes prevailed. These themes describe the positive and negative experiences and strategies in addressing challenges in enforcing and maintaining maritime safety and security.

The following are the themes that described the experiences of the PCG personnel, to wit:

1. Positive Workforce Dynamics
2. Operational Challenges
3. Strategic Approaches to Maritime Safety and Security

These three themes underscore the diverse experiences of the PCG personnel while enforcing maritime safety and security within their assigned stations in Eastern Visayas. In addition, these themes emphasize the PCG personnel's dedication and commitment toward their work, the different challenges they have encountered, and the strategies they have used to address the challenges in the implementation of maritime safety and security in the region.

Theme 1. Positive Workforce Dynamics. Theme 1 described the positive experiences of the PCG personnel while performing their duties. The study's results exposed the PCG personnel's work fulfillment and satisfaction, and strong work ethic, which was boosted through public appreciation and support. These sub-themes elucidate the participants' positive workforce dynamics.

*Work Fulfillment and Satisfaction.* Findings showed that all participants felt fulfilled and satisfied performing their jobs as PCG personnel, particularly in conducting their maritime operations. These factors encourage members to carry out their tasks and obligations at their assigned PCG stations. Additionally, Participant 2 joyfully mentioned that she was able to save and assist others through her line of work. She revealed that:

*"I felt satisfied on my part because I used my profession to help others, and in this situation the Coast Guard courage and ability are being used since Coast Guard are not only for inspecting vessels, in port but even in conducting search and rescue during calamity, it is very satisfying because people are grateful that you helped them." (Participant 2)*

Moreover, Participant 4 disclosed his fulfillment when they saved and rescued people despite the challenges they encountered to accomplish their mission and achieve positive results. He said that:

*"It's very satisfying, ma'am, because after all your hard work, you should always strive for positive results. That's why it's so rewarding when a rescue is successful. I'm not just assigned here; I've been involved in similar rescue operations at other stations, too. It's always fulfilling to know that we've been able to save someone." (Participant 4)*

Furthermore, Participant 8 mentioned that he is inspired to pursue excellence in his profession by work fulfilment. He stated that:

*"Once you start doing your duty, you will feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that you are helping others. This feeling of fulfillment motivates you to do more and strive for excellence in your work." (Participant 8)*

Additionally, Participant 13 expressed his satisfaction and fulfilment once they accomplished their mission and achieved their objectives, particularly in search and rescue operations. He revealed that:

*"Regarding our search and rescue operations, ma'am, the most fulfilling aspect is completing our missions. It is incredibly rewarding to see the results of our efforts and achieve our objectives." (Participant 13)*

Participant 14 shared that there was a feeling of fulfilment once their troop was able to help the people, and when he would see their troop members happy for achieving their objectives, he stated that:

*"I feel a sense of satisfaction, ma'am, when our troops can assist the locals and complete their missions successfully. Seeing my team happy is also very rewarding." (Participant 14)*

Additionally, Participant 16 mentioned that there is satisfaction and fulfilment on her

part if she can contribute positively to the community. She said that:

*"It is satisfying, ma'am, knowing that you have positively influenced your community, particularly in times of distress like Typhoon Agaton; you have transformed into a bridge that unites families." (Participant 16)*

Participant 17 also shared his satisfaction and fulfilment when they could help the community while gaining knowledge and experience in their accomplished mission.

*"It is fulfilling, ma'am, because it's a two-way street. We can help others, and in return, we gain valuable experience and knowledge from the missions and tasks assigned to us. It is rewarding to know that we are making a positive impact on people's lives." (Participant 17)*

**Strong Work Ethic.** The second positive experience of the participants in performing their duties and responsibilities is the strong work ethic that the agency molded from the moment they joined the service. Nearly all participants have expressed devotion and dedication, often sacrificing personal and family time to fulfill their obligations. This was mentioned by Participant 1 that she would immediately report to their office when their immediate supervisor instructed her to report, even though she was on vacation leave. She was confidently saying:

*"So, there is a feeling of satisfaction on the part of the Coast Guard because people could see the dedication of the personnel, for example on my part ma'am, if the station would instruct me to report, I would report without any hesitation, and complaints, I need to report back in my station immediately especially if it is an order." (Participant 1)*

As Participant 2 confirmed, the dedication and commitment of the Coast Guard personnel can be seen in devoting their time more often to their work than to their families. She stated that:

*"Dedication is really needed in our work because we stayed much longer in our work than in our home, so until now I am still learning, and attending schoolings to grow, and enhance my knowledge in this chosen profession, and maybe if I am not dedicated I had quit from this work early." (Participant 2)*

Additionally, Participant 8 added that their dedication to serving the people and the nation began when they enlisted in the agency. He also said that he needs to prioritize his work, even if there are family matters, he needs to attend to. He was emotional when he said that:

*"The moment you apply for a uniformed service, you're committing yourself to a 24/7 job. It's a lifelong commitment to serving the people and the country." (Participant 8)*

*"You cannot prioritize your personal needs over the needs of the nation. Even if your family is sick, your duty to serve the country comes first. This is the commitment you made when you joined the uniformed service." (Participant 8)*

Likewise, Participant 9 shared that fulfilling his duties and functions made him more dedicated and committed to his work. This is what he said:

*"The fact that we can fulfill our duties and serve the people makes me feel dedicated and committed to my work." (Participant 9)*

Similarly, Participant 13 added that the more dedicated they are in fulfilling their duties, the more their commitment and dedication will develop. This is what he said:

*"Because, ma'am, responsibilities cannot be neglected. They cannot simply be abandoned. The more dedicated one is to fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, the more their dedication and commitment will grow." (Participant 13)*

According to Participant 17, his squad exhibits a great work ethic. They continue to

work until they are exhausted to complete the task at hand. He humbly said that:

*"You see, ma'am, our troops are often exhausted, but they always maintain professionalism and carry out their duties. Even our senior officers, who are also tired, continue to perform their tasks because they feel it's their duty. Seeing them fulfill their responsibilities is gratifying, no matter how challenging the situation." (Participant 17)*

Furthermore, Participant 18 said that he would give his 100 percent commitment to his work in returning the favor to the Coast Guard for allowing him to join the service. He said that:

*"As a way of giving back to the Coast Guard, I pledge my full commitment. I consider it my duty to fulfill my responsibilities to the organization." (Participant 18)*

Theme 2. Operational Challenges. The findings of the study also revealed the operational challenges of the PCG personnel encountered in performing their duties. Three sub-themes were found to describe the difficulties faced by PCG personnel: the lack of resources, negative perceptions and misconceptions of the community on their work, and the emotional toll of duty.

**Resource Constraints.** The result of the study emphasized that a lack of facilities, personnel, and equipment is a shortage of resources for the participants, which are vital in performing their duties, and also affect the maritime safety and security implementation. This was supported by the statement of Participant 1 when she shared that the budget is the main problem of the PCG agency. She was so frustrated, saying that:

*"So far, our main problem is the budget, unlike other agencies such as PNP and BFP, which are already established agencies, and if ever there is deployment and no gas available, it could compromise the deployment." (Participant 1)*



Participant 3 supported the statement of Participant 1 when he mentioned that they are lacking personnel. He revealed that:

*"Our department, ma'am, is currently experiencing a shortage of personnel. Consequently, the number of functioning units is limited, and we are therefore assisting in other areas. It's as if we are performing a bundled set of tasks, ma'am."* (Participant 3)

He also added that they lacked equipment, particularly floating assets, which hindered their operations. He stated that:

*"Perhaps, ma'am, based on our experiences, one of our biggest challenges is the lack of equipment. During operations, we often find ourselves without the necessary tools, especially floating assets. Sometimes, they are even out of order and unusable, ma'am."* (Participant 3)

Participant 4 also divulged that floating assets are one of the lacking equipment in their station. He said that:

*"Our response times are further hindered by the lack of available floating assets. Many of our vessels are currently undergoing repairs, limiting our operational capacity. So we just tap LGU to borrow their available floating asset."* (Participant 4)

Participant 5 expressed that they lack life-saving equipment to be used for search and rescue operations. He revealed that:

*"One of our biggest challenges is the lack of adequate equipment, especially life-saving devices. Sometimes, we have to borrow equipment from the station or the local government. This shortage of resources can significantly hinder our operations."* (Participant 5)

Moreover, Participant 16 exposed that they also need a big establishment so that they could accommodate all their clients. She said that:

*"Ma'am, in my opinion, one of the major issues is the infrastructure of our stations and substations. Many of them lack adequate office space, making it difficult to accommodate clients or the public."* (Participant 16)

**Negative Community Perceptions and Misconceptions.** Participants divulged that they were hurt if people misunderstood their work and would comment negatively, saying that they are abusing their power without knowing that they are only honestly doing their job and following the orders of their heads. As revealed by Participant 1, they had felt stressed because people would say that they were cowards for not fighting the Chinese Coast Guard, particularly in protecting the West Philippine Sea. She expressed this in her disappointed voice, saying that:

*"Yes, ma'am, we also felt stressed since there were also people criticizing us, especially in the West Philippine Sea, where the Chinese used water cannon against the Coast Guard personnel because they did not know that we were only following orders and that is to implement tolerance."* (Participant 1)

*"People criticized us, saying we were cowards for not fighting back to protect our maritime domain, unaware that we were merely following orders from higher authorities to maintain a high tolerance and avoid escalating the situation."* (Participant 1)

Likewise, Participant 6 said that they are also affected by the people's negative comments posted on social media. He cited it sadly, saying that:

*"Another significant challenge we face is the negative public perception of the Coast Guard. Unfair or inaccurate media portrayals and a lack of public trust can erode morale and job satisfaction. The constant criticism, often unfounded, can be demoralizing and make it difficult to maintain a positive work environment."* (Participant 6)

Participant 9 shared that people often misjudged them and that they would be taken advantage of their position, but in reality, they are only doing their duties and responsibilities as mandated by them. He mentioned unhappily that:

*"We've experienced instances where the public misjudges the Coast Guard's intentions. Often, when the Coast Guard is simply carrying out its duties, negative information spreads rapidly on social media. People quickly share negative comments without verifying the facts, leading to widespread misinformation." (Participant 9)*

Likewise, Participant 16 shared the same experience with Participant 9 that they often encountered people misjudging them and that they would take advantage of their position, without knowing that they were only doing their duties and responsibilities. He said that:

*"It is disheartening, ma'am, when people view the Coast Guard negatively. For instance, when they see the Coast Guard apprehending someone, they often assume that the Coast Guard is targeting innocent individuals. It's as if they believe that by helping others, you're somehow putting yourself in a negative light. That is the most disappointing aspect of this perception." (Participant 16)*

**Emotional Toll of Duty.** It was revealed by the participants that they are experiencing emotional and sometimes psychological distress because of their challenging work in enforcing maritime safety and security. They encounter high-stress operations such as conducting search and rescue, confronting dangerous and emotionally draining illegal activities, and patrolling vast areas of their assigned maritime domain, which is often in challenging and stressful conditions.

Participant 2 shared that she became sad once they could not retrieve or turn over the cadaver of the victims to their families, who are hoping to provide them a proper burial

due to the large amounts of debris. She was sad, saying:

*"Disappointed and sad because we could not turn over cadavers to their families so that they would be given a formal vigil or funeral, so we let the cadavers be buried in the place. It is very disappointing, especially if we could discover cadavers who are families hugging one another, and we could not retrieve them due to debris." (Participant 2)*

On the other hand, Participant 6 also mentioned that they always experienced stress, then sometimes anxiety and trauma, especially if they are responding and exposed to catastrophic events. He said that:

*"Our mental health is also significantly impacted by our work. We often experience stress, anxiety, and even trauma from witnessing tragic events such as fatalities. These experiences require us to develop strong resilience and adaptability to cope with the demands of our profession." (Participant 6)*

Moreover, Participants 10 and 12 shared that they are sad and disappointed with those people who do not obey the laws and commit illegal activities. Participant 10 said that:

*"The most difficult part is when the standards we impose are not always followed by others." (Participant 10)*

Participant 12 also added by saying:

*"Personally, ma'am, I find it very disheartening to encounter people who engage in illegal activities like dynamite fishing and using fine-mesh nets. I've experienced many cases of this, and it is not very pleasant." (Participant 12)*

Additionally, participants also shared that the most difficult situation in working as Coast Guard personnel is being away from their families. Though they want to go home and be with their families, however, they need to prioritize their duties and accomplish

their missions. This was supported by the statements of Participants 6, 15, and 16. These are part of their statements.

*"One of the most challenging aspects of our job is the personal sacrifice required. Being away from our families for extended periods, often during times of crisis, can be emotionally taxing. Our loved ones worry about our safety and well-being, and the delays in returning home due to ongoing missions can strain our relationships."* (Participant 6)

Participant 15 also added by saying:

*"I can generalize, ma'am, and say that being assigned far away might be more difficult now compared to when you didn't have children. Previously, when you were single, you were probably more flexible with your assignments. However, having a spouse and children adds new considerations."* (Participant 15)

Participant 16 also shared the same experience by saying:

*"However, there are times when I can't help but worry about my child. It is much harder now, compared to when I was single, and it was ok for me not to go home. Having a child has made me more emotionally invested."* (Participant 16)

Theme 3. Strategic Approaches to Maritime Safety and Security. Four sub-themes describe the strategies the participants implemented in addressing challenges in enforcing maritime safety and security. These strategies helped them maintain the safety and security of their assigned Coast Guard stations.

*Adaptability and Operational Efficiency.* Participants discussed how, despite the difficulties they have faced, they are still able to carry out their tasks and obligations in preserving the safety and security of their designated maritime domain by being flexible and effective in making the most of the resources at their disposal so that they

can use them in various aspects of their roles. Participant 2 shared that she needs to be resourceful while manning her assigned stations. She mentioned that:

*"Just like that, you need to think out of the box to ask for help from others because we have limited resources in the station."* (Participant 2)

Furthermore, Participant 5 mentioned that they are maximizing the available resources so that they can use the resources efficiently in performing their duties. He shared that:

*"We strive to improve the quality of our services by maximizing the resources we have, even if they are limited. Despite the small number of personnel, we consistently fulfill our duties and functions to the best of our ability."* (Participant 5)

Also, Participants 8, 14, and 15 shared that since they have limited resources, they need to delegate and distribute the resources efficiently. This was the statement of Informant 8:

*"I think our efficiency lies in how we allocate our resources. We carefully determine where to deploy our assets, like vehicles and personnel. For instance, during the recent typhoon, we sent a significant number of our team to Northern Samar because they needed more assistance compared to Leyte."* (Participant 2)

Participant 14 also added that:

*"Our manpower is indeed limited, ma'am, but we don't let that hinder us from accomplishing our tasks. We maximize the use of our resources. For instance, before deployment, we conduct a thorough inventory of our equipment, determining where it will be used and where it will be sourced. We carefully analyze the pros and cons, especially in emergencies, and assess whether our manpower is sufficient to support our stations or substations."* (Participant 14)



Participant 15 supported the statements of 8 and 14 by saying that:

*"We need to make the most of the resources we already have. Relying solely on government assistance can be a lengthy process, involving numerous steps. Therefore, we should focus on maximizing what we have locally to continue fulfilling our responsibilities effectively." (Participant 15)*

**Good Leadership and Teamwork.** One of the strategies implemented by the participants is good leadership and teamwork. Station commanders always consider the suggestions of their subordinates, while their subordinates follow their instructions. Moreover, participants ensure they have a plan and are prepared for their activities before they undergo maritime operations. They are doing this to ensure the smooth flow of the operations. This was supported by the statement of Participant 1, ensuring that her decisions should not harm the welfare of the station. She said that:

*"So it should be balanced and fair, because the welfare of your subordinates will depend on the decision you make, which will affect your responsibility, so decision making is very hard for me." (Participant 1)*

She also added that she often considers the ideas of her subordinates, knowing that they are older than her in terms of length of service, by saying that:

*"They do not look down on me since I am younger than them, and I do not show also that I am better than them, we listen to both sides and are open-minded, about what I am doing to overcome challenges, I ask them the DOs and DON'Ts from my colleagues and if ever they could not provide answer I will ask my senior officer." (Participant 1)*

Moreover, Participant 5 shared that in performing their duties, they should follow the chain of command, and personal decisions will only arise once their station commander is not present and they need to decide quickly. He mentioned that by saying:

*"It implies that you are no longer a civilian, and therefore, you are expected to follow the chain of command strictly. Personal judgments should only be exercised when there are no clear orders from your commanding officer." (Participant 5)*

In addition, Participant 9 mentioned that they ensure that they are prepared and ready to prevent and respond to maritime security threats and even conduct search and rescue operations once a disaster occurs in their area of responsibility. This was part of his statement:

*"Preventing and responding to maritime security threats requires preparedness. As our Deputy Commander often says, we should be ready before the storm even appears on the horizon. Having a prepared response team, well-trained personnel, and ready equipment is essential for an effective response." (Participant 9)*

Furthermore, Participant 12 added that aside from preparation, they should have a plan first so that they would identify the possible threats and the proper deployment of personnel and equipment. He said that:

*"When it comes to strategies for preventing security threats, planning is also essential, ma'am. To add to what Sir mentioned earlier, if we're well-prepared, we should also have a plan for how to execute our preparations. As for personnel, we have people stationed outside the port, and we can respond quickly in case of any incidents." (Participant 12)*

**Stringent Maritime Safety and Security Implementation.** Strict implementation of maritime safety and security procedures is another strategy of the participants. Before the ship leaves, they routinely do a Pre-Departure Inspection (PDI). They also inspect the cargo of the passengers using their K9 dogs to ensure that no contraband enters their area of responsibility. Apart from that, participants frequently carry out maritime patrols to stop and address illicit activity. Besides, most participants shared that they

conduct inspections to evaluate if the vessel is compliant, prevent maritime accidents, and ensure the safety of the crew and passengers. This was the statement of Participant 1:

*"Maritime safety and maritime security have different personnel who will inspect the vessel and if they find that the vessel did not follow the standard, they will hold it and will not allow it to travel." (Participant 1)*

Participant 4 also added that they conducted thorough verifications of documents before they would release the motorboats. He said confidently that:

*"We conduct thorough verifications to confirm the identity and purpose of visitors. This includes requesting all necessary documents and inquiring about their reason for being in the area. Before allowing them to proceed, we release them only after a satisfactory verification process. Moreover, we have been cracking down on unregistered piers constructed by barangays, as these can be used for illegal activities. To ensure our area remains secure, we have implemented stricter security measures." (Participant 4)*

Additionally, Participant 6 also said that they are conducting a vessel inspection. This was his statement:

*"In terms of maritime safety, we conduct vessel inspections to ensure compliance with safety standards. We thoroughly inspect vessels before they embark on their voyages to guarantee their seaworthiness and prevent incidents such as sinking or overloading." (Participant 6)*

Also, Participant 11 mentioned that they are also conducting PDI or pre-departure inspection to assess if the ship complies with the requirements. They are doing this to maintain the safety and security of their maritime jurisdiction. He said that:

*"In our area, ma'am, we maintain the security of our maritime jurisdiction. For example,*

*before any vessel departs for Cebu, we conduct a PDI or pre-departure inspection. We check all documents for any expiration, equipment, life jackets, and fire extinguishers before we sign. We make sure that everything is in order, ma'am." (Participant 11)*

Participant 15 shared that they are also doing the PDI in their area of responsibility, apart from that, they are also checking the cargoes and the ship's load line to ensure that the boat does not exceed the passengers and the cargo. He stated that:

*"Our usual task is to conduct Pre-Departure Inspection (PDI) on vessels. During these inspections, we check the ships and their cargo and ensure that all cargo and vehicles are properly secured. We also verify passenger counts to ensure they are within the allowed limits. Additionally, we inspect the load line to confirm that the ship is not overloaded, even if the crew claims otherwise." (Participant 15)*

On the other hand, Participant 5 shared that they are conducting maritime and coastal patrols in their area of responsibility to prevent illegal activities such as transporting raw and frozen meat with ASF. He stated:

*"We conduct regular maritime and coastal patrols within our area of responsibility. These patrols help us maintain security and prevent the entry of prohibited items, such as pigs, due to the ongoing African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak." (Participant 5)*

Hence, Participant 10 shared that they are removing opportunities on the part of the perpetrators by implementing high visibility. He mentioned that:

*"A person's visibility is crucial. By ensuring they are always in sight, we can minimize threats and reduce potential opportunities for harm." (Participant 10)*

Likewise, Participant 18 mentioned that their stations are doing overt and covert security

measures to maintain the safety and security of their area. He revealed that:

*"To prevent maritime threats in this area, as I mentioned earlier, we employ both overt and covert security measures. I believe that a combination of both is essential for effective security operations" (Participant 18).*

**Inter-Agency Collaboration and Community Engagement:** Most participants mentioned how closely they work with other organizations, including the Bureau of Fire Protection and the Philippine National Police. Aside from that, they also collaborate with the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), beach, and resort owners. Moreover, they also have support from the community, such as the PCG Auxiliary (PCGA). This was proven by Participant 11, who shared that they often attend meetings with other agencies to share different information that would help in maintaining public safety and security. He said that:

*"We are very active in collaborating with law enforcement agencies. We have regular inter-agency meetings with the BFP, PNP, AFP, and other law enforcement agencies. We also have separate meetings with the intelligence group where they can disclose all information. Our respective representatives then relay the information discussed in those meetings." (Participant 11)*

Additionally, researchers also learned from Participant 12 that they tap the concerned agency in case they could discover and confiscate contraband like illegal drugs. This was part of her statement:

*"Whenever we receive confidential messages like illegal drugs, we also tap our friends' police officers to help us, especially if we could not do it alone." (Participant 12)*

Moreover, Participant 10 mentioned that aside from the law enforcement agencies, they also collaborate with beach and resort owners, fisheries offices, and barangay

officials to ensure public safety. She said that:

*"At our substations in Baybay, we conduct joint operations with beach resorts and the fisheries office. Having more people involved strengthens our efforts. As Sir mentioned, we also prioritize building relationships with the public. To facilitate this, we collect the contact information of barangay captains. In case we intercept anything, we immediately inform the barangay captain so they are aware of the situation." (Participant 10)*

Participant 12 added that they also collaborate with MARINA to discuss maritime issues. Then, they also collaborate with the PNP, and the agency responds to their request. This was his statement:

*"Regarding our meetings with MARINA, ma'am, we discussed the issues we were facing and what actions they should take. As for the Philippine Coast Guard, these meetings have strengthened collaborations between our organizations. Additionally, the PNP has been responsive to the Coast Guard's requests. For instance, when the Coast Guard has activities that require the PNP's presence, they have been actively involved, as long as they are notified promptly." (Participant 12)*

Participant 2 happily shared that they also have the PCG Auxiliary, who are their support in terms of the agency conducting different activities. She smilingly stated:

*"We have PCGA, Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary, which we tap them if needed, civilians, volunteers, we have that. If we need resources, for example, in conducting a coastal clean-up, the PCGA will provide, they donate, and if there is a feeding program, the PCGA also helps us, and they also donate school supplies." (Participant 2)*

## DISCUSSION

Through using the qualitative phenomenological approach, results and findings were identified

and categorized. Thematic analyses revealed the participants' experiences and strategies to enforce laws and maintain the safety and security of their assigned maritime domain. The study revealed that the positive workforce dynamics of the PCG personnel, such as work fulfilment and satisfaction, and a strong work ethic, motivate them to perform their duties in maintaining maritime safety and security.

The PCG personnel have a strong sense of work fulfilment and satisfaction since they consider their work more than just a job. Work fulfilment, as emphasized by Kiziah (2003), is a complex idea that is different from simple job satisfaction because it has a deeper emotional bond that is essential for the professional growth of employees, which is beneficial not only to the employees but also to the organization.

Moreover, the dedication and commitment of the PCG personnel are driven by the feeling of purpose as well as a strong work ethic, which is characterized by a passionate attitude towards their tasks. Personnel with a strong work ethic are very competitive in achieving the goals of the organization (Andreev, 2025). A strong work ethic also strengthens the positive relationship between job fulfillment and the overall life satisfaction of employees (Jing & Yan, 2024).

The personnel of the PCG faced operational challenges, including resource constraints, negative community perceptions and misconceptions, and the emotional toll of duty; these challenges are regarded as negative experiences encountered by PCG personnel while enforcing maritime safety and security.

The stations and sub-stations of the PCG in Eastern Visayas have limited personnel and equipment, such as floating assets, and no permanent and comfortable facilities for personnel. Thus, it was emphasized by Monje (2013) that the lack of funds, lack of modern equipment, and lack of skilled personnel make maritime enforcement highly risky and correspond to the national agency's inadequate capacity for maritime law enforcement.

The PCG personnel also encountered negative community perceptions and misconceptions, in which people questioned their honesty in their work. Siddharth (2023) explained that inaccurate or biased perceptions can cause people to feel wrong emotions, and these inappropriate emotions can impair their judgment, behavior, and decision-making. Furthermore, media portrayals impact social views. The media's portrayal of distinct social groups reinforces misperceptions, leading to bias and discrimination (Vijayendra et al., 2019). The public perceptions have also influenced the job satisfaction, performance, and personal lives of law enforcers (Keaton et al., 2023).

Additionally, the emotional toll of duty has been experienced by the PCG personnel while performing their duties in maintaining maritime safety and security. The PCG personnel frequently encounter traumatic incidents. These traumatic events are one of the risk factors for mental health conditions like PTSD, anxiety, depressive disorders, and alcoholism (Andrews et al., 2022a; Nisbet et al., 2022). Coast Guard personnel have much higher rates of mental health issues than the general population. It is most likely the result of exposure to traumatic experiences and professional pressures (Andrews et al., 2022b).

The PCG personnel are still motivated to fulfill the agency's mission despite the challenges. So, they employed several strategies to address difficulties such as adaptability and operational efficiency, good leadership and teamwork, stringent maritime safety and security implementation, and inter-agency collaboration and community engagement.

Good leadership and teamwork foster operational adaptability and efficiency within the organization. Team leaders should not only focus on articulating a clear vision for adaptability within the organization, but they should also set an example by exhibiting the positive behaviors they wish to see throughout the organization, demonstrating flexibility and motivating groups to adopt new concepts and approaches (Alberto, 2025). An organization's functioning in a dynamic environment also gains

from having personnel adapt to changing environments (Hofman et al., 2024), while enhancing emotional intelligence boosts leadership skills and overall organizational success (Kiishi, 2024).

Stringent maritime safety and security through interagency collaboration and community engagement were also implemented by the PCG personnel. Maritime law enforcers are enhancing maritime safety in the domestic ferry industry to prevent maritime incidents, especially in emerging countries. In addition, most factors contributing to maritime accidents are complex operations, antiquated technology, human mistakes, and weak laws (Baig et al., 2024). Moreover, strengthening maritime intelligence gathering, maritime investigations, and maritime domain awareness requires the cooperation of multiple countries (Apriliyanti et al., 2024). Additionally, the absence of good collaboration impedes prompt reaction and recovery efforts, which would result in losing more lives and properties (Kumari, 2023). Therefore, the initiative's success can be ascribed to the active participation of numerous sectors, such as government agencies, researchers, and community members (Bacalso et al., 2023).

**Conclusion.** The study's results provide the varied experiences of the personnel of the PCG in implementing maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. However, despite their positive work dynamics, such as work fulfillment and satisfaction and strong work ethic, which made them motivated to work, they also encountered operational challenges, namely resource constraints, negative community perceptions and misconceptions, and the emotional toll of duty that affects their work performance on maritime safety and security implementation. Since it is part of their duties and responsibilities to enforce laws and maintain the safety and security of their assigned maritime domain, they have implemented strategies such as adaptability and operational efficiency, good leadership, teamwork, stringent maritime safety and security implementation, inter-agency collaboration, and community engagement; to

address maritime security threats and issues. Therefore, the **PCG** personnel need international, national, and local support to provide them with more resources, such as additional personnel, PCG personnel capability building, modern equipment, and facilities to ensure the Eastern Visayas region's maritime safety and security.

**Recommendations.** The study's results have emphasized several suggestions for maintaining maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines.

*Professional Development of PCG Personnel.* The PCG personnel need comprehensive training programs to enhance their capability to enforce maritime safety and security.

1. *Mental and Psychological Support for PCG Personnel.* The agency needs to pay attention to the emotional distress that PCG personnel experience from exposure to traumatic maritime incidents, limited time with their families, and frustration with maritime perpetrators. In this regard, the agency should constantly evaluate its personnel's emotional and mental well-being by establishing activities such as counseling and other forms of psychological support.
2. *Resource Allocation.* The Coast Guard District Eastern Visayas stations and substations need more personnel, equipment, and facilities to ensure maritime safety and security. In this case, the agency and the Department of Transportation should allocate funds to provide the resources needed by the PCG personnel.
3. *International, National, and Local Collaboration.* The PCG should also strengthen international partnerships and cooperation with coast guards in other countries to enhance the maritime safety and security implementation in the country through intelligence and information sharing, special training of the PCG personnel, and modern technology useful for the effective implementation of the maritime safety and security.



Collaboration among the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the PNP-Maritime Group, and the PCG is essential for safeguarding maritime users, including fishermen and beach and resort owners, as well as for enforcing strict maritime laws. Furthermore, the PCG should strengthen its collaboration with MARINA and the maritime industry through the institutionalization of real-time data sharing and cooperative operational planning and by having an integrated system for transmitting vessel information, crew licenses, incident reports, and threat data to enable MARINA and PCG to undertake more effective and coordinated inspections, search and rescue missions, and security activities.

Moreover, the PCG should also strengthen its collaboration with ship owners, operators, and freight forwarders by establishing joint safety and security committees for frequent information exchange and cooperative risk assessments and by having joint training exercises and programs emphasizing emergency response, security procedures, and compliance best practices to establish and uphold strong maritime safety and security standards.

Additionally, the PCG should work more closely with the community, especially coastal residents and fishermen, by setting up local reporting networks for them to easily share information about suspicious activities, maritime incidents, or environmental dangers. This collaboration, along with community education and disaster preparedness activities, helps create a safety-focused culture and improves response times during maritime emergencies.

The support and assistance of the local government units with the PCG are also necessary because the PCG personnel need the help of the LGU, particularly with facilities and equipment, and other needs of the PCG personnel in conducting maritime operations. The LGU may provide a location for the PCG to establish an office building. Aside from that, the LGU should impose an effective coastal management plan that will protect the marine

resources and minimize their destruction and risk. The LGU can also promote maritime safety and security awareness through broadcasting on the radio and disseminating information to barangay chairpersons.

In addition, further investigation through longitudinal studies of the impact of resource constraints and the emotional toll of duty on the long-term well-being and operational performance of PCG personnel is needed for future research. Researchers could also evaluate the effectiveness of strategies employed by PCG personnel, such as inter-agency collaboration and community engagement, by assessing the visible outcomes on maritime safety and security in the Eastern Visayas region. Additionally, researchers should study how international, national, and local support contributes to enhancing the skills of PCG personnel and improving maritime safety and security in the area.

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