

Navigating Forgiveness Among Adult Children Towards Parental Alcohol Misuse: A Phenomenological Exploration

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Abstract: Alcohol consumption is prevalent in the Philippines, with high risks of alcohol misuse significantly influencing family dynamics and well-being. Parental alcohol misuse often extends beyond childhood, affecting adult relationships and psychological well-being. Among these challenges, forgiveness serves as a protective factor that mitigates deep emotional wounds caused by adult children's early experiences. This study explores the lived experiences of adult children of parents with alcohol misuse, particularly how they navigate forgiveness and process healing. Using a phenomenological approach, ten adult participants who lived with a parent with alcohol misuse during the first 18 years of life were interviewed. Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), findings revealed that participants' childhoods were marked by psychological adversity, emotional and behavioral struggles, and disrupted family dynamics, all of which shaped their adult values and coping mechanisms. Forgiveness is marked on their motivations to forgive, influenced by cultural norms, spiritual belief, values, desire to ease the feeling, passage of time and change in their parent's attitudes. Healing was deeply personal and complex, with forgiveness playing a central role in reducing emotional burdens. Avoidance coping emerged as a central mechanism, while adaptive coping strategies reinforces resilience among the adult children. This research offers meaningful implications for rehabilitative services, aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 3), and informs policies on the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act. It also provides valuable insights for clinical practice and counseling, particularly in developing culturally responsive family-based therapeutic models and group counseling.

Keywords: *forgiveness, parental alcohol misuse, adverse childhood experiences, phenomenology*

I. INTRODUCTION

Adult Children with Parents with Alcohol Misuse

Alcohol consumption is prevalent in the Philippines. A 2021 survey conducted by the Department of Health found that four in ten Filipino adults reported alcohol use within the past 30 days. Additionally, the World Health Organization (2016) reported that 5.3% of Filipinos aged 15 and above suffer from Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). However, due to the lack of mental health workers and facilities (Mental Health Atlas 2017 Country Profile: Philippines), combined with the

normalization of heavy drinking in the country, many Filipinos remain undiagnosed.

Heavy drinking and binge drinking are forms of alcohol misuse, which increase the risk of harmful consequences, including the development of AUD. Beyond the individual, alcohol misuse has a profound impact on families, contributing to conflict and dysfunction within the household. Parental alcohol misuse is defined as a spectrum of problematic drinking behaviors by those with parental responsibilities (Kenny, C., 2018). Parents who misuse alcohol often exhibit impaired parenting styles and behaviors, leading to adverse childhood experiences that may heighten the risk of mental and behavioral health issues in their children.

Research shows that children whose fathers had severe alcohol dependence displayed more behavioral problems and reported higher levels of perceived stress (Gholap et al., 2023). Furthermore, both maternal and paternal alcohol abuse—regardless of severity—has been linked to increased risks of mental and behavioral disorders in children (Raitasalo et al., 2018). Children with a parent suffering from alcohol problems commonly experience chronic stress due to sleep disruptions, the sale of household items to fund alcohol use, the exchange of food or social support for alcohol, and exposure to domestic violence and abuse (Jeremiah, R. et al., 2024).

The impact of parental alcohol misuse extends beyond childhood and adolescence and often persists into adulthood, affecting relationships and mental well-being. Daughters of parents with alcohol misuse tend to take on greater responsibility for the emotional needs of the family, often assuming caregiving roles that hinder their ability to develop individual autonomy. This dynamic frequently affects their romantic relationships, leading to difficulties in establishing boundaries and emotional independence (Kelley et al., 2007). Adult children of parents with AUD frequently struggle to connect with others, finding it difficult to trust and build close relationships, which leads to emotional distancing and self-protection (Jamieson, T., 2019). According to Bodkin and Leonard (2008), married individuals with a parent who had AUD report lower levels of marital satisfaction and intimacy.

Their findings also suggest that parental alcoholism may contribute to increased physical aggression in husbands.

The Path to Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the capacity to release feelings of anger and desire for retribution towards the perceived transgressor for causing harm (Lawler, 2023). Helmbold et al. (2010) asserted that forgiveness is different from justification, excuse, condonation, pardoning, and reconciliation. According to Rungduin et al. (2019), forgiveness takes place when the victim alters their perception and interpretation of the transgression, experiences a shift in the emotional tone from negative to a more neutral or positive affective state, and may even take steps to repair the relationship. The purpose and significant end of forgiveness is to preserve or perpetuate personal relationships, and to also release the victim from intense negative emotions that, if left unresolved, may adversely impact the psychological and physical well-being of the victim. (Helmbold et al. 2010 & Maio et al. 2008)

Forgiveness has long been recognized as a significant component of both personal and relational healing recovery. Forgiveness is not merely about forgetting the transgression and resentment, but a conscious choice to let go from anger and bitterness. It is also empirically associated with various psychological, mental, and spiritual benefits, such as relief from guilt and shame, reduced anxiety, depression, and anger, as well as increased self-esteem, hope, enhanced self-acceptance, sense of control over one's environment, and more (Brémault-Phillips et al. 2022 & van der Meiden et al. 2024). By letting go of the emotional burden, it promotes inner peace, enhances personal well-being, and strengthens relationships, which ultimately contribute to a more positive outlook in life. In this study, forgiveness is theorized as a crucial component in the emotional and psychological healing process of adult children who grew up with a parent who has alcohol misuse. The study postulates that forgiveness helps in addressing the emotional and psychological repercussions caused by parental alcohol misuse, which will ultimately help them in achieving emotional closure and decreasing lingering anger, hurt, sadness that perpetuates emotional distress.

According to Maio et al. (2008), a complete understanding of forgiveness requires also recognizing the relationship between the transgressor and the victim. The operation of forgiveness serves as a relational function and varies greatly depending on the type of relationship the transgressor and the victim has. For instance, functions of forgiveness vary between friends, couples, or parent-child relationships since these relationships fulfill different psychological needs. In relation to dyad family relationships, a parent's forgiveness towards their children requires a simple set of antecedents. However, in cases where parents have emotionally injured their children, forgiveness becomes a more complex and intricate set of facilitating factors. Parental inflicted injury often results in intense feeling and lingering pain, anger, resentment and animosity. This children's difficulty of forgiving their parents may be related to the perceived sacred duty of parenthood and the sense of betrayal when parents fail to fulfill their expected role. (Breshears, 2015; May et al., 2015; Sherr et al., 2019; Brann et al., 2007 as cited in van der Meiden et al. 2024)

Individuals who have experienced trauma often struggle with negative self-image, especially if the trauma occurred during childhood. This is due to the child's natural development of self-image as they grow older. The environment and experiences of a child is crucial in shaping their overall development. When these children have negative experiences from their caregivers as they form their sense of self, the child will then internalize these experiences (Lawler, 2023). The impact of parental alcohol misuse may linger as the children become adults, which is evident on how they perceive themselves and their relationship with others. Among these challenges, forgiveness serves as a protective factor to mitigate the deep emotional wounds caused by parent alcohol misuse.

Forgiveness and unforgiveness are determined by these underlying psychological dimensions. Individuals with secure attachment tend to experience lower levels of avoidance and desire for renger, making forgiveness more likely. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment may struggle with negative transgressions-related interpersonal motivations, which makes it difficult to forgive the transgressions. However, as the passage of time unfolds, changes in self-concept and motivation may occur as they process their emotions and adopt new perspectives, which ultimately shifts their capacity to forgive.

Previous studies have explored the crucial role of forgiveness in family relationships and parental injuries, but little empirical research has explored the process of individuals who later achieved personal healing through (un)forgiveness from alcohol misuse((van der Meiden et al. 2024). This study will use a phenomenological approach to capture as fully as possible the lives of adult children who, as a child, experienced moderate to severe impact of parental alcohol misuse, who later achieved healing through forgiveness. The study will also account for adult children who have not reached the stage of forgiveness. In this way, this qualitative inquiry will be able to explore the phenomenon that accounts both forgiveness and unforgiveness as potential pathways to healing or continued distress.

The Present Study

The goal of the current study is to explore the lived experiences of adult children of parents with alcohol misuse. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding on how they navigate forgiveness towards their parents, and how they perceive and experience healing from the challenges associated with their childhood and family environment.

To understand the experiences of Adult Children of Parents with Alcohol Misuse, this study poses the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of adult children living with parents with alcohol misuse?
2. How do adult children navigate forgiveness toward parents with an alcohol misuse?
3. How do adult children perceive and experience healing from their childhood and family experiences related to alcohol misuse?

Conceptual Framework

The goal of the current study is to gain insight into the lived experience of adult children, who, as a child lived with their parents who have alcohol misuse, which ultimately aims at gaining greater understanding of how these adult children reconcile with their past and transgressor. The conceptual model illustrates the interrelation of the themes, which is the manner in which adult children navigate forgiveness, and their perceptions and experiences of healing from their childhood experiences, all of which gives us a better understanding of the lived experiences of these adult children. The current study will contribute to a better understanding of the psychological and emotional processes involved in adult children's personal healing and recovery by examining their former experiences, life they lived through, and their ability to make meaning out of those experiences. The figure below aims to understand the lived experiences of adult children living with parents with alcohol misuse.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

Parental alcohol misuse plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's attachment style, which later on affects their self-concept and the ability to forgive. According to attachment theory by Bowlby (1988), an infant's relationship with the primary caregivers are significant in shaping the emotional and social development of an individual. Primary attachment can either develop into secure and insecure attachments. Children with secure attachments are more likely to develop into emotionally healthy adults, capable of forming stable intimate relationships, and having realistic perception of themselves. On the other hand, children who have insecure attachment leads to difficulty in forming relationships in adulthood, and lower self-esteem due to their environment (Wu, 2009). When children grow up with a parent who has alcohol misuse, this attachment security will be threatened, which prevents them from having a stable sense of self.

Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory emphasizes that every individual has the potential to achieve self-actualization. This inherent tendency for growth is fostered by the congruence between self-concept and the ideal self (Feist J. & Feist G., 2006). However, self-concept is shaped by an individual's conditions of worth, which can be traced back in childhood experiences. Adult children of parents with alcohol misuse according to previous studies, are more likely to experience adverse childhood conditions, including neglect, abuse, and trauma. These experiences can profoundly impact their self-concept, often leading to diminished self-worth.

McCullough's model of Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations asserts that there are three key dimensions of motivations, which is revenge, avoidance, benevolence. These three TRIMs also define the process of forgiving the transgressor, wherein, when people forgive, they are less vengeful and less avoidant while increasing their benevolence toward the transgressor (McCullough et al., 2002 as cited by Yaqoob, 2024). McCullough and colleagues (2003) suggest that there are three factors that influence an individual to forgive; (1) severity of transgression, (2) empathy and, (3) responsibility attribution. Interestingly, McCullough and colleagues (2003) also asserts that people's attitudes and motivations may evolve over time.

Adult children of parents with alcohol misuse may struggle to forgive their parents due to the severity and perceived responsibility attribution that fosters negative motivations (avoidance and revenge). However, empathy encourages benevolence, especially when these individuals recognize that alcohol misuse is a mental health concern rather than an intentional injury. Over the years, individuals may experience reductions in negative TRIMs (avoidance and revenge) and increased benevolence. Thus, as adult children process their emotions and gain new perspectives, they may reevaluate their parent's transgression, leading to shifts in forgiveness motivations.

Forgiveness and unforgiveness are determined by these underlying psychological dimensions. Individuals with secure attachment tend to experience lower levels of avoidance and desire for revenge, making forgiveness more likely. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment may struggle with negative transgressions-related interpersonal motivations, which makes it difficult to forgive the transgressions. However, as the passage of time unfolds, changes in self-concept and motivation may occur as they process their emotions and adopt new perspectives, which ultimately shifts their capacity to forgive. These psychological dimensions will serve as a guide in providing insight into how growing up with a parent with alcohol misuse influences self-concept, motivations, personal growth, and the ability to move forward. By exploring the process of meaning-making, this study aims to deepen the understanding of resilience and healing in this population.

II. METHODS

Research design

This study employed a phenomenological approach, a qualitative method that focuses on the lived experiences of the subjects (Moran, 2013). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Smith (1996), was utilized to emphasize the subjective exploration of participants, creating an in-depth understanding of how individuals construct meaning from their experiences.

Participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. 10 participants (five males and females) participated in the study. The inclusion criteria were individuals who are (1) 18 years old and above, (2) those who lived with one or both alcoholic parents during childhood, and (3) scored three out of six in the children of alcoholics screening form. There are no

exclusion criteria; however, participants with a current or past mental health condition must be actively undergoing therapy or medication or by having already recovered, to minimize the risk of triggering distress.

Instruments

To collect in-depth data, the researcher conducted interviews using open-ended and semi-structured questions. The interview questions focused on participants' experiences of living with parents with alcohol misuse and how they navigate forgiveness and healing from these experiences, which was validated by three (3) subject matter experts on psychology and counseling. The interview questionnaire also included translated Filipino questions to ensure that each question has the capacity to yield rich and detailed data. Furthermore, the study used the screening form Children of Alcoholic Screening Test (CAST) - 6 developed by Hodgins, et.al, (1995), a short version of the 30 true or false item scale (Jones, 1981) and originally designed for clinical and research purposes.

Procedure

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The researcher used social media platforms to recruit participants from online alcoholic recovery support groups and conducted preliminary screening to ensure they meet the inclusion criteria. Participants were provided with informed consent forms, including a confidentiality agreement and their right to withdraw from the study. For the interview procedure, each participant was interviewed separately. The researchers conducted a brief emotional well-being check-in before and after each interview. Psychological first aid was also back-up in case participants experience mental distress. After data collection, analyses were conducted. Expert validation and member-checking were also carried out in collaboration with the co-researcher.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Data were transcribed and interpreted through thematic analysis, which focused on deriving meaning from participants' responses. This analysis approach aims to examine the constructed meanings and how participants make sense of their experiences (Roberts, 2013). Deductive thematic analysis was utilized in analyzing the data providing a detailed analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the guide of the theoretical framework. To minimize researcher bias, member checking with participants and analysis by multiple coders were conducted in analyzing the data.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers adhere to the ethical guidelines set by the institution to ensure the well-being of the participant. Due to the sensitivity of the study, the researchers ensure to inform participants about the nature of the study. First, informed consent was given to inform the participants of their right to withdraw from any point of the study without consequences. Also, confidentiality and anonymity were also addressed by using pseudonyms and securing the storage and access of the data. Furthermore, a distress protocol was implemented to address any psychological discomfort of the participants during

the interview process. Lastly, member checking and expert validation were conducted to ensure that the data obtained are credible throughout the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULT CHILDREN LIVING WITH PARENTS WITH ALCOHOL MISUSE

Theme I. Childhood exposure to psychological adversity and distress

This theme describe the experiences of adult children living with their parents with alcohol misuse. It encompasses the development of hypervigilance as a response to associated triggers of parent's alcohol use, and also highlights their adverse childhood experiences, such as being subjected to or witnessing abuse and violence within their homes.

Hypervigilance. The participants described their childhood experiences of living with a parent with alcohol misuse as anxiety-inducing and fearful. These feelings typically arose when the parent was under the influence of alcohol. Whenever their parents induce alcohol, the participants tended to anticipate danger, which often manifested in physical reactions such as shaking and hiding.

"It's like you don't feel safe in your own home. And when you see something—maybe seeing alcohol or knowing that your dad is drunk—it kind of becomes a trigger. Like it's already an indication that you need to hide so you won't be the one he takes it out on, or it's like you already know what's going to happen. So, you try to avoid those situations, particularly him." (Participant 6)

"Before, when I was young, he would always go wild whenever he was drunk. It's because my mom left him, so he would come to my grandmother's house—and that's where he would go wild. It was really hard because I was kind of traumatized by it. Like, I would really start shaking whenever he ran around the back of our house because he was drunk." (Participant 3)

The participants also stated that their experience was stressful, which manifested in episodes of panic and nervousness whenever their parents were under the influence of alcohol.

"I guess it's a bit stressful... there's a sense of panic because I get nervous that there might be another quarrel or some kind of chaos, like what happened before." (Participant 8)

"So it was really difficult, I guess, as a child. I always remember that whenever I knew my dad was coming home—especially since he usually drank at night—just hearing the sound of his motorcycle would already make

my heart race. I couldn't breathe. That's how I felt—nervous, anxious. I would just lock myself in my room.” (Participant 7)

This is similar to the study Omkarappa & Rentals (2019) which found that Children of Alcoholics (COA) had elevated levels of agoraphobia, generalized anxiety, and fear of physical injury compared to non-children of alcoholics. Even after leaving their respective homes, hypervigilance has a high likelihood to manifest during adulthood, which can be seen through social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and communication patterns. Furthermore, adult children are highly sensitive to comments from others and guarded in their own personal communications. (Hall & Webster, 2007)

“Until now, even as an adult, you're still carrying that—well, that trauma, like even just a slight noise and, ah, you already get a bit scared because of it. Like sometimes when someone shouts like that, I feel like the person is angry at me or something like that.” (Participant 6)

Adverse childhood experiences. Witnessing violence and abuse—both directly (verbal and physical abuse) and indirectly (witnessing the non-alcohol-using parent being abused) which often occurred when the father was the parent with alcohol misuse. All of it contributed to their negative and adverse experiences during childhood.

“When I was around 15 years old, my mom was drunk and was so angry. I had just washed the dishes, and then she suddenly hurt me. I even got a mark here, and at that time, she almost blinded me. In other words, she became violent.” (Participant 5)

“Every time he brought a bottle with him or when his friends were already hanging out at the house, I would start shaking—I'd really be trembling, and I couldn't sleep at all. And then I would witness how he became abusive toward my mom, both verbally and physically.” (Participant 1)

Adult children of alcoholics experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. This includes physical abuse and community violence such as witnessing aggression in the neighborhood (Sun, G. et al., 2023) and exposure to domestic violence and abuse (Jeremiah, R. et al., 2024).

Theme II. Behavioral and emotional consequences

This theme highlights the impact of their childhood experiences, including early independence and premature assumption of adult responsibilities. Furthermore, this theme encompasses the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms and psychological dysfunctions, such as experiencing depressive symptoms and engagement in negative behaviors.

Early adult responsibilities and independence. Living with a parent with alcohol misuse led the adult children to take on early adult responsibilities which the parent fails to assume, such as taking care of their siblings and managing finances. This finding is not limited to the daughters, (Kelley et al., 2017), but also includes eldest children in general who are often expected to assume caregiving roles which is common to the Filipino family.

“It's very hard because, of course—she's my mother, right? We all expect our mothers to be the light of the home, the one who holds everything together. And I'm also the eldest sibling, the eldest child, actually. So because of that—and because Mama was always away from home—I ended up becoming the mother figure to my siblings at a very young age, which was really difficult. I mean, just imagine—at six years old, I was already cooking breakfast for my family while my mom was, you know, out somewhere.” (Participant 2)

“I was really forced to become the older brother right away—to become an adult—even though I wasn't at the right age yet for that kind of role and responsibility. So yeah, I think that's the biggest impact it had on me—I grew up too fast.” (Participant 1)

Part of these adult responsibilities includes making independent decisions without consulting their parents and providing for their own financial needs. This may stem from the possibility that children who grow up in alcoholic household are often taught that accommodating their own personal needs and desires are inappropriate (Hall & Webster, 2007)

Emergence of Maladaptive Coping and Psychological Dysfunctions. Adult children's early adverse experiences resulted in developing maladaptive coping strategies, such as isolation and repression of feelings due to their fear of being misunderstood by the family.

“You know, it's like I never grew up telling my family how I feel. I always, you know, kept it to myself. Like, as much as possible, I didn't want to tell them, I didn't want them to know because I had this fear that they wouldn't understand me—and that they'd misunderstand me too. So, it was hard for me because, you know, when there are already problems piling up, I didn't want to be another burden. That's how I felt growing up.” (Participant 3)

These effects also manifested through dysfunctional behaviors, such as engaging in bullying, rebellious behaviors, and mirroring impulsive actions of their parent with alcohol misuse.

“When I was in elementary school, every time I saw someone with a good relationship with their parents... I'm not proud of this, okay, but back then, whenever I saw people like that, I didn't just feel envious. I would

actually bully them. That's how I was in elementary. Like, I was one of the top students, you know, so that kind of became my facade. Like, 'Okay, I'm superior,' something like that." (Participant 1)

"Ah, that happened during a drinking session too. I accidentally—well, I was also drunk. I was already at that point, and I ended up kissing a girl. And at that moment, I think I really did kind of absorb or adopt my father's erratic decision-making." (Participant 8)

Furthermore, all the participants share the same sentiments on involuntary recurrence of mental and emotional dysfunctions now that they are adults. They report their tendency of having emotional instability and sensitivity, and recurrence of depressive symptoms.

"I've attempted many times, and I've self-harmed several times. There were also some suicide attempts. I also emotionally abused myself every time my dad would drink and there'd be fights. I would just go to the side and cry. There were times when I didn't know how to cope with myself. It got to a point where I am stress eating, I eat expired foods." (Participant 8)

Harter (2000) found in her review that adult children of alcoholics are at heightened risk for various negative consequences, including elevated distress, particularly in the form of depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms of stress, the development of rigid, extreme, or maladaptive personality traits and behaviors, and an increased susceptibility to substance abuse.

Theme III. Disrupted Family Dynamics

The effects of alcohol misuse extend on the disruptions of family dynamics. Separation of parents are common among the participants due to frequent fights, abuse, emotional distance, and misunderstanding.

"Right off the bat, well, yeah, my parents separated — and it was because of my dad's misuse of alcohol. Our parents separated because my mom kind of became the punching bag in that relationship. And because of that, they ended up separating." (Participant 1)

Additionally, lack of communication is heavily present between the family members, while some of their siblings also mirror their parent's drinking behavior. This is similar to the finding of Zimic & Jukic (2012) saying that there is a high prevalence rate of alcohol addiction across the family generations of the alcoholic.

"Another thing — I think my dad being an alcohol abuser also kind of rubbed off on my younger sibling, the one right after me, because they saw our dad often misusing alcohol, they picked up the same habit at such a young age." (Participant 1)

"My siblings also picked up drinking at an early age. That's it. As for me, I didn't really get into it — I never really thought about it that way, because for me, drinking always meant trouble right away. And then before, it was like... everything just kind of fell apart. We all got scattered, and it's not like there was outright rejection or anything — we're still here. But the communication... it really lacks. It's very lacking. I'm the one who notices that my siblings don't really have any communication with our parents." (Participant 8)

The lack of communication and misunderstanding between the parent and a child led to the relationship becoming detached and distant. According to Nkobi and Kingan (2025), parental alcohol misuse has a negative impact, having a deeper emotional consequence and family relationship damage. In many cases, children carry the burden of role reversal, with the parents relying on the child itself for their own emotional and physical needs. The absence of a parental figure consequently results in neglecting the physical and emotional needs of the child.

"It's like our relationship became distant. Like, things felt awkward at home. Of course, when he's sober and everything seems okay, he doesn't acknowledge what he did — even though he does remember it." (Participant 5)

Additionally, parental alcohol misuse led to financial struggles within the household due to instances of misplacing money because of alcohol intoxication, and prioritizing procurement of alcohol rather than the necessities of the family.

"At their Christmas party, my father got his bonuses (income bonus) and gifts and all that. But he got really drunk. One of his coworkers did take him home, but only up to somewhere nearby — near the church, I think. And maybe because he was so drunk, he ended up sleeping on the street. When he woke up, his pants were gone, his bag was gone, his shoes and even his socks — all gone. So the money, of course, the bonus — it was all gone too. We couldn't really do anything about it. It affected our family — financially, emotionally. That's one of the effects of his alcohol use, or rather, his alcohol abuse." (Participant 6)

There is a significant relationship between heavy drinking of alcohol and financial problems within the family. It is argued that alcoholics spend too much on alcohol, accompanied by dire consequences of alcohol intoxication, such as damages to property that causes bad financial conditions (Tripathy, D. et.al., 2019).

Theme IV. Values formation

The values and beliefs of adult children were also influenced because of living with a parent who misused alcohol. This influence often included religious dissonance,

characterized by a disconnect between the teachings of their faith and the behaviors they observed from the parent with alcohol misuse.

“What I was being taught in church — like drinking is forbidden, and all these other rules — I was seeing the complete opposite in my dad. So it felt kind of nonsensical that he would force us to worship, like he’d push me to follow this and that, but then he himself wasn’t living by those teachings. And also, that wasn’t the only reason I started to feel disconnected from our religion — of course, there were deeper reasons too. But seeing that kind of hypocrisy really stood out to me.” (Participant 7)

Relationships have a significant influence on values formation, particularly in choosing potential romantic partners and friends. Individuals often consider whether someone is a non-heavy drinker as a key factor in forming relationships, driven by a fear of encountering the same drinking behaviors exhibited by their parents with alcohol misuse.

“I’m afraid of having a partner or a friend who drinks too much because, personally, I rarely drink. But I’m not saying that I completely avoid it. I’m just scared that they might end up like my mom, who has violent tendencies when she drinks excessively.” (Participant 5)

Part of the influence in the relationship is the attachment style of the adult children. Participants often struggle in the ability to trust others.

“It feels like everything is untrustworthy, and I feel like I need to focus on what’s beneficial. It’s like I have zero tolerance for certain things, especially with people. I’m still afraid to socialize, because it really affected me a lot. It’s like, ‘What if they turn out like this when they’re drunk? What if they act like this?’ I just lose trust so quickly.” (Participant 8)

Studies support that adult children of alcoholics tend to manifest dysfunctional attachment styles (El-Guebaly, 1993) such as fearful avoidant that manifest as fear of intimacy and trouble trusting others.

NAVIGATING FORGIVENESS TOWARD PARENTS WITH AN ALCOHOL MISUSE

Theme I: Motivations to forgive

This theme captures the complexity of how adult children made sense of their motivations to forgive a parent with alcohol misuse. The participants revealed that cultural, spiritual values, and the desire to let go of the negative emotions played a significant role in their process of forgiveness. Also, aspects like time, age, and their parent’s effort to change and fulfill parental responsibilities played a significant role in their willingness to forgive.

Moral Obligations to Forgive. The participants felt a deep and internalized sense of responsibility to forgive their parents despite the mental and emotional damage that was inflicted to them. Their motivations are rooted from the notion of *‘utang na loob’*, a Filipino cultural value that focuses on the interplay of indebtedness and gratitude in family relationships. In this context, forgiveness was often seen as a moral and cultural necessity rather than individual choice.

“It’s like what Mama always tells us — that we should be grateful because even though he’s like that, he was still able to provide. Even though he’s like that, he didn’t abandon us. So that’s also one of the factors that made me consider forgiving him — like, yeah, she has a point.” (Participant 6)

“Maybe it’s the *utang na loob* [debt of gratitude], because I wouldn’t have survived like this if not for him being here. So even though he was often like that, he still worked hard before just to support us. So even though he did what he did — that happened — there is still something, you know, to be thankful for, and a reason to forgive him.” (Participant 10)

According to Menguin (2023), *‘utang na loob’* or debt of gratitude is a deep sense of gratitude and strong obligation to reciprocate the help. It means appreciating the help one receives from others as a permanent moral debt. In families, where harmony is essential, a sense of gratitude can promote forgiveness as a means of preserving and repairing relationships. This is congruent with Leon & Lopez (2017) study where *‘utang na loob’* became a crucial motivator for forgiveness. The sense of obligation serves as a relational resource, allowing empathy and benevolence toward the offending family member, in the end making forgiveness more likely as a way to maintain and reinforce the familial bond. Thus, regardless of the parent’s damage due to alcohol misuse, most adult children experienced a lingering sense of gratitude and obligation based on the caregiving and parental roles that they fulfilled. This moral and affective debt encouraged sympathy and created a sense of moral imperative to forgive in order to maintain family relationships.

For some, forgiveness moved beyond obligation and exercised their unconditional acceptance. Such acceptance depended not simply upon the parental roles that were fulfilled, behaviors made in the past or cultural norms, but on the enduring connection between family relationships.

“First of all, since I am their child — I am my father’s child — I forgave him because no matter what wrongs he has done, he is still my father. He’s still the one who gave me life, so I could live in this world today.” (Participant 4)

The participants recognize their parent’s presence and role despite having been harmed. Some adult children choose to forgive not out of moral or cultural obligation, but because

they appreciated the irreplaceable nature of a parent. According to Fishbane (2019), acceptance from an adult child can see parents' limitations in the frame of their own family or societal struggle, like economic adversity or past circumstances. This understanding of problematic parental behavior does not excuse their behavior, but instead promotes compassion, so that the adult child can move beyond anger and resentment. Thus, unconditional acceptance serves as a strong emotional anchor in the process of forgiveness that allows participants to respect their individual boundaries while nonetheless choosing to let go of resentment with their transgressor.

Ease the Emotional Burden. This captures the desire of the participants to achieve inner peace from the lingering pain that resulted from their parent's alcohol misuse. Forgiveness, for many adult children, was a means to let go of strong feelings of anger and resentment, which had burdened them for a long time.

“Well, it’s also for myself, because, you know, you can’t really go through each day carrying a grudge in your heart. So yeah. It’s kind of like a light switch — once you stop holding on to it, it feels like there’s nothing dragging you down anymore.” (Participant 3)

Forgiveness, for some, serves as a release valve, where participants have an avenue to release emotional burden that “drags them down” or burdens that prevented their peace for a long time. Forgiveness, in this context, was not about letting go of their parent's offensive behavior in the past but about regaining control over their emotional state. Raj et. al., (2016) stated that forgiveness is linked to decreased negative emotions of anxiety, depression, hostility, and anger, and an increased sense of well-being, emotional balance, and greater positive emotions. The reduction of negative feelings and increase in positive affective states serve as lightening the emotional load. Forgiveness provided an opportunity for them to unshackle themselves, to reduce the psychological burden that weighed upon them each day, and to take their first steps forward with an enhanced sense of focus and peace.

For some adult children, they perceived forgiveness as a movement toward repairing broken familial ties, particularly the parents. It also served its relational value, where it became an avenue to repair connection and intimacy that had been disrupted for a long time due to alcohol abuse.

“Every time I see them now, I can already smile. I can talk to them without thinking they’ll hurt me again. So my decisions in life have really become better, and my outlook on the future is clearer—no more problems. Because I also don’t want to stay angry. I don’t want to keep holding on to resentment, especially since they’re still my parents.” (Participant 4)

Research suggests that one of the purposes and end of forgiveness is to preserve or perpetuate personal relationships by allowing individuals to release blame, anger, or guilt. It

enables both the wronged and the offender to heal and reconnect (Helmbold et al. 2010 & Maio et al. 2008). Forgiveness allows the participant to move away from psychological harm caused by their childhood experiences toward acceptance, where they gain emotional clarity and a better sense of direction in life. Thus, forgiveness was a deliberate action to rebuild the relationship that has been disrupted due to alcohol misuse.

Spiritual beliefs and values. Another factor that emerged in their forgiveness process is the influence of their spiritual beliefs and ingrained values. This serves as a guiding force to forgive the transgressed grounded in compassion, humility and a sense of duty according to their religious standards

“If Papa God knows how to forgive, then who am I, just a person created by Papa God, not to forgive? Of course, as His child, I can also forgive my parents, even though they’ve made mistakes, because everyone makes mistakes. No one is perfect in this world.” (Participant 4)

“... Once I went to church, I wasn’t really a religious person. Mhm. But ever since, even though until now I’m still not that religious, there was a time, you know, at our church, when the pastor opened my eyes to the truth. It was like, 'Why aren’t you forgiving? You also sin, but the person you’ve wronged forgives you. And most importantly, God forgives you, so why can’t you forgive?’” (Participant 9)

This demonstrated that spirituality and belief in divine mercy gave the participant the strength to offer the same grace to their parents. The participants chose to exercise their positive qualities, such as compassion instead of condemnation. This is congruent to existing research of Raj et. al., (2016) that religiosity and spirituality reinforce the forgiveness process of an individual through inducing feelings of guilt upon the inability to forgive and asserting religion's potential for promoting behavior to forgive. In this context, spirituality reinforces their forgiveness process through faith, humility, and optimism for healing.

Conscience. For some, their inner moral compass shapes their thought processes toward forgiveness. Their personal choice and definitions of right and wrong influence their desire to let go of anger and resentment caused by their parents.

“... because I’m really on my own now, and lastly, it’s not really the responsibility of a child. It’s more about your conscience, whether or not you choose to love your parents back. Because if you don’t, it’s probably just out of guilt, like it’s just your conscience, and that’s what truly matters in the end. (Participant 8)

The participant shows a clear understanding that although old wounds may still resonate, they no longer control current behavior. This data illustrates that their inner values

reinforce their forgiveness process. Consuegra et. al., (2023) asserts that a firm conscience is an attribute that leads to a forgiving behavior, revealing that a good-formed sense of morality leads people to forgive in the name of doing what is good and virtuous. In this context, conscience is the reinforcer and the benchmark of emotional maturity, which allows them to forgive their transgressor.

Passage of Time. For some adult children, forgiveness was a gradual process, wherein the long passage of time causes them to evolve their attitudes toward the transgression. This, in turn, shifted their capacity to forgive as previous experiences became part of their lives over time, something they had learned to accept and accommodate.

“So now, it feels like I’ve forgiven him more because we’ve both grown older. So, time really plays a big factor in forgiveness. And like I said earlier, I’ve gotten used to it, so it’s not really an issue for me anymore because it’s become a part of my life.” (Participant 6)

This statement depicts that as they carry these painful memories from their childhood experiences, the emotional burden that comes along with it gradually diminishes. The damage caused by parental alcohol misuse still existed, but it no longer involves persistent attention. This is congruent to the existing study of McCullough et al., (2003) where forgiveness is characterized as a process that develops over a period of time, rather than a single event. Gradually, the participants' painful memories and heavy feelings became familiar and part of their lives, something that is more manageable, less urgent, and eventually forgivable.

Shift in Parent’s Attitudes and their Transformation. Another motivation for their capacity to forgive is the change they witnessed in the attitudes and behavior of their parents. The participants reported that, with age, their parents showed effort in transforming their way of life and in decision-making. This change strengthens the perception that the parent was actively working to reform their life and their relationship with their child.

“I’ve noticed that his way of living has really improved, and he’s getting older too. There have been times when he faced problems like this, so now he avoids situations like that. It’s like he has a strong will to live because he listens to me, like telling him that it’s enough, things should be this way now” (Participant 8)

“... it’s like I’m starting to forgive him too, because he’s getting older, and his drinking has lessened as well. If he does drink, he just drinks alone. Back then, when he used to drink outside and come home, it was like—he turned into a different person. But now, it’s not like that anymore. That kind of thing rarely happens now.” (Participant 6)

This data highlighted that their parents' effort to change was important in their ability to forgive. Misztal (2011) cites Arendt (1958) where she asserts that the perceived capacity for change in the transgressor makes forgiveness possible for the victim. The possibility of a transformed relationship, where the destructive behavior is not repeated becomes a foundation for transcending the cycle of action and reaction. Thus, the victim's belief in the offender's genuine commitment to change can be the critical trigger for launching the forgiveness process, opening the door to reconciliation. In this context, the parent’s positive transformation on self-repair, along with time, allowed the psychological wounds to heal, making forgiveness more likely.

Theme II: Barriers to Forgiveness (Unforgiveness)

This theme captures the barriers and challenges that prevented participants from forgiving their parents. While some adult children express their desire to forgive, but, factors such as preservations of self-worth, parent’s unwillingness to change habits and the lingering impact of their previous experiences made it difficult for some to ensue and grant forgiveness to their parents.

Preserving Self-worth. For those adult children that are unable to forgive their parents, their inability to forgive stems from their desire to preserve their self-worth. Self-worth is the internal sense that you are worthy and deserving of love and connection, regardless of your circumstances. This reflects how participants actively manage and protect their identity and emotional boundaries in response to parental alcohol misuse.

“For me, if we’re going to forgive someone for what they did or said to us, it feels like you’re lowkey accepting that you deserve that kind of treatment, those words they gave you. I don’t think I can do that. I don’t think I can accept that kind of treatment. I can’t believe I deserved what I got from him. So yeah, that kind of behavior from my father is definitely unforgivable.” (Participant 1)

“... until now, it still goes around in my head. It’s really hard to justify forgiving my mom for that part. It’s just really difficult.” (Participant 5)

To some participants, unforgiveness was a means of standing firm against the negative treatment and adverse experiences they had. Forgiving would feel like admitting that their parents’ action was justified, which goes directly against their desire to maintain their self-worth. Lawler’s (2023) dissertations also asserts that if the victim’s anger over the injury has not yet been validated or respected, they are not obligated to forgive the transgressor without causing more damage as it suggests the invalidation of their very real experiences and feelings. Such invalidation can undermine their sense of self-worth by suggesting that their perceptions are not valid or that tFor the participants, to maintain boundaries and defend themselves, unforgiveness is a self-preservation act

asserting that the abuse was inherently wrong and damaging to them. They must get over it before they are ready.

Parent's Unwillingness to Change Habits. This subtheme reflects on participant's difficulty of extending forgiveness when their parents made little to no efforts to change negative behaviors. The recurring pattern of alcohol abuse or repeated emotional abandonment caused participants to find it problematic to reconcile or heal.

"Every time I get the chance, I try to communicate with him—like, I give him pointers and advice, like, 'Okay, here are the things you can do to be a better father to us. But he really doesn't do anything. So that felt like my last shot, like, you really don't want to change, you're really not going to do anything. Okay then, I guess it's not my loss. So now, it's like there's completely zero possibility that I'm going to forgive him. I'll be civil, sure, but forgive? I don't really think so.'" (Participant 1)

"... because it's like you can really see that he's not changing. And that—that's really the main thing, that you can see he's not changing at all." (Participant 7)

Seeing no genuine attempt from their parents to change themselves made the process of emotional healing difficult for the participant. The cycle of repeated disappointment reinforces their negative emotions of betrayal and hopelessness. Rungduin et. al., (2018) argues that forgiveness involves two parties, wherein the actions of the transgressor play a great role in the victim forgiving them. Such as, offenders who forgave themselves were more likely to apologize and make amends. The research also emphasizes the crucial role of "Actions" and "Restorations," wherein offenders vow to modify the offending behavior to restore the relationship. In this sense, the transgressor's sincerity is crucial, which requires believable and congruent behaviors to someone making amends and seeking forgiveness. Forgiveness does not only require letting go of the past but also involves a tangible proof of change and responsibility. Adult children perceive forgiveness as not tolerating harmful behavior, but also an effort to change from the other party.

Lingering Impact of their Childhood experiences. Painful memories and emotional scars from their childhood still shape the participant's lives in the present, even after a long time. The neglect, fear, and destructive tendencies left a mark that are still difficult to forget, resolve and manage.

"Maybe what really had a big impact on me were the things he said when he was drunk. Because I'm the kind of person who doesn't usually hold grudges, but once someone says something really offensive to me, I remember it—even now. And when I see my bruises and scars, I still remember how I got them, and how I felt when it happened. Until now, it still goes around in my head." (Participant 5)

For some adult children, the emotional and physical reminder of the abuse still lingers that cannot be buried in time. The bruises and flashback left a lasting and unresolved trauma. According to Malakcioğlu (2022), holding on to painful memories tends to result in heightened negative emotions, including anger and resentment. This anger can produce a powerful emotional attachment to the trauma and the individual responsible for it. In this context, forgiveness is not merely a matter of will, but a process repeatedly interrupted by memory and pain.

Theme III: Conditions Toward Possible Forgiveness

This theme discusses particular conditions and factors that may help the adult children to consider forgiveness. In this context, forgiveness requires the genuine intention of the parent with alcohol misuse to change habits and the need for sit-down conversations to obtain accountability, gain clarity and for emotional closure.

Parent's Willingness and Effort to Change. In order to forgive, participants require seeing real efforts from their parents to change behavior through lessening parent's alcohol consumption and becoming emotionally responsible. These observable changes will provide assurance that their adverse experiences during

"It ultimately comes down to having a genuine intention to improve himself. As we know, the root cause of his behavior is his alcohol misuse. And if—by some miracle—he was to stop drinking completely and sincerely commit to changing for the better, with a genuine willingness from within, then I would be open to giving him a chance to make amends for the mistakes he has made in the past." (Participant 1)

"Perhaps if I were to see him completely stop—like, if he actually entered a rehabilitation program. I think what I'm still waiting to see is him genuinely acknowledging, 'I have a problem.' I feel that's really one of the first steps toward making me think, 'Maybe he is worth forgiving.' If I could see that he's making an effort to change in that way—demonstrating a willingness to seek professional help—then that would mean something." (Participant 7)

In order to forgive, the participants emphasize how forgiveness requires commitment and observable efforts from their parents to change the root cause of their behaviors, specifically the alcohol misuse. Some adult children express that forgiveness was not immediate or unconditional. It needed tangible evidence of change based on sincere intention to change and taking responsibility for their behavior. For some, without these measures, forgiveness is mostly unlikely. Griswold (2007) asserts that for forgiveness to be accomplished successfully, the offender has to be willing to make amends to warrant forgiveness. This means that an evident willingness to change attitude or behavior by the transgressor can be the initial step that encourages the aggrieved party to reduce their

resentment and start considering forgiving. Forgiveness requires the result of mutual effort and accountability both as a child and a parent. In this context, forgiveness is a mutual process, where the parent's initiative to change will help the child to personal and relational healing.

Need for Sit-down Conversations. In this context, the need for sit-down conversation does not only entail a change of words, but it is more so about having a safe environment where both sides feel heard and respected. This demonstrates the crucial role of communication in the process of forgiveness.

“Perhaps we could start with a conversation that isn't awkward—one where we don't end up arguing. Just a proper, respectful conversation. Because every time we talk, it always turns into an argument, like he constantly contradicts me. But I hope that someday we can talk calmly, and I also hope I can reach a point where, if she were to come near me, I wouldn't feel afraid anymore—that there wouldn't be any fear of getting hurt again.” (Participant 5)

The participant desires to have an open and honest communication to their parents in hope to resolve the conflict between them. In order to achieve forgiveness, there is a need for assurance that those adverse experiences during childhood years would not be repeated. Rungduin et. al., (2018) suggests that explaining the reasons why a certain wrongdoing was committed is crucial in order for the victim to forgive. However, it is also important that the transgressor demonstrates sincerity and genuineness while giving the explanation. Disclosing more during the process of seeking forgiveness is more likely to lead to forgiving. Having a genuine dialogue between both parties suggests that forgiveness might become possible if their pain is validated and heard.

ADULT CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE HEALING FROM THEIR CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES RELATED TO ALCOHOL MISUSE.

Theme I: Forgiveness as a Gateway to Healing

Freedom from emotional burden. Forgiveness provided participants to let go of the emotional burden, such as anger, resentment, and hurt caused by their childhood experiences and parent's alcohol misuse. It helped them in finding inner peace and clarity.

“It feels lighter emotionally—waking up in the morning without that heaviness in your heart. It's like you're slowly becoming okay. It may not happen all at once, but even small progress is better than none at all. Because it's difficult to wake up each day still burdened by thoughts of your father and everything that happened. But through that process of healing, I've gradually started to cope” (Participant 4)

In Haikola (2023) research focusing on adult survivors of interpersonal childhood trauma characterizes forgiveness as a release and relief from emotional burden. Forgiveness made them feel "freer, looser" and to be "freed from that hatred" and anger. This demonstrated the adult children's gradual process of healing through forgiveness. This illustrates the significant change from the heavy feeling to a feeling of "lightness" when forgiving. It reinforces the idea that waking up free from the weight of unresolved anger or resentment is evidence on how forgiveness can offer freedom from the emotional burden. Their decision to forgive enabled them to adopt a more peaceful and balanced outlook on their life.

Relational Repair and Recovery. Due to disrupted family dynamics because of parental alcohol misuse, forgiveness serves as an avenue to mend and recover damaged relationships, particularly between parents and children. Forgiveness helps in reconnecting, trusting, and better communication to restore relationships.

“... since I forgave him, things have been okay between us. It felt like I rediscovered that I still have a mother. I experienced, you know, playing with my mom, even though I was 17 at the time. I got to experience spending time with her, like sleeping next to her, and we would talk about our lives before going to bed. So, yeah, things have become better between us.” (Participant 2)

“Perhaps my journey of healing, after I forgave, is reflected in how my relationship with my parents has improved. When I compare myself to who I was before, the change is really significant—it's huge. I went from being someone who enjoyed being alone to now having fun with my parents. Even simple moments like just dropping them off or sharing meals together outside have become something I truly enjoy” (Participant 8)

For some adult children, they described forgiveness as a way to reawaken and repair the broken relationship with their parents. They were able to do activities together and take joy in simple things, such as sleeping and playing together. Forgiveness broke the emotional barrier and distance that happened due to early adverse experiences. McCullough et al., (2003) states forgiveness serves as an avenue for relationship recovery to heal damage brought about by interpersonal offenses and promote positive interactions. It is a prosocial behavior, wherein it allows closeness between relationships despite the harm caused by disconnections. The participants found a sense of belonging and emotional intimacy once again with their parents and a renewed appreciation with their family dynamics.

Act of Moving Forward. This data highlights the way participants perceived forgiveness as a way to take control of their own lives and move forward from their past. Instead of staying stuck on their past experiences and damage caused by parental alcohol misuse, they saw forgiveness as a step towards

emotional freedom and personal growth. Forgiveness allowed them to release negative emotions and traumas they suffered.

“You can never heal if you don't forgive, if you don't have acceptance. That's how it is for me. You can never move forward if you don't forgive.” (Participant 3)

“I think it really helps that when you forgive your parents for something like that, and of course, in the process of forgiveness, you don't have to forget. It's like, you still know what happened, but at the same time, you don't use it as a reason to stop moving forward. It's just something that's part of your past, but at the same time, it doesn't drag you down anymore” (Participant 6)

“You won't be able to move forward if you're still carrying a burden, right? So, you'll only be able to move on once you let go of that burden. And one thing that helps with that is forgiveness. Like, you just forgive everything. Although it might not happen right away, but slowly, everything will feel lighter, and the weight will lessen” (Participant 10)

The statement reflects on how the participants recognized that holding on to anger, pain, resentment and other negative emotions prevents them from personal growth, finding peace, or moving on in life. Forgiveness, as the participant stated, is a gradual process of letting go of emotional burden caused by parental alcohol misuse. For adult children, forgiveness was about their readiness to live free from these negative emotions caused by their early adversities. Lawler (2023) asserts that forgiveness is an essential act of moving on that is achieved through releasing negative feelings and attachment to past harm and the transgressor. Letting go enables adult children to go forward more easily and emotionally with clarity and purpose.

Theme II. Adjustment Strategies

The participants described their healing process through the use of various adjustment strategies. This theme captures their coping mechanisms, which range from avoidance coping to more adaptive approaches such as spirituality, self-care, and seeking support from others with similar experiences.

Adaptive coping. Participants employed various adaptive coping strategies, including spirituality, self-care, and seeking support from others with similar experiences. Spirituality served as a significant form of coping, particularly through prayer, where participants sought courage and divine assistance in forgiving their parents, particularly those with alcohol misuse issues.

“What I did was I prayed to God to give me the courage to forgive my father. And God gave me a sign—He's helping me, saying, 'My child, this is your chance to forgive your father after all these 20 years.'” (Participant 4)

Emotion-focused coping, such as self-care and expressing emotions (e.g., crying), was another common strategy. Self-care was utilized through practices like self-meditation, travel, and personal reflection.

“...By relying on self-meditation, something like that—like having some 'me time.' It's more about focusing on myself because, in a way, I'm preparing myself, you know? Like, at some point, you're nurturing yourself, you're in the process of rethinking your thoughts, and doing activities that help you find a sense of peace.” (Participant 10)

Additionally, seeking support from people with shared experiences was vital for many participants, both those who had forgiven and those still struggling to do so. Sharing experiences with others helped participants process their feelings and foster resilience and understanding in their healing journey.

“I was only able to cope because I had a best friend. I shared everything with them, and we were in the same situation—we both came from broken families. I would open up to them, and it felt like they were the one who helped me heal. I always thought, if I didn't have my best friend, I wouldn't have been able to cope during that time—I wouldn't have been able to heal. That was the time I really started longing for my mom. I was overwhelmed with stress because I had to take care of things at home. At the same time, I was also studying, and on top of that, I just wanted to experience what it's like to be a kid. Everything was piling up—it all mixed together to the point where I just wanted to give up, because it felt like I'd never get to experience that kind of life. But since I found a best friend... well, It helps me heal at least.” (Participant 2)

“Maybe, when it comes to managing my unresolved feelings, I can only really do that when I talk to my siblings. I have a very good relationship with my sisters, which I'm really grateful for. Because our relationship is strong, we have these kinds of 'debriefing sessions'—we talk and share stories about each other's lives. And during those conversations, when topics like this come up—though they're painful—that's when I start to feel lighter. It's only with them that I feel comfortable enough to open up about things like this. I can't do that with other people. It doesn't hurt as much when it's with them, because these are shared experiences. They've gone through what I've gone through, firsthand... there's that understanding, and I know they see where I'm coming from, and what I've been through.” (Participant 1)

Kielet (1994) found that adult children of alcoholics who were well-functioning used social support from friends, teachers, and guidance counselors to cope more effectively with their stressful home lives. This study suggests that actively seeking external social support can help individuals develop a

sense of control. When people can exert some control and reshape their surroundings, they can create positive experiences and better navigate both the positive and negative aspects of life.

Avoidance Coping. One of the key themes in how individuals adjust to childhood experiences is avoidant coping. This strategy often includes emotional suppression and the use of distractions to avoid engaging with painful thoughts or memories. Participants in the study frequently described suppressing unresolved feelings by immersing themselves in the demands of daily life. Many believed that as long as there were no triggers or reminders of the past, those unresolved emotions could remain unresolved.

“I don’t manage, at least—uh, how do I explain this?

I’m the type of person who’s ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ The more I don’t see you, the less you come to mind. So, my unresolved feelings, they just stay unresolved, they’re just hidden inside me. As long as there’s no trigger, I’m okay—like, I can forget about them because I’m a really busy person, with academics, personal life, and work. But once something triggers it, of course, all those pent-up emotions come out. So yeah, once it’s triggered, it hits me.” (Participant 1)

Other participants identified with a more passive, go-with-the-flow approach, describing minimal conscious effort to cope beyond simply continuing with daily routines.

“I guess I’m kind of like Mr. Go-with-the-flow now. I just keep going, just go with whatever. I don’t really have—like, I don’t really have any coping mechanisms when it comes to healing, because healing really takes time and goes through a process. There’s no specific ‘coping strategy’ I need—for me, at least.” (Participant 8)

Distraction as a form of avoidance also emerged as a common behavior across narratives.

“For me, it’s like—I’m the type of person who, I don’t know, I always end up thinking, ‘I’ll just let it be,’ something like that. I’ll just find a distraction instead, and I won’t even say anything about it.” (Participant 9)

“I don’t really process it—as in, I’m more into distractions right now, and I don’t have any contact with my parents at the moment.” (Participant 5)

These findings align with existing literature suggesting that adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) frequently engage in avoidant coping strategies. Klostermann et al. (2011) found that ACOAs reported higher levels of avoidance in managing distress. Furthermore, Haverfield and Theiss (2015) emphasized that the prohibition of open discussions about alcohol within families can suppress emotional expression, hinder understanding, and limit the

ability to cope with the consequences of growing up with an alcoholic parent.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alcohol consumption is prevalent in the Philippines, often associated with heavy drinking and binge drinking. These practices are forms of alcohol misuse that have harmful consequences not only for the individual but also for their families. Parents with alcohol misuse often exhibit impaired parenting styles and behaviors, leading to adverse childhood experiences that may increase the risk of mental and behavioral health issues in their children. Despite this, limited studies have explored the lived experiences of adult children of alcoholics in the Philippines, particularly regarding forgiveness in this context. This study examined the lived experiences of adult children of parents with alcohol misuse and how they navigate forgiveness and healing from the challenges they face.

In relation to the lived experiences of adult children living with an alcoholic parent, four main themes emerged: (1) childhood exposure to psychological adversity and distress, (2) behavioral and emotional consequences, including the assumption of early adult responsibilities and independence, as well as the emergence of maladaptive coping mechanisms and psychological dysfunctions, such as engaging in rebellious behavior and experiencing depressive symptoms. (3) Disrupted family dynamics, which resulted in communication issues, neglect, and the imitating parent's drinking behavior, and (4) values formation in adulthood, described in terms of religious dissonance and relationship values and perceptions.

Regarding forgiveness, three main themes emerged: (1) motivation to forgive, with six subthemes, including the influence of *utang na loob* (a Filipino cultural concept of debt of gratitude), easing the emotional burden, passage of time, spiritual values, conscience, and parent’s attitude shift. (2) Barriers to forgiveness were characterized by the desire to preserve self-worth, the parent’s unwillingness to change, and the lingering impact of childhood experiences. (3) Conditions for possible forgiveness in the future include the parent's willingness and effort to change and the need for open, honest conversations.

Each participant experienced healing in different forms. A major insight of the study is the role of forgiveness in their healing process. Forgiveness helped them let go of emotional burdens and repair relationships damaged by their childhood experiences and their parent's alcohol misuse. Lastly, participants employed adjustment strategies, with avoidance coping as a central mechanism and adaptive coping strategies that displayed resilience among the adult children.

Practical implications

It is important to understand the long-term psychological consequences of early exposure to adversities resulting from parental alcohol misuse for future researchers to create comprehensive rehabilitation services that are grounded on

empathy. This will help in integrating family therapy to alleviate intergenerational consequences that may affect the involved family members and succeeding generations. This research is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3, that focuses on health and well-being by creating mental health services proportionate to the issue at hand in order to alleviate overall well-being. Also, this research supports policies like the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act, emphasizing the importance of accessible support services for victims and witnesses of domestic violence. Through researching forgiveness and its associated barriers, the study promotes generating trauma-informed programs as well as highlighting the crucial role of Filipino values like utang na loob (gratitude of debt) in shaping the process of forgiveness. Reinforcing these values will promote healing and make treatment more meaningful by becoming culturally responsive. Furthermore, these experiences provide a foundation for group therapy, which can help individuals to share a sense of belonging, validation, and learning from others, which positively affects the development of healthier coping strategies and a sense of belonging and comfort that they are not alone.

Limitations and future directions

This research is limited only to the experiences of adult children towards parental alcohol misuse, more specifically on how they navigate and process forgiveness and healing. Though it provides valuable qualitative information, it is not intended to identify causal relationships or statistical correlations between parental alcohol misuse and specific outcomes. As such, future research is urged to investigate possible long-term impacts of parental alcohol misuse using quantitative analysis to determine potential correlations. It is also suggested to explore other aspects of the adult children's experience, such as relationship patterns, occupational adjustment, and parenting. Also, exploring how elements such as family background, emotional neglect, cultural norms, and cultural values contribute to relational difficulties might provide a more complete picture of the intergenerational effect of alcohol use. In doing so, future research can complement the existing data and modify therapy practices, particularly in the process of adapting interventions to individuals and families who are dealing with the residuals of addiction.

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