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Journey to Justice of Secondary Crime Victims of Sexual Abuse: A Multi-Case Study

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***Abstract*: The objective of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of secondary crime victims of sexual abuse in relation to their journey toward justice in regard to their personal experience, the effects that follow, coping mechanisms used, and institutional support systems they receive. This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews to elicit meaningful narrative accounts of the process of journey toward justice from the participants. The case units in this study comprise secondary crime victims of sexual abuse that have personally gone through the journey toward justice in relation to a sexual abuse case. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data obtained from the seven case units. The target population comprised individuals 18 years and older who were identified as secondary victims of sexual abuse cases. In other words, individuals who are parents, siblings, social workers, or grandparents of the primary victims of sexual abuse. In line with the objectives of the research, whose main aim was to investigate the experiences of the secondary victims of sexual abuse, the results showed interrelated themes such as: *Emotional Distress, Institutional Delay, Institutional Support, Social Support, and Blame and doubt.* The second objective of the research, which focused on understanding the long-term effect of sexual abuse on the secondary victims, uncovered interrelated themes such as: *Lingering Emotional Impact, Fear and Anxiety, Sleep Disruption, Loss of Motivation, Protective Behavior, Resilience and Careful Decision Making, Family Disruption, and Trauma.* The third objective of the study which aimed at investigating coping strategies utilized by the secondary victims to pursue justice despite the obstacles that they encounter included: *Social Support, Distraction and Diversion, Distraction and Diversion, Divine Intervention, and Finding a Purpose.* Access to justice-related services such as legal aid, psychosocial counseling, employment, and supportive communities played an important role in coping among secondary sexual abuse victims.**

***Keywords*: criminal justice, secondary crime victims, sexual abuse, multiple case study, Philippines.**

1. Introduction

While much has been said about the rights and experiences of primary victims of sexual abuse, little is known about the experiences of secondary crime victims like the victims' families, friends, and witnesses. Such people have to go through the ordeal of being exposed to trauma, emotional problems, and social ramifications as a result of being too close to the crime (Russin et al., 2022; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2024). Studies reveal that vicarious traumatization can occur with the victims, especially in the form of anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms, particularly with the family members of the victims. Also, the victims of sexual abuse tend to feel powerless, frustrated, and emotionally hurt, especially when there is no justice done to them due to the delay or denial of justice or when they are not allowed to be a part of the judicial process (Cea et al., 2025)

Furthermore, secondary victimization occurs when there is poor handling of cases by law enforcers, the judiciary, and sometimes even by social service agencies that have not been properly trained on how to handle traumatic situations. Constructivist justice theory asserts that justice is subjective and changes from time to time according to an individual's perception of justice. In light of this theory, secondary victims need validation, recognition, and healing above all else (Cole et al., 2023). Additionally, there is scientific evidence suggesting that lengthy delays in the courts, complicated processes, and the unavailability of psychological services add to the trauma of both the main and secondary victims. Also, marginalized sections of the community, like the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and other ethnic groups, are faced with additional obstacles owing to cultural insensitivity and discrimination (Outright International, 2022). Despite these issues being well documented, there is a lack of literature in terms of theoretical models that look at the "journey to justice" of the secondary victims of crimes. This paper, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by studying the journey to justice of secondary victims of sexual abuse crimes.

An examination into the path to justice for secondary crime victims of sexual abuse is extremely crucial since it highlights the experiences of people who, though not the direct victims themselves, have suffered immense psychological, emotional, and social consequences due to their close association with the primary victim. Research in this field helps in building an enhanced knowledge base on how justice systems can become more accommodating and responsive to all kinds of affected parties. Secondary victimization of this kind has been highlighted by previous research in the context of legal and institutional procedures through insensitivity, delays, and lack of focus on the victim in the justice process (Campbell et al., 2021). Moreover, systematic gaps in the provision of support services and barriers experienced by marginalized groups, such

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as the LGBTQIA+ community and persons with disabilities, while accessing justice and protection have been pointed out by scholars (Cole et al., 2025). Through analysis of these two areas, the current study adds value to the relatively new field of victimology by contributing to policies for equity in the process of justice that recognize all forms of damages resulting from sexual abuse.

Previous studies have greatly enhanced our knowledge regarding the psychological and legal problems of primary victims of sexual abuse; nonetheless, there is inadequate attention paid to the needs and problems of secondary victims of crime, those who suffer emotionally and socially due to the sexual abuse of a person close to them. It was found out through the works of Cole et al. (2025) and Cea et al. (2025) that secondary victims frequently undergo emotional distress, social isolation, and procedural injustice in the form of exclusion from the court hearings process.

In addition, the lack of trauma-informed and victim-centered practices within the justice system is another issue leading to secondary victimization. Secondary victimization is defined as the re-victimization of the victims by institutions designed to provide protection and safety (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). It has been shown that insensitive reactions, victim blaming, procedure delays, and lack of support in legal procedures can lead to increased psychological suffering and make victims reluctant to work with the justice system (Campbell et al., 2021). In recent publications, there have also been calls to broaden and enrich the victimology framework in order to take into account the experience of secondary victims of crimes and survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation (Jay et al., 2022). This makes clear the relevance of the proposed study, which intends to investigate the experience of secondary victims of sexual abuse and analyze the unique journey to justice of these victims.

The research is based on the constructivist interpretive paradigm as it rests upon the assumption that "justice" is not a definite and objective state but rather an ongoing process characterized by subjectivity, relationality, and construction. Constructivism and interpretivism presuppose that people (secondary victims of sexual abuse, in this case) create meanings out of their experience; consequently, their journey to justice will be studied through their perspectives and context, their relationships and interaction with the legal, social, and institutional systems. These types of paradigms provide the researcher with an opportunity to investigate the process of how the social structures influence people's perceptions of justice, voice, control, and healing. Feminist theories and socio-structural perspectives, in particular, are frequently used while investigating the issues of sexual abuse and victimization because they provide a researcher with a set of tools for exploring how secondary victims can be silenced, blamed, and marginalized by the social and legal system (Bows, 2021; Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2022).

New literature on secondary crime victims of sexual abuse emphasizes their suffering, which may include emotional distress, exclusion from the processes of justice, and neglect by institutions. Among key studies, one should focus on the term of secondary victimization when the system of law and support causes additional distress due to such factors as blaming, disbelief, or exclusion. For example, Collaton et al. (2024) describe justice as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes voice, participation, and prevention of any future harm, while Swanepoel (2021) mentions that the system response to the crime may only contribute to trauma of the victim. Moreover, there is evidence that vulnerable populations, including women and LGBTQ+ individuals, suffer from such harms even more (Umbach et al., 2025). There are theoretical frameworks that may be used to interpret these findings: they are feminism and trauma. Feminism is used to explain the problem of power and gendered responses in the system, while trauma theory may be used to explain psychological problems of the victims of sexual abuse and their participation in justice.

In relation to the current study, there are certain key concepts that are essential in comprehending the experiences of secondary crime victims of sexual abuse. A secondary victim is someone who has experienced harm from a crime through no fault of their own. In most cases, secondary victims are people like the relatives, close friends, or caretakers of the initial victim (Swanepoel, 2021). Sexual abuse can be described as any unwanted sexual act and sexual conduct forced upon someone, causing both physical and emotional pain (Collaton et al., 2024). A secondary victimization is an additional injury faced by victims and their families as a consequence of engaging with the criminal justice system, including being disbelieved, blamed, asked inappropriate questions, and a lack of support from authority figures (Cole et al., 2025).

Finally, the idea of a journey to justice includes the intricate, personalized process whereby victims go through a process of gaining recognition, accountability, and healing. This idea stresses justice not just as an end result of legal proceedings but also as a process involving interactional aspects (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2022). The current victimological research points out that the experience of both victims and secondary victims is greatly affected by various social and institutional mechanisms during their journey to justice (Campbell et al., 2021).

Even as sexual abuse and victimization continue to attract scholarly interest, the bulk of existing studies mainly concentrates on the experiences of the primary victims, thereby creating an information vacuum concerning the plight of the secondary victims, like the parents, siblings, or grandparents who are equally traumatized. Little literature can be found concerning how the secondary crime victims relate with the judicial process, how they cope emotionally and socially, and how they suffer secondary victimization due to institutional neglect or marginalization. The local scenario in the Philippines, more so in the rural and indigenous settings, is bereft of data regarding the same, particularly in regions where the prevailing cultural beliefs, accessibility of the judicial system, and social support mechanisms vary greatly. What makes this research different from other similar studies is the use of a multi-case qualitative research approach, which will enable the researchers to shed light on the journey to justice of the secondary victims from their own point of view. The need

for carrying out this study in the local setting is based on the need for providing culturally-responsive and trauma-informed justice interventions.

The objective of the current research is to discover and comprehend the experiences of the secondary crime victims of sexual abuse within the course of their way to justice, specifically their perceptions, interactions, and reactions to the surrounding legal and social system. The chosen qualitative approach will involve conducting a multiple case study that allows for making an in-depth and comparative analysis of the experiences of several individuals at once. Data collection techniques will include semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and field observations, leading to obtaining a detailed contextual comprehension of the cases. Data analysis techniques will include thematic analysis.

More specifically, the study aims to find the answers to the following research questions. The first is to examine the diverse experiences of the secondary victims of sexual abuse, including the parents, siblings, grandparents, and a social worker, as they seek justice for the primary victims. The second is to understand the effects that the sexual abuse may have had on the secondary victims over the long term. The third is to understand how the secondary victims cope with the experiences and what support networks they used to do so. The last is to understand the similarities and differences in the experiences of the secondary crime victims of sexual abuse.

This research is socially and internationally important since it is an addition to the body of literature on the field of victimology through the provision of valuable information on secondary crime victims who have been sexually abused, thereby filling in a huge research gap in the field, since they are often marginalized in the discussions on justice and are not considered when implementing victim-oriented policies. Their journey towards justice is going to provide useful information about how the legal and other processes that concern victim justice can be more accommodating, trauma-informed, and sensitive to their needs. Socially, it helps advance the rights of individuals in terms of human rights and mental health. The information gained will help improve criminal justice institutions, social welfare services, mental health organizations, NGOs dealing with abused people, and local government units that offer victim services. It will especially be helpful to those secondary victims living in poor and rural areas. In addition, it will provide a base for future researchers to continue studying secondary victimization.

The research is in line with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. The research focuses on the experiences of secondary victims of sexual abuse with the law through an exploration of institutional challenges, support service deficiencies, and access limitations (SDG 16). This kind of research contributes to the creation of more just, equitable, and accessible justice systems by supporting vulnerable communities.

The study is also subject to certain limitations and delimitations, which could affect the range and generalizability of its results. First of all, one of the limitations is related to the choice of research methodology and is connected with a qualitative multi-case study approach that, although successful for deep analysis, cannot generalize findings about all secondary victims of sexual abuse because of non-random selection and small sample size. Data used in the study have been collected from self-reports made by participants, and therefore, it is likely that they can be affected by such factors as memory recall and unwillingness to reveal information because of trauma. Moreover, the size of the sample is purposefully restricted to create rich narratives, but this means that perspectives from victims from various cultures or social classes may not be covered. However, in relation to the analysis of data, although it was rigorous, thematic analysis is interpretative and involves subjective perception on behalf of the researcher. Despite the attempts to avoid it by using reflexivity and triangulation, some bias is possible. Delimitations are concerned with the geographical range of the research and the participation of those victims who are willing and capable of recalling their experience. These limitations are acknowledged to provide transparency and guide appropriate interpretation and application of the study's outcomes.

2. Method

In this section, the research methodology used to examine the experiences of the secondary victims and how they seek justice is discussed.

A. Case Units

The population of interest for this study includes secondary victims of sexual abuse who have been engaged in the assistance and investigation process of the crime. Secondary victims are defined as persons who are indirectly affected because of their close connection to the primary victim, including but not limited to parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members. The mother who became an advocate in the case will be included in the study to explore the issues of secondary victims at the emotional, social, and advocacy levels, as well as how they transform from personal pain into becoming advocates for others. A grandfather and grandmother will be included in order to provide first-hand experiences on the emotions and social effects of sexual abuse in families and their experience with the legal system; two siblings, one being a sister who observed the emotional consequences of the abuse and the brother who felt angry, guilty, or helpless after the abuse. The case of a father pursuing justice from a perpetrator highlights the challenges faced by secondary victims when seeking justice and the methods of resilience that they adopt. A social worker who will provide professional input regarding institutions and the gaps within services provided.

However, there are some common traits of the people involved in these cases that illustrate the complicated issue of secondary victimization in the context of sexual abuse. First, all of them suffer from vicarious trauma, having mental and emotional problems despite the fact that they were not direct victims. They belong to those who have to help the survivor, being relatives of this person or professional helpers. Their involvement in such situations brings many troubles for them, and they become the victims of vicarious trauma and secondary

victimization (Cole et al., 2025; Swanepoel, 2021).

In total, seven cases have been considered for this study, as it aligns with the requirements of multi-case research and emphasizes the need for rich, deep, and meaningful data rather than a large sample size in the study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The use of voluntary sampling in this study is justified in view of the vulnerable nature of the population in the study because it respects the autonomy of the participants and their right to make a decision regarding their involvement in the study. Moreover, voluntary sampling helps respondents become more cooperative and honest in the discussion and provides rich and meaningful information about the subject matter. Another important sampling technique being used in this study is voluntary sampling, also known as voluntary response sampling or self-selection sampling. Voluntary sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique where respondents voluntarily participate in the study because of their interest in sharing the experience.

The criteria for participants to participate in this research include that they should be at least 18 years of age. They should be secondary survivors of a case of child sexual abuse, who may include family members or friends of the primary survivor, like a parent, sibling, friend, or grandparent of the main victim. In addition, they should be emotionally and socially connected to the process of seeking justice by the primary victim. Finally, they should be currently residing in the study location during the time of the crime.

Those participants who fail to fulfill the eligibility requirements for the research are excluded from the study. In particular, people are excluded from the research if they are the main victims of sexual abuse or are not ready to join the research safely because of the emotional and psychological difficulties. Contrary to the use of clinical judgment, the researcher applied the quick questionnaire for evaluation of their readiness for the research, namely for self-evaluation of their emotional stability and the ability to talk about sensitive topics. People who are not ready to participate due to their possible distress, as well as those who refuse to be audio recorded and give their informed consent, cannot take part in the research. Participants have the right to quit at any stage of the study without penalties. For those participants who failed the screening procedure or felt distressed during the interview, the researcher provided them with a referral to the appropriate services.

The researcher immediately accepts the withdrawal of the participant from the research or interview, recording the time and date of the withdrawal, but does not inquire about the reasons for such withdrawal from the participant. The participant's autonomy is strictly preserved, emphasizing the voluntariness of the research participation and non-utilization of any collected information by the researcher unless the participant agrees. Based on the review of the implications of the participant's withdrawal for the research design and its analysis, the researcher has made necessary changes and included the information about the withdrawals into the results section of the paper.

The research is carried out in Region XI, where sexual abuse incidents are known to happen frequently, with limited support mechanisms in place for the victim, especially for secondary victims. In several areas in the Philippines, the social stigma, inefficiencies in the legal system, and lack of access to trauma-based resources make it a hostile or indifferent environment not only for the primary victim but for his/her family members and those who are closest to them. According to the Commission on Human Rights (2025) and recent reports of local NGOs, there has been increasing awareness of the emotional burden placed on the secondary victim. Unfortunately, very little in terms of intervention strategies have been developed specifically for them.

The research is a multi-case study that examines varied secondary victims' experiences of sexual abuse from an individual, relational, and emotional point of view. First, it is possible to mention the case of a mother acting as the primary complainant and the legal guardian of her daughter. Second, siblings (the brother and the sister) are under examination because of the social exclusion caused by their association with an abuser. The emotional and familial support provided by the grandparents (the grandmother and the grandfather) while feeling helpless and emotional distress during the whole justice process is discussed in another case. A father who tried to seek justice for his child and who copes with anger, fear, and emotional stress due to legal procedure and society pressures is one more participant of the current research. A social worker who has been actively helping the victim and her family and who has been exposed to vicarious trauma and emotional exhaustion because of constant involvement in the case and problems with the justice procedure is another secondary victim included in this research project.

B. Materials and Instrument

In this study, the major tool used for the gathering of primary data is a semi-structured interview guide that was created by the researcher for IDIs of secondary victims of sexual abuse. The interview guide features open-ended questions that allow respondents to provide detailed narrative descriptions of their experiences, perceptions, and interactions with the justice institutions. The process of creating an interview guide is a highly complex one. Firstly, a systematic review of relevant literature on the topic of secondary victimization, trauma-informed justice, and other qualitative studies informs the creation of questions. After that, the draft of the instrument will be critically assessed by expert validators such as a registered social worker, a criminologist, and a qualitative research specialist.

C. Design and Procedure

A qualitative multi-case study design was used in this study, an approach that is suitable for studying rich and complicated human phenomena from a contextual perspective. As Yin (2018) explains, a multi-case study design allows the researcher to make comparisons across various units of analysis (in this case, secondary victims) to produce important findings and insight. The multi-case design suits well social and behavioral science research and specifically criminology and justice

research because it gives a full picture of realities influenced by various factors, including individual, social, and institutional influences. Considering that the study focuses on the journey to justice, an evolving and subjective process, the multi-case design fits well within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

A thematic analysis approach is used to examine and interpret data collected from in-depth interviews (IDIs) with secondary crime victims. This analytic technique, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021), involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within qualitative data, making it ideal for addressing the study's core questions about lived experiences, perceptions of justice, and coping mechanisms. The study falls under the descriptive-exploratory typology in terms of its objective dimension, as it seeks to describe and explore the rich, nuanced experiences of individuals that are not yet well documented in existing literature. In terms of the time dimension, the research is cross-sectional, collecting data within a single time frame from various participants whose experiences span different timelines.

The researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, responsible for establishing rapport, conducting interviews, documenting observations, and interpreting the narratives. This active and engaged role enhances credibility and ensures that the research captures context-sensitive data. To enhance reflexivity and minimize bias, the researcher maintained a field journal throughout the process, documenting observations, emotions, and decisions made during interviews and analysis.

After obtaining clearance from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC), the research was conducted in line with the ethics principles. The participants are selected on the basis of certain criteria, and prior to conducting interviews, the informed consent of the subjects is taken. Collection of data takes place through semi-structured interviews, which last about 60-90 minutes. These interviews are recorded (with the consent of the interviewee) and complemented with fieldnotes and memos to ensure understanding of the context and non-verbal communications of the participants. The interviews are conducted in English, Filipino, or Bisaya language, according to the preference of the participants.

After the transcription of all the interviews, thematic analysis of the data was carried out through Braun and Clarke's six-stage process (2021), including familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, theme search, theme review, theme definition and labeling, and finally producing the report. The transcripts were read several times and manually coded through margin notes before the coding was entered into qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo or MAXQDA. Patterns were then searched for within cases to find similarities and differences in experiences of justice seeking and emotions.

The trustworthiness of the research is assured through several measures. Credibility was ensured through member checking, where the participants checked their interviews or summaries for correctness and accuracy of their statements and interpretation of the same. This is used to validate the authenticity of the results and to develop collective meaning. Dependability was achieved through an audit trail where there will be clear documentation of interview procedures, coding schemes, journals, and analytic memos, giving room for other researchers to track the process of the research and its dependability. Confirmability was assured through triangulation of data sources, where the interviews, field notes, and documents were used in addition to the reflexive journaling of the researcher to minimize subjectivity. Transferability was achieved through detailed descriptions of the setting and the cases and participants involved in the study.

As per the ethical guidelines, all participants were informed about the objective of the study, the confidentiality process, and the withdrawal option at any point. All identifiers are stripped from transcripts, and pseudonyms are used in all reports. The compliance certification was obtained from UMERC prior to data collection (UMERC-2026-038). In addition, participants could avail themselves of referral options in case of any distress caused during interviews.

The current study was conducted with the highest ethics in mind and abided by the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 as well as the ethical considerations by the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Mindanao, UMERC. Ethical clearance was granted by UMERC under protocol number 2026-038 prior to conducting any data collection activities. All participation was completely voluntary, and informed consent was collected using the trauma-informed and continuous consent approach that really valued the autonomy of participants as well as the right to withdraw at any moment. We used data anonymization, pseudonyms, confidentiality in records management, and controlled access to research data to preserve privacy. Participants were recruited through voluntary sampling and only after obtaining necessary ethical approvals and organizational permissions. Psychological, social, legal, and confidentiality risk reduction was also attempted in the current study.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the study are presented and discussed through the narratives of seven (7) cases of secondary victims. This discussion aims to examine the experiences of secondary victims of sexual abuse in order to establish the effects of sexual abuse on secondary victims and to find out the coping strategies used to pursue justice. The results were analyzed systematically based on the research objectives and supported by the narratives and literature review.

Table 1
Profile of the participant cases

Case	Pseudonym	Sex	Civil Status	Age
1	Resilient Brother	Male	Single	25
2	Stoic Father	Male	Married	57
3	Protective Grandfather	Male	Married	60
4	Nurturing Grandmother	Female	Married	58
5	Courageous Mother	Female	Single	39
6	Hopeful Sister	Female	Single	38
7	Compassionate Social Worker	Female	Married	42

Case 1 Resilient Brother is a 25-year-old single man who

became proactive and took up a protective stance in relation to the crime committed against his brother. Being one of the immediate family members of the victim, he was an active participant in the early phases of the justice-seeking process, including helping to file a case and being present at the consultations. His contribution to the process did not stop there, as he also acted as an emotional and physical support for the victim. The individual noted that he experienced strong emotions of anger, frustration, and helplessness while dealing with the bureaucracy of the system. Nevertheless, he stayed committed to defending the interests of his brother. The account provided is an example of the dual position occupied by siblings as protectors and secondary victims. Close family ties affect the emotional component of the process significantly.

Case 2 Stoic Father is a 57-year-old married man who serves as the breadwinner for the family. Being the head of the family, the responsibility of making decisions during the justice-seeking process fell upon him. This entailed coordination with law enforcement officials, securing an attorney, and providing emotional and physical security to the victim. Even though he appeared to be calm, he underwent internal stress and felt the pressure of having to stay strong for his family.

Case 3 Protective Grandfather is a 60-year-old married man whose involvement in the process of pursuing justice became necessary because the mother of the victim was away from home, working abroad. This individual took part in many processes that are usually fulfilled by parents, like interaction with police, participating in court hearings, and making important decisions related to the case. In spite of the advanced age of this individual, he showed great ability to be resilient and perform all his duties with responsibility. In the case of this individual, we can see that his participation was not only practical but emotional as well, since he protected the victim throughout the whole procedure of seeking justice.

Case 4 Nurturing Grandmother is a married woman aged 58 years who played an important role as a caregiver and emotional buffer for the family in the aftermath of the event. Due to the lack or presence of the main caregivers during some stages of the justice-seeking process, she got actively involved in the care of the victim and his/her emotional state. The woman acted as a source of stability, comfort, and security for the victim to cope with traumatic experiences. Her role became crucial to keep the family cohesive during the process. She mentioned that she faced constant fear and anxiety related to the safety and future of the victim. Her story draws attention to the additional burden faced by elderly relatives.

Case 5 Courageous Mother is a 39-year-old single mother who was primarily responsible for carrying out the justice-seeking process. As the primary caregiver and legal guardian of the victim, she took total responsibility for starting the process, working with the police, and actively participating in the process. Her involvement involved constant interactions with the police, social workers, and the court system, thus putting her at the center of the process of seeking justice. In addition to the process-related aspects of her involvement, she was also involved in emotionally taking care of the victim while struggling with her emotions. The mother said that she suffered from anxiety and exhaustion as well as some occasional guilt, but did not give up on her fight for justice. Her double responsibility as a caregiver and primary advocate for justice illustrates the additional challenges faced by single parents.

Case 6 Hopeful Sister is a 38-year-old woman without a partner who was an essential part of the journey towards justice for the victim. Despite the fact that she did not act as the decision-maker for legal matters, she was actively participating in supporting the victim with emotions and practical assistance. She would accompany the victim on the way to the appointments, provide reassurance, and serve as a confidant within the family. Being in close touch with the victim, Hopeful Sister was subjected to the stress and experienced secondary trauma due to distress, anger, and frustration that she felt. However, she kept being a solid and encouraging presence for the victim and the family in general. The case demonstrates the experiences of the siblings as secondary victims and their dual position as anchors of emotions and witnesses of the justice-seeking process.

Case 7 Compassionate Social Worker was a 42-year-old married lady who had acted professionally in bringing justice to the victim in the particular case. She had acted professionally as a social worker linking the victim, the family, and the various institutions in the justice process, such as police, legal professionals, and other support services. In this capacity, she had the responsibility of offering services like case management, coordinating the various services, psychosocial support, and ensuring that the rights and interests of the victim were protected. She played an active role in guiding the family on how to navigate the procedure, explaining legal procedures to the victims and the families, and advocating for victim-sensitive practices in institutions. Despite her professional competence, she expressed the emotional difficulties she faces when handling sensitive cases and especially seeing the pain that the victim and his family go through during the process.

A. Experiences of Secondary Victims of Sexual Abuse

1) Resilient Brother

The resilient brother was another secondary victim and had to endure numerous emotional, psychological, and social difficulties in the quest for justice on behalf of his brother. His experiences included an abundance of anger, emotional pain, guilt, emotional exhaustion, and recurrence of trauma during the course of the entire justice process. Indicators like overthinking, insomnia, hyper-vigilance, and anxiety during court hearings were evident in the participant's experience. However, the participant exhibited resilience as he learned to control his emotions and channel all of them towards the support of the primary victim. Barriers involved in the justice process included the long duration of the process and exposure to traumatizing experiences during the hearings. Though the process seemed hard and full of emotional turmoil, hope, determination, and dedication were evident in this pursuit of justice.

Furthermore, the participant's experience in the search for justice entailed several hurdles along with the presence of positive supports. While the process did not involve any

unpleasant encounter with the authorities, it was very lengthy and emotionally draining. However, the participant encountered several police officers and DSWD personnel who were helpful and caring throughout the process.

2) Stoic Father

The Stoic Father felt intense emotional and psychological distress once he learned about the abuse, calling his experience life-changing. The emotions associated with his feelings included pain, confusion, and difficulty concentrating on future dreams and aspirations for the child. Throughout the process of seeking justice, the participant had problems with accepting what happened, but tried to deal with the experience through other people's advice and the gradual realization that one had to get used to the trauma.

Furthermore, making tough decisions while taking legal steps to seek justice became a challenging task for the participant, who took some actions such as reporting the crime after receiving the necessary advice from the authorities. Moreover, the participant was deeply distressed by witnessing the child's pain, which increased his drive to get justice. Despite the emotional turmoil that the participant went through, he remained determined to secure justice.

3) Protective Grandfather

As a secondary victim, the Protective Grandfather underwent intense emotional trauma and worries while trying to secure justice for their grandchild. Sadness, disbelief, and feelings of anxiety prevailed throughout the whole process, mainly because of the protracted duration of the case and waiting for justice to be done. The participant had problems coping with the situation because of the circumstances involved, since it turned out that the abuser was the child's biological father. On the social front, the incident strengthened family solidarity and a united stand in fighting for justice.

There were no serious institutional barriers for the participant to overcome during the process. As stated by the participant, there was great assistance from both the police and the DSWD, and they were always informed about what was going on with the case. Nevertheless, logistics became a problem since the location made it difficult for the participant to follow the process and attend the court sessions. The journey was characterized by emotional strain, patience, and unwavering hope, reflecting the resilience of secondary victims amid prolonged legal processes.

4) Nurturing Grandmother

The Nurturing Grandmother experienced various forms of psychological and emotional disturbance following the abuse case, such as fear, confusion, loss of sleep, and mental imbalance. Indeed, the incident had greatly compromised the participant's feeling of safety, considering the fact that the abuser was an individual they knew well. Further social challenges the participant experienced included disbelief, which led to a lack of support from some members of the family and the community, and doubting the validity of the allegations made by the child. This experience was indeed overwhelming and very life-changing, filled with emotional disturbances, social challenges, and fear.

In spite of all the challenges the participant encountered in connection with the above case, they were committed to pursuing justice through seeking help from relevant institutions. These included the police and the Women and Children Protection Desk. Although the participant found the efforts of these institutions supportive and responsive in most cases, some barriers were associated with the process of justice. They included delayed arrest of the suspect, reliance on the evidence provided by the children, and changes in alternative justice approaches, such as online hearings amid the pandemic.

5) Courageous Mother

The participant was under severe emotional trauma and disturbance while trying to seek justice for her child. She had experiences of fear, vulnerability, and internal conflicts, especially when forced to take sides either in favor of protecting her child or keeping family unity, since the perpetrator was a family member. This affected her family relations negatively, due to a lack of support from her husband's side, and social isolation since people accused her of filing a case against the perpetrator. The situation was experienced as traumatic, painful, and life-changing as she experienced emotional pain, social struggles, and fear, but she was resilient in fighting for justice.

She exhibited high levels of maternal determination as she focused on the well-being of her child and not the relationships within the family. The participants reported that she faced threats and pressures from the side of the perpetrator's family to drop the case, causing fear in her, but also made her try to look for security from the authorities. Her case was supported by the institutions of the police and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

6) Hopeful Sister

The emotions that were prevalent throughout the Hopeful Sister process included fear, panic, confusion, and distress. These emotions were felt especially right after the event. The person who underwent this process described their emotional condition as being emotionally unstable because they felt shaky, they were crying, and they could not cope with the situation, especially when their sister vanished. Guilt and blaming each other among the family members contributed to emotional problems, and there was an effect on the other family members as well, especially on their siblings.

Nevertheless, the family showed a high level of cohesiveness and determination in making efforts to pursue justice. They contacted the barangay, community, and the police to ask for their help in order to get the situation under control and make sure that their sister is safe. The institutions were helpful and responsive enough in providing aid in a timely manner. At the same time, the family faced some obstacles and threats as well since they had to worry about getting into any kind of trouble from the aggressor.

B. Compassionate Social Worker

There were various psychological and emotional effects experienced by the Compassionate Social Worker after interacting with children who recounted their experiences of being abused. The participant indicated feeling protective towards not only other children but also towards her own child.

Her awareness of risks and danger increased. Although there was no disruption of social relationships caused by the experience, the experience changed the way she viewed things concerning safety and trust. There was anger towards the abusers and also empathy towards the victims, especially during critical times, such as while reviewing affidavits and attending court hearings.

Moreover, she mentioned problems, which included a delay in processing cases because of heavy workloads among police officers, and also the need for documentation. There were also delays in judicial decision-making regarding the integration of the children. This caused emotional distress to both the children and caregivers. Nevertheless, despite these problems, the experience was considered structured and supportive because of the justice process. In particular, she referred to referral processes in Davao City. Thus, the experience was both emotionally distressing and meaningful. It can be described as a combination of frustration caused by the process delays and satisfaction from achieving justice.

Emotional Distress. The theme reinforced Warrington (2023), noting that close family members or significant others who are non-abusing individuals in cases of sexual abuse tend to suffer from emotions of guilt, pain, fear, and stress as they struggle to help the victim while also dealing with their own emotions. In a similar way, Vera-Gray (2023) noted that sexual abuse does not affect only the victim but also family members and support groups, leading to emotional distress.

Mura gyud kog mabuang ma'am oy kay maglibog ko asa nag—asa, asa nako, ma kompleto pa ba akong pamilya or mu dapig ba akong bana saakoa o dili. Mao gyud to dili gyud nako i give up akong anak kay anak man nako—anak man jud ang nag kuan ba dugo niya ug dugo nako isa ra, mao nang kailangan jud nako ipaglaban siya, bahalag maguba akong pamilya. Guol ma'am, kanang mahulagway--kanang dili nimo masabtan ba nga murag dili naka maka-feel, na murag tanan palibot-- nasa palibot nimo, murag ikaw bitaw gi basol. Ikaw pa'y nangayo ug hustisya, n'ya ikaw pa'y murag gibasol sa tao, ana ba. Mao nang sakit jud kaayo saimong—saakoa to na side. (PQ1-PQ1-C5)

Ma'am, I felt like I was losing my mind because I was so confused. I kept asking myself where I belonged, whether my family would ever be complete again, and whether my husband would stand by me or not. Despite everything, I never considered giving up on my child because he is my child. We share the same blood, and that is why I knew I had to fight for him, even if it meant that my family would fall apart. I was deeply devastated, Ma'am. It is difficult to describe because I could no longer understand what I was feeling. It was as if I had become emotionally numb, and everyone around me seemed to blame me. Even though I was the one seeking justice, I was the one being judged and blamed by other people. That was incredibly painful for me. (PQ1-PQ1-C5)

As shown in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, secondary victims of sexual abuse often experience secondary traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, and psychological burden because of their emotional connection with the victim and exposure to traumatic narratives. Lo Iacono et al. (2021) explained that exposure to sexual abuse within family and caregiving contexts may contribute to emotional dysregulation, trauma symptoms, anxiety, and long-term psychological distress. Moreover, studies on secondary traumatic stress suggest that individuals exposed to another person's trauma may experience symptoms like direct trauma exposure, including emotional overwhelm, intrusive thoughts, sleep disturbance, and psychological exhaustion (Ulaş & Seçer, 2025).

Siguro ano, naa jud siguro jud tong kasuko or kapungot against the perpetrator sa mga children na naadmit sa among center at the same time more or less ma feel nimo ang burden sa bata. Every time they share or upon reading their affidavits. So kami jud, imake sure namo na strong mi na individual kay nakabalo mi na weak ang bata. Especially hapit na or imminent na ang mga court hearings. They need kanang someone nga

Table 2
Experiences of secondary victims of sexual abuse

Emerging Theme	Core Ideas
Emotional Distress	• Characterized by overwhelming anger, pain, and guilt experienced as a reaction to the abuse and its consequences. [P1] • The experience is perceived as life-altering, leaving one with the feeling that one's world has collapsed. [P2] • Ongoing worry and unresolved sadness that continue to affect the individual over time. [P3] • Feelings of being mentally overwhelmed, nearing emotional or psychological collapse. [P4] • Deep sadness accompanied by a sense of losing control over one's mental and emotional state. [P5] • Inability to find peace or stability due to intrusive thoughts and emotional disturbance. [P6] • Internalization of the victim's pain, leading to emotional strain and a sense of responsibility or burden. [P7]
Institutional Delay	• The extended duration of legal proceedings is perceived as a significant barrier to their pursuit of justice. [P1] • Continuous waiting for results creates emotional strain and a sense of unresolved justice. [P3] • The length of time spent waiting (e.g., months) intensifies distress and impatience. [P4] • Systemic factors, such as heavy workload, contribute to delays in case filing and processing. [P7]
Institutional Support	• Received assistance from formal institutions. [P1,2,3 & 5] • Experienced consistent institutional support and guidance. [P4 & 6] • Perceived the referral system as effective in facilitating access to services and support. [P7].
Social Support	• Experienced strengthened family relationships and consistent support from family members. [P 1 & 2] • Received help from neighbors and the broader community during the situation. [P 3, 4, 5 & 6]
Blame and Doubt	• Experienced blame and negative judgment from others. [P5 & 6] • Encountered disbelief and invalidation. [P4]

maghatag sad sa ilaha ug strong figure so kami jud to. (PQ1-PQ1-C7)

Perhaps there was really anger and resentment toward the perpetrator for what had happened to the children admitted to our center. At the same time, we could truly feel the burden that the children were carrying, especially every time they shared their experiences or whenever we read their affidavits. Because of this, we made sure to remain emotionally strong, knowing that the children were in a vulnerable state. This was especially important when their court hearings were approaching or imminent. They needed someone who could serve as a source of strength and stability, and we took on that role for them. *(PQ1-PQ1-C7)*

Institutional Delay. The results from the study indicated that the secondary victims of sexual abuse encountered a lot of emotional problems because of the delays on the part of institutions involved in the legal process. The victims reported delays in the hearing process, delayed filing of cases, delays in approval procedures, and long waiting periods, all of which increased their emotional stress. Delay was the cause of frustration, stress, emotional tiredness, and hopelessness among secondary victims who were already emotionally affected by the abuse (Niriella, 2021).

So far sa court wala man kayo miy problema kay very ano sila accommodating sila sa among mga queries at the same time naga update sad sila sa mga schedules like briefings so sa mga documents na kailangan namo isubmit pa. Pero naa tay kanang murag court na kanang ano ba kanang dugay, shall I say naa tay branch, certain branch nga kanang dugay sad siya iyang approval with regards sa kanag reintegration sa bata sa community even kami na social worker makaassess na okay na ang bata, ready na ang families, safe na ang family and community na ulian but ang court jud ang usually nagadiffer or nagadelay ng reintegration process. Ang bata man gud "ma kanus a ko muoli". Syempre kay structured ang atong activities sa center, so wala sila maanad eh. Na expose sila sa time tong younger years na they have free will. Naa sila sa bunks, makagawas sila sa ilang panimalay. Here comes nashelter sila, murag staying them that long murag mag cause nasad sa ilaha ug effect sa ilaha. So mao ng kami, we make it sure na kung safe na ang ulian, ireintegrate na namo na pero naa jud tay certain branch sa RTC 11 nga siguro gusto lang sad nila imake sure na ready na ang kumbaga mapursue ang case ug maokay ang bata. Kanang murag pahumanon ang case ba pero murag kanua a paman ni murag mutake paman ni ug mga 4 years. Dugay kaayo. (PQ1-PQ1-C7)

So far, we have not encountered many problems with the court because they have generally been accommodating in responding to our queries. They also keep us updated regarding schedules, such as briefings, and inform us about the documents we still need to submit. However, there are certain court branches that take a long time to approve the reintegration of a child into the community. Despite our assessment as social workers indicating that the child is ready, the family is ready, and the home and community environment are safe for the child to return to, the courts still take too much time before reintegration.

Children always say to us, "Ma'am, when can I go back home?" As the center has set schedule for everything, they do not feel comfortable in such a setting. Before coming into the shelter, particularly in their young age, they get accustomed to being more free, as they can go out and roam around the community. After getting put into the shelter, they can experience both emotional and psychological impact from staying inside the shelter for a very long time. Therefore, we, as social workers, try our best to integrate them as early as possible when it is already safe to do so. There are some branches of Regional Trial Court in Region XI who seem to prolong the process, maybe they need to make sure that the child is ready for the integration process as well as they still can continue pursuing the case. (PQ1-PQ1-C7)

In Cases 1, 3, 4, and 7, delay in the justice system was viewed as one of the challenges in the process of obtaining justice by the participants. Lengthy procedures, constant waiting for the results, and prolonged duration of the procedure created emotional tension, frustrations, and a lack of justice for the participants. All these results are confirmed by the current literature, which states that the delays in the justice system often cause secondary victimization and long-term psychological problems of the victimized individuals and their families. According to Abdullaev (2025), the survivor and his/her support system may feel the effects of retraumatization caused by the lengthy and psychologically exhausting process of obtaining justice. Also, Powell and Henry (2021) stated that delays in cases of sexual assault cause additional emotional distress, decrease the level of trust in the institution, and make the victimized individual and his/her family feel frustrated and helpless. Furthermore, Enforcement (2022) pointed out that secondary victims experience additional emotional stress connected with the need to support the primary victim through the lengthy legal procedure.

Despite the problems, those involved in Cases 1, 2, 3, and 5 noted that they received some sort of assistance and support through institutions like the police and the DSWD, which enabled them to keep on fighting for justice despite the challenges they had to face. Positive institutional responses after experiencing sexual abuse promote emotional healing and resilience, and also ensure the psychological well-being of both the primary and secondary victims of abuse. Trauma-informed institutional responses by police and legal professionals, among others, can help minimize further traumatization of the victim (Syahbur, 2023).

Institutional Support. The importance of institutional support cannot be overstated when it comes to dealing with secondary victims of sexual abuse in terms of emotions, psychology, and the legal process. A secondary victim is an individual who is indirectly traumatized as a result of the primary victim being sexually abused. Therefore, for secondary victims, institutional support becomes critical in alleviating their emotional burden. This kind of support from institutions such as the police force, the courts, and the social welfare agency helps to alleviate the

stress that secondary victims feel as a result of sexual violence (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2022).

Sa DSWD ug pulis, okay raman. Ila man kong gisuportahan. Pero dilis a barangay wala, wala man ko nangayo ug tabang sa Barangay dire kay tua sa Maco raman gud nahitabo. Wala man dire so wala ra sad ko nangayo ug tabang dire. Layo raman ang nahitaboan. Pirminti man sila nagasuporta. Nagatawag sad sila sa update, ang nagagunit sa kaso, babae na pulis man ang naghawak ato. Pirminti man nagafollow up ug tawag. (PQ2-PQ2-C3)

The support of DSWD and the police was excellent. They were there for me all along. Speaking of the barangay, I did not need any help from them because the problem occurred in Maco and not in our own barangay. Because it happened outside my area, I did not bother seeking their help. The police kept me in their good books because they always kept in touch with me regarding the update of the case. The police officer who was handling my case was a lady police officer and she would call me frequently. (PQ2-PQ2-C3)

The participants in Cases 4 and 6 received consistent institutional guidance and support in dealing with the emotional and legal difficulties involved in the cases. The institutional support that was received provided reassurance, direction, and confidence in the justice-seeking process. The participant in Case 7 perceived the referral system as effective in terms of accessing all the required services and interventions. This is consistent with the findings by Lathan et al. (2021) that the presence of positive institutional response through the validation of the feelings of the survivor, active support, and communication can be highly beneficial for the coping process and resilience. Additionally, it should be emphasized that support systems for secondary victims play an important role in minimizing the emotional trauma and facilitating the psychological recovery after the traumatic events. As was indicated by the authors, secondary victims usually experience a range of emotions, such as emotional distress, anxiety, guilt, and psychological burden because of their involvement in the traumatic situation and its institutional handling (Cobos-Vargas et al., 2022).

Social Support. Reassurance, empathy, and interpersonal support systems are key factors in mitigating secondary trauma and mental health problems faced by families and other people who have been impacted indirectly by cases of sexual abuse. The support provided by family and community support systems is vital for dealing with emotional pain, fear, and trauma responses among primary and secondary survivors. (Gewirtz-Meydan et al. 2022).

Wala ko kasabot sa akong gibati. Nangurog ko ato, nagdagan na nangayo ug tabang nga ing ana ang nahitabo. Kay kato na time nga nahitabo wala nakauli akong isoon at kay gidala lagi atong lakiha. Tapos naa pakoy manghod ato duha ka bulan. Naglakaw mi sa akong mama, nadumduman pajud nako na nagbaktas mi ug layo sa hingtungdan sa akong igsoon kay naa daw didto. Ingon sa mga tao nan aa daw didto. Pag ingon nako sa akong ig agaw, niuban sad siya didto. Wala pud kapugong mga ig agaw, hapit sad niya napatay tong lakiha to, kay iya mang gisumbag ba, nadasok siya ilalom sa katre unya akong manghod nikurog ug nihilak dayon nikupo sa akoa. Akong mama mura sad siyag mabuang ato nga time kay bagong anak man siya ato. Gitabangan sad mi sa pulis maong narescue mi dayon sa pulis. Gidakop man dayon siya ato na time. (PQ2-PQ1-C6)

I could not understand what I was feeling. I was trembling, and I immediately ran to ask for help after learning what had happened. At that time, my sibling had not yet returned home because he had been taken by the perpetrator. I also had a younger sibling who was only two months old. My mother and I walked a long distance because people told us that my sibling was there. When I informed my cousin, he came with us. My cousins could barely control their anger they almost killed the man because one of them punched him, causing him to fall underneath the bed. Meanwhile, my younger sibling was shaking, crying, and immediately clung to me. My mother also seemed as though she was losing her mind during that time because she had just given birth. Fortunately, the police helped us, and they were able to rescue us immediately. The perpetrator was arrested right away. (PQ2-PQ1-C6)

Cases 1 and 2 experienced strengthened family relationships and consistent emotional support from family members, which helped them cope with emotional distress and continue pursuing justice. Family members provided comfort, reassurance, encouragement, and a sense of security during emotionally difficult situations. Meanwhile, participants in Cases 3, 4, 5, and 6 received assistance and support from neighbors and the broader community, demonstrating the importance of social connectedness and collective support during times of crisis. The above findings are consistent with the findings of Lathan et al. (2021), which established that favorable social responses and emotional support after disclosure are linked to less psychological distress and enhanced coping strategies for people related to trauma. The importance of families and communities as vital sources of support for both primary and secondary survivors of sexual abuse through emotional support, tangible support, and validation was stressed by Vera-Gray (2023). In addition, Gewirtz-Meydan et al. (2020) emphasized that emotional reassurance, empathy, and strong supportive interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in reducing secondary traumatic stress and psychological distress among family members and individuals indirectly affected by sexual abuse cases.

Blame and Doubt. Invalidating social responses and victim-blaming attitudes create significant barriers to emotional recovery because they minimize, question, or dismiss the experiences of victims and those connected to them. When survivors or secondary victims are blamed, doubted, or accused of exaggerating the incident, they may develop feelings of shame, guilt, self-doubt, and emotional isolation. Instead of receiving understanding and support, they may feel rejected or judged by their family, community, or social environment. These negative reactions can intensify psychological distress,

worsen trauma-related symptoms, and reduce their confidence in seeking emotional or institutional assistance (Adair & Senn, 2026).

Mura gyud kog mabuang ma'am oy kay maglibog ko asa nag—asa, asa nako, ma kompleto pa ba akong pamilya or mu dapig ba akong bana saakoa o dili. Mao gyud to dili gyud nako i give up akong anak kay anak man nako—anak man jud ang nag kuan ba dugo niya ug dugo nako isa ra, mao nang kailangan jud nako ipaglaban siya, bahalag maguba akong pamilya. Guol ma'am, kanang mahulagway--kanang dili nimo masabtan ba nga murag dili naka maka-feel, na murag tanan palibot-- nasa palibot nimo, murag ikaw bitaw gi basol. Ikaw pa'y nangayo ug hustisya, n'ya ikaw pa'y murag gibasol sa tao, ana ba. Mao nang sakit jud kaayo saimong—saakoa to na side. (P1-P1-C5)

Ma'am, I felt like I was losing my mind because I was so confused. I kept asking myself where I stood, whether my family would ever be whole again, and whether my husband would stand by me or not. Despite everything, I never considered giving up on my child because he is my child. We share the same blood, and that is why I knew I had to fight for him, even if it meant that my family would fall apart. I was extremely hurt, Ma'am. It is hard to put into words because I was at a point where I could not understand what I was going through. I was just numb emotionally, and everybody blamed me. Although I was the one fighting for my right, I felt that the society blamed me for something that happened. That was the most heartbreaking thing for me. (P1-P1-C5)

Cases 5 and 6 faced negative judgments and blame from people. On the other hand, Case 4 faced disbelief and invalidation related to their experiences and worries. This is consistent with the literature review done by Ullman (2023). Ullman highlighted that the social reaction towards sexual assault disclosure significantly affects the process of healing and mental health of individuals who experience sexual violence. In this case, Ullman explains that negative reactions such as blame, disbelief, trivializing, criticizing, and invalidation may make the symptoms of trauma worse and lead to increased emotional distress of the victims and their supporters.

This emotional distress is mainly associated with worries about the outcomes of the case and the safety of the primary victim. The guilt of the person for not protecting the victim adds to emotional distress. However, the person shows some emerging strength by realizing the need to be strong for the sake of the family. Generally, the person will face persistent psychological distress but also an increased sense of responsibility and emotional strength in the future. Furthermore, Sigurdardottir & Halldorsdottir (2021) stated that social disbelief and stigma towards sexual abuse make the victims and their supporters silent.

C. Long-term Impact of Sexual Abuse on Secondary Victims

1) Resilient Brother

Emotional, psychological, and social impacts were evident in the life of the Resilient Brother as he went through time. In terms of his emotions, he still possesses the emotional baggage of pain, anxiety, and protectiveness, but is learning how to cope with these emotions. From the psychological impact, vigilance, overthinking, and insomnia became some of the issues that he had to deal with as a result of the experience.

2) Stoic Father

He suffered initially from a lack of motivation, feeling heavy emotionally, and being less active in terms of doing things, especially work, which proves the gravity of the psychological effect. Decisions made were also influenced by various factors that involved the future of the child and the future grandchild, as it made the decision-making process cautious and full of emotion in order to fight for justice.

In the case of the Stoic Father, there are some long-lasting effects on his emotions, psychology, and functioning. As he manages his distressing feelings better, there will still be some emotions associated with his experience that will keep changing. In terms of psychology, he is troubled by intrusive thoughts and feelings that affect his focus. In physical terms, it influences his sleep and fatigue due to constant worries.

3) Protective Grandfather

Nevertheless, the Protective Grandfather has to deal with certain emotional and social consequences as well. There are no considerable differences in his everyday life, but he feels constant shame, embarrassment, and emotional problems connected with this event. Such a reaction is caused by the impact of social stigma and concern about his reputation as a member of the family and a grandparent.

Although this person keeps all his physical health and continues his usual activities, he experiences an enormous psychological burden and is concerned about the welfare of the victim. Moreover, the way of coping with the problem did not change; he still maintains optimism and tries to solve this case. At the same time, this experience makes him more convinced about the necessity of justice and his obligation to continue working on solving this case. His faith in the lawbreaker has been lost, and he is going to deal with legal matters connected with it.

4) Nurturing Grandmother

There are lasting emotional, psychological, and behavioral effects on the Nurturing Grandmother from the occurrence of the experience. As a result of the experience, there is increased fearfulness and social isolation, where the participant is too cautious and prevents the child from associating with others. There are also fears and mistrust of others. From the psychological perspective, the individual shows signs of trauma and anxiety, where fearfulness and distress occur when interacting with others and while remembering the experience.

From an emotional perspective, the participant continues to experience fear and distress, particularly regarding the children's safety, which leads them to remain vigilant and closely monitor the children's activities. From the psychological perspective, the experience made the participant react through overthinking, disturbed sleeping patterns, lack of appetite, and distress when remembering the experience. However, it can be seen that the participant copes with the issue

through avoidance and not thinking about the event for the sake of normal functioning.

5) Courageous Mother

There are considerable long-term social, emotional, and relational consequences from the Courageous Mother's experience. The incident caused disruption within her family, mainly because it disrupted her marital relations due to the changes in her partner's behavior, which resulted in emotional distance and conflict. She was also under social pressure since people blamed and criticized her for taking legal action against the wrongdoer.

There are environmental stressors that have made her move to another place in order to reduce the amount of stigma and criticism, which helps her cope with her emotions. Regardless of this, she continues to believe in the law and relies on the advice of institutions and evidence to help her make a case for her daughter. This experience has changed her attitude toward life, and she is now more cautious about everything.

6) Hopeful Sister

At first, the feelings include being confused, afraid, helpless, and emotionally shocked at the time of rescue and reaction to the abuse. With time, these feelings become long-lasting emotional disturbances, like anger towards the abuser, intrusive memories, spontaneous crying, and emotional instability.

On an emotional level, the person is still experiencing stress, fear, anxiety, and intrusive memories, which are hard to deal with. On a psychological level, the person is constantly overthinking, emotionally distressed, and constantly remembering the traumatic experience even after a considerable amount of time. On a physical level, the experience impacts the ability to sleep and function normally, resulting in fatigue and weakness.

D. Compassionate Social Worker

The Compassionate Social Worker experience resulted in increased alertness and overprotection of vulnerable people, such as female relatives and children, due to the awareness developed because of trauma. However, in spite of these difficulties, the participant shows adaptability and growth of professional skills, learning to combine empathy and self-regulation. The social functioning is normal; there is no problem with interpersonal relationships. From an emotional perspective, the participant still experiences sadness, frustration, and disappointment due to poor results achieved by children in spite of the good care, empowerment, and assistance they get during their rehabilitation. It can be considered as secondary trauma when a person empathically takes into account the problems of victims even outside the framework of providing care.

From the psychological perspective, the participant develops realistic attitudes and emotional regulation as he learns to combine his empathy and acceptance of the fact that there are many external circumstances that cannot be influenced, such as unequal opportunities, lack of family support, and socio-economic factors. However, she still remains devoted to helping. Despite being part of the reason why she becomes emotionally overwhelmed and suffers from secondary trauma, the participant turns this experience into an instrument of professional strength and compassion. These difficulties only serve to strengthen her resolve, making her more committed to the task of fighting for children's well-being, always keeping their interests in mind.

Lingering Emotional Impact. Trauma exposure associated with sexual abuse may contribute to long-term emotional dysregulation, chronic stress, anxiety, and psychological distress among individuals connected to the victim because secondary victims are often emotionally involved in the traumatic experience and its aftermath. Family members, caregivers, partners, and support persons may repeatedly witness the victim's emotional suffering, legal struggles, and behavioral changes, which can deeply affect their own psychological well-being. Continuous exposure to the trauma, especially during investigations, court hearings, and discussions about the abuse, may cause secondary victims to relive painful emotions and develop persistent worry, fear,

Table 3
The long-term impacts of sexual abuse on secondary victims

Emerging Theme	Core Ideas
Lingering Emotional Impact	• Persistent feelings of anger, resentment, anxiety, and emotional pain. [P1] • Sustained grief due to the absence of justice. [P3] • Continued emotional suffering is expressed through questioning the injustice. [P6]
Fear and Anxiety	• Experienced persistent anxiety related to the uncertainty of outcomes. [P1 & 3] • Underwent fear and worry concerning safety and potential threats. [P 3, 4 & 5] • Exhibited physiological and emotional symptoms of anxiety. [P6]
Sleep Disruption	• Persistent sleep disturbances are experienced [P 2,3, & 4] • Ongoing physical exhaustion and bodily weakness result from lack of rest. [P1 & 6]
Loss of Motivation	• Loss of motivation to engage in work and daily responsibilities is experienced. [P 1, 2 & 6] • Decreased appetite and neglect of basic self-care, such as eating, are evident. [P4 & 5]
Protective Behavior	• Increased protectiveness toward family members. [P1 & 4] • Heightened vigilance and cautious behavior. [P6 & 7]
Resilience and Careful Decision Making	• Increased personal strength and resilience. [P1] • Greater caution and careful decision-making. [P2]
Family Disruption	• Experienced breakdown or threat to the stability of family relationships. [P6] • Experienced significant changes and strain in family dynamics. [P5]
Trauma	• Underwent trauma triggered by exposure to reminders. [P 1 & 2] • Experienced persistent intrusive thoughts related to the incident. [P6] • Exhibited cognitive distress manifested through overthinking. [P4]

helplessness, and emotional exhaustion (Lo Iacono et al, 2021).

Naa gihapon ma'am. Dili jud nimo malikayan labi na ng muabot ang panahon na ikaw jud ang basolon sa tanan palibot. Dili jud nimo maiwasan ma'am na maguol jud ka. Mubalik jud sa imoha. Wala ko nakafeel ug guilt ato kay gibuhat man nako ang tanan para sa akong anak ma'am. Kahadlok lang nuon naa. Kanang dili nimo malikayan ba ns mahadlok ka kay ikaw ilang gibasol kay kada lihok daw pamasahe. Masakitan sad ka kay ikaw may basolon. (PQ2-PQ1-C5)

Yes, Ma'am, those feelings are still there. You cannot really avoid them, especially when the time comes that the people around you blame you for everything. It is impossible not to feel hurt and saddened because those memories always come back. However, I never felt guilty because I knew I had done everything I could for my child. What remained was fear. You cannot help but feel afraid when people keep blaming you, making it seem as though every decision you make is wrong. It is painful because, in the end, you are the one who is held responsible. (PQ2-PQ1-C5)

The participants in cases 1, 3, and 6 mentioned ongoing emotional pain related to their experiences with the trauma and the quest for justice. This is in line with past studies indicating the importance of lasting emotions experienced by the people affected by sexual abuse. Sigurdardottir and Halldorsdottir (2021) stated that exposure to sexual violence would lead to emotional pain, which includes but is not limited to feelings such as grief, anxiety, emotional pain, and psychological distress that may last for quite some time. According to the authors, the trauma related to sexual violence might be an unresolved one due to the constant recollection of the events or inability to find any resolution or justice. Lo Iacono et al. (2021) have indicated that exposure to trauma because of sexual abuse may lead to dysregulation, chronic stress, anxiety, and psychological distress for the individual in connection to the victim. It could be a family member or support person who witnesses the suffering of the victim through legal proceedings.

Fear and Anxiety. The family and supporters of the victims of sexual abuse often go through anxiety and fear because of their emotional attachment to the safety and well-being of the primary victim of sexual abuse. Witnessing the emotional suffering, trauma, and behavioral changes of their loved one may create feelings of helplessness, worry, and emotional burden among secondary victims. Many family members fear that the victim may continue to experience psychological harm, social stigma, or retraumatization throughout the justice process. Concerns about the victim's emotional stability and future well-being may also cause persistent stress and overprotectiveness within the family (Vera-Gray, 2023).

Nabantayan nako na mas maingat nako. Mag sege nako ug bantay sa akong palibot kay gusto nako maprotektahan akong pamilya. Nagatibangay mi sa akong pamilya para makab ot ang hustisya. Akong mga higala ug silingan kay nag advise sad sa amoa na ipadayon jud ang kaso para sa akong manghod. Kailangan jud na magbarog para sa hustiya ug para sa pamilya. (PQ2-PQ1-C1)

I noticed that I have become much more cautious. I am constantly aware of my surroundings because I want to protect my family. My family and I supported one another throughout our pursuit of justice. My friends and neighbors also encouraged us to continue pursuing the case for the sake of my younger sibling. They reminded us that we had to stand firm in seeking justice and protecting our family. *(PQ2-PQ1-C1)*

Cases 1 and 3 involved constant anxiety arising from the uncertain outcome of legal cases and the lengthy nature of the justice process. Participants in Cases 3, 4, and 5 suffered from fear and worry about personal safety and possible threats from the perpetrator because of the possibility of more harm or release of the perpetrator. In Case 6, participants demonstrated physical and emotional symptoms of anxiety, including trembling and emotional distress, implying that the effect of trauma was not only emotional but also physical. According to Lo Iacono et al. (2021), trauma exposure in connection with sexual abuse can result in chronic anxiety, dysregulation of emotions, hypervigilance, and long-term psychological distress for people who are associated with the victim of the crime. Additionally, Sigurdardottir and Halldorsdottir (2021) pointed out that persistent fear, emotional suffering, and psychological instability are typical effects of trauma exposure in relation to sexual violence. Lastly, Gewirtz-Meydan et al. (2020) found that repeated exposure to emotionally disturbing events and continuous participation in cases related to sexual violence can cause secondary traumatic stress, anxiety symptoms, and emotional exhaustion.

Sleep Disruption. In general, trauma exposure is significantly related to sleep disturbances, such as insomnia, poor sleep, fatigue, and difficulties regulating both emotional and physiological aspects. According to the study, people who are exposed to trauma face high levels of psychological arousal, intrusive thoughts, anxiety, and emotional distress that can have an adverse impact on their sleep. Despite the fact that secondary victims do not go through direct exposure to trauma, constant emotional exposure to the suffering of the primary victim and participation in stressful legal procedures can lead to the development of the same reactions due to trauma. Secondary victims tend to experience recurrent re-living of traumatic experience, fear for their safety and justice results, and hypervigilance, which makes sleep impossible (Unnarsdottir et al., 2025).

Sa una, ang hunahuna nako kay kasuko ug kasakit ra ang mobati. Pero sa ulahi, nakita nako nga naapektuhan diay pud ang akong mental health naay times nga lisod kaayo katulog ug sige kog overthink bisan sa gagmay nga butang. Nagahuna huna ko ug hustisya para sa akong manghod. (PQ2-PQ2-C1)

To start with, I believed that the only thing I was going through was anger and hurt. With time however, I came to realize that my mental well-being was also impacted. At times, it was extremely challenging to get any sleep because of over-thinking about anything and everything that happened. My

mind was always preoccupied with avenging what happened to my brother or sister. (PQ2-PQ2-C1)

In Cases 2, 3, and 4, the participants had trouble sleeping because they were unable to fall asleep, get good rest, or stay awake as they continued to have intrusive thoughts about the situation and the ongoing justice process. Meanwhile, Case 1 and Case 6 were constantly feeling physically exhausted and weak due to insufficient rest and emotional stress. These observations support Schenker et al. (2024), who mentioned that the traumatic experiences of a person and the post-traumatic symptomatology were significantly related to sleep disorders, emotional regulation problems, and exhaustion of a person. They pointed out that people experiencing trauma tend to have intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, anxiety, and psychological distress, which lead to a lack of proper sleep and feelings of exhaustion and weakness. Despite the fact that secondary victims do not experience direct abuse, their emotional connection with the victim can make them experience the effects of secondary traumatic stress (Rzeszutek et al., 2024).

Loss of Motivation. There is a close connection between trauma-induced stress and emotional exhaustion, as people who go through traumatic events tend to become both mentally and emotionally overburdened due to constant anxiety, fear, and sadness. Being constantly stressed out with trauma-related issues leads to the depletion of one's emotional resources, which, in turn, makes it hard for people to be interested in anything and concentrate on their tasks and activities. Hence, people lose their motivation to work, study, spend time with others, and perform other routine things they used to do before (Hansford & Jobson, 2021).

Medyo nadaot jud among panginabuhi kay wala nakoy gana mutrabaho. Unya hinuon wala man sad ko nagapangita ug samok pud. Murag nawal an ko ug gana sa pagpanginabuhi ba. Sa panahon sa kagabihon, mag istorya istorya mi sa akong pamilya. Makaingon pud ko na kung ipapriso nato, pwede man pero luoy atong magiging apo kay nabuntis baya so mao to nakadesisyon nalang na pasagdaan nalang usa. Unya nalang istoryahon ug makaanak na. (PQ2-PQ2-C2)

Our livelihood was greatly affected because I lost the motivation to work. At the same time, I no longer wanted to get involved in anything or deal with other people. It felt as though I had lost my desire to move forward with my life. At night, my family and I would sit together and talk about what had happened. I even found myself saying that we could have the perpetrator imprisoned, but I also felt sorry for my grandchild because she was already pregnant. Because of that, we decided to set the matter aside temporarily and wait until she had given birth before discussing the case again. *(PQ2-PQ2-C2)*

In Cases 1, 2, and 6, participants showed signs of a lack of motivation for work and other activities because of emotional exhaustion, constant stress, and psychological burden caused by abuse and the process of dealing with justice. Participants indicated feeling physically weak and low on energy, and lacked interest in regular activities. At the same time, in Cases 4 and 5, there was a decline in their appetite and self-care, which demonstrates that emotional problems have already impacted their physical and emotional well-being. The results are consistent with the research of Ogińska-Bulik et al. (2023), which stated that secondary traumatization can lead to negative psychological consequences, including emotional exhaustion, lack of motivation, and inability to perform daily activities. The authors stressed that the continuous emotional burden and ineffective coping with stress resulting from the trauma can lead to problems with the cognitive and emotional well-being of people.

In addition, Barutcu (2025) observed that secondary traumatic stress among family caregivers can be linked to emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, lack of motivation, and poor self-care practices. Caregivers and helpers who are consistently confronted with the pain and anguish of other people may experience stress, which will leave them feeling stressed and will manifest in the form of low appetite, physical fatigue, and emotional withdrawal.

Protective Behavior. Secondary traumatic stress is experienced by family members and support people who are involved in dealing with cases of sexual abuse. The individuals experience fear, emotional hypervigilance, and enhanced protective actions towards the loved ones due to the emotional connection with the trauma that the victim experiences and the resulting consequences. As the secondary victim watches the emotional distress, fear, and vulnerability of the primary victim, he/she becomes overly aware of any dangers that might come his/her way, thus being on guard always. This emotional hypervigilance arises out of the desire to protect one's loved ones (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2020).

Ginabantayan nako na mas maingat nako. Mga mag sege nako ug bantay sa akong palibot nga gusto nako maprotektahan akong pamilya. Ginatibangay mi sa akong pamilya nga makabot ang hustisya. Ang akong mga higala ug silingan nga nagadvice sad sa amoa nga ipadayon jud ang kaso para sa akong manghod. Kailangan jud nga magbarog para sa hustiya ug para sa pamilya. (PQ2-PQ2-C1)

I observed that I have become more cautious. I always observe my surroundings because I want to protect my family. My family and I work together to pursue justice. My friends and neighbors have also advised us to continue the case for my younger sibling. We have to really stand firm for justice and for our family. (PQ2-PQ2-C1)

In Cases 1 and 4, participants revealed increased protection of their family members, especially their kids and any other vulnerable loved ones, in order to make sure that they remain safe from any other form of harm. On the other hand, in Cases 6 and 7, participants became more vigilant and cautious in their actions since they became more alert, vigilant, and responsive to the possibility of being threatened. These results align with Lo Iacono et al. (2021), who stated that exposure to trauma linked to sexual abuse may increase hypervigilance, chronic anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and increased stress reactions in people who have been affected by such trauma. Family

members and support persons who are emotionally attached to the case of sexual abuse may become too cautious and protective due to constant fear and worry about the victim's protection from further victimization. In the same way, Vera-Gray (2023) noted that families of sexual abuse victims usually face ongoing issues of safety, well-being, and protection.

Resilience and Careful Decision Making. Individuals exposed to prolonged emotional stress and traumatic experiences may develop resilience, emotional regulation, and adaptive functioning as part of their efforts to maintain psychological well-being despite adversity because repeated exposure to difficult life situations often pushes individuals to develop coping strategies that help them emotionally survive and continue functioning. Over time, some individuals learn to manage overwhelming emotions such as fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety by becoming more emotionally aware, cautious, and mentally prepared when facing stressful situations (Rzeszutek et al., 2024).

Daghan. Kanang giving your best para sa mga Akong gipractice na dapat magpahulay jud para naa kay kusog na makigbisog sa pagpangayo ug hustiya. Nangita sad ko ug suporta ato sa akong pamilya ma'am. Pasalamat lang sad ko sa ilaha. Dapat usahay kailangan sad nato mukalma aron makahuna huna tag tarong ma'am. (PQ2-PQ3-C1)

I learned that I need to take care of myself and make sure I get enough rest so that I have the strength to continue fighting for justice. During that time, I also sought support from my family, and I am truly grateful for everything they did for me. I realized that sometimes we need to calm ourselves first so that we can think clearly and make better decisions. (PQ2-PQ3-C1)

In Case 1, the participant demonstrated increased personal strength and resilience by learning to remain emotionally strong despite the challenges encountered throughout the justice process. Meanwhile, in Case 2, the participant exhibited greater caution and careful decision-making, becoming more mindful and thoughtful when dealing with stressful situations and responsibilities. These findings are consistent with Taku and Efthemiou (2025), who explained that individuals exposed to traumatic experiences may develop post-traumatic growth and resilience as part of their psychological adjustment and recovery process. The authors emphasized that resilience involves the ability to adapt positively despite emotional hardship. At the same time, post-traumatic growth may lead individuals to develop greater emotional strength, self-awareness, and a more careful outlook in life. Exposure to adversity may encourage individuals to become more reflective, cautious, and emotionally prepared when making decisions and responding to stressful situations. Similarly, Barutcu (2025) noted that family caregivers and support persons exposed to secondary traumatic stress often develop adaptive coping strategies, emotional endurance, and resilience to continue functioning and supporting their loved ones despite prolonged emotional burden.

Family Disruption. Trauma associated with sexual abuse may contribute to weakened trust, emotional disconnection, strained communication, and instability within family relationships. Family members and support persons may struggle to cope with intense emotions such as guilt, anger, fear, and helplessness, which may further disrupt family functioning and emotional bonds. In addition, unresolved emotional distress and prolonged involvement in legal and recovery processes may intensify conflict and tension among family members (Marson, 2024).

Nasulbad ang kaso mao tong nalipay na mi ato kay naa nay hustiya. Nasulbad ang kaso sa akong igsoon, nagbulag pud ang akong pamilya. (PQ2-PQ4- C6)

This case was settled and, at last, we were all glad that justice had been served. While justice was served for my younger sister, my family fell apart. (PQ2-PQ4-C6)

In Case 6, the participant had a breakdown in family relations, which shows that the emotional pain related to the abuse impacted the cohesion of the family. On the other hand, in Case 5, the participant faced changes and stress in the family dynamics, which shows that the abuse led to changes in interpersonal interactions and emotional relations. According to Sigurdardottir & Halldorsdottir (2021), the emotional pain that follows sexual violence impacts not only the victim but also the family system through relational stress and emotional dysregulation. Furthermore, Gewirtz-Meydan et al. (2022) pointed out that the secondary traumatic stress among family members in cases of sexual abuse can have a negative effect on emotional regulation and family relationships because of emotional stress.

Trauma. Family caregivers and support persons exposed to traumatic experiences often develop symptoms associated with secondary trauma, including emotional exhaustion, intrusive recollections, overthinking, and psychological distress, because they become emotionally connected to the suffering and experiences of the primary victim. In the context of secondary victims of sexual abuse, family members, caregivers, and individuals directly involved in supporting the victim may repeatedly hear details of the abuse, witness the victim's emotional pain, and participate in emotionally demanding legal and recovery processes (Barutcu, 2025).

Naay kausaban ato. Akong apo, dili na gyud nako pagawson. Bisag kagawson, dili nako pagawson. Kanang dili ko ganahan ug kanang nay kanang mu adto ug balay kay, kanang nay mangutana ug kuan ba, ing-ana. Mura kog nahug ko ato—mura pud kog mahadlok ug tao, ana. Sa kanang, murag na trauma ko ba (PQ2-PQ1-C4)

There were significant changes after what happened. I became extremely protective of my grandchild. I would no longer allow my grandchild to go outside, even for simple reasons. I also became uncomfortable whenever people came to our house or asked questions about the incident. It was as though I had become afraid of other people. I realized that I had been deeply traumatized by what had happened. (PQ2-PQ1-C4)

In Cases 1 and 2, the participants went through trauma

because of the reminders of the event, especially when they were at court, discussing the abuse, and when faced with things related to the traumatic event. On the other hand, the participant from Case 6 had persistent thoughts regarding the event, revealing the inability to stop the intrusion of memories and emotions of the abuse. In Case 4, the participant showed signs of cognitive disturbance in the form of overthinking.

The above results are consistent with previous studies highlighting the impacts of secondary trauma on those in the family and support persons exposed to sexually abused cases. Gewirtz-Meydan et al. (2022), secondary victims of sexual abuse have the tendency of experiencing secondary traumatic stress, which is associated with intrusive memories and emotions caused by continuous exposure to the victim's trauma experience. Likewise, Lo Iacono et al. (2021), observed that trauma exposure with regards to sexual abuse might result in continuous stress response, emotional dysregulation, intrusion memories, and psychological distress for the people close to the event. It is common for the family members or caregivers to internalize the emotions and fear of the victim.

E. The Coping Mechanism Employed by Secondary Victims to Continue Pursuing Justice Amidst the Challenges Encountered

1) Resilient Brother

Various coping strategies were used by the Resilient Brother for him to keep striving towards justice despite the psychological and emotional obstacles he was facing. The emotional support that came from his family and friends was found to be the best coping strategy since he was getting constant advice, encouragement, company, and emotional solace from them. Socializing and distractions were some other coping techniques used by the participant in order to momentarily relieve himself of emotional distress and overthinking. Moreover, spiritual coping techniques like praying and trusting in God were also important sources of strength and hope for the participant.

Also, he used coping methods involving emotions, society, and spirituality to keep seeking justice in spite of the persistent pain and emotion associated with the experience of the family members. Emotions such as listening to, comforting, visiting their home, checking up on their well-being, and giving advice were very helpful in enabling the participant to cope since they reduced the feeling of isolation while making him tough enough to withstand the justice-seeking process. In addition to that, faith in God and continuous prayers were majorly important coping methods spiritually since they gave the participant hope, encouragement, and the belief that eventually justice would be done to the victim.

2) Stoic Father

Among the strategies that were used to endure the trials and tribulations encountered during the pursuit of justice were emotional regulation, family-based coping, and acceptance. Emotion regulation and acceptance of thoughts were achieved gradually in spite of the emotional trauma and pain that were being endured because of the abuse and legal procedures. Family members provided important support and understanding, especially from the participants' child. Among other ways the participant coped was through compassion and increased attention towards the victim who suffered emotionally, taking her in his arms when she was distraught.

Community support and involvement also played an important role in helping the participant cope with the emotional struggles associated with the process of seeking justice. Friends and neighbors assisted the participant in coping with his difficulties through visiting him, accompanying him in his recreation, and encouraging him to socialize. Engaging in games and being around people would momentarily relieve emotional pain and reduce intrusive memories of the traumatizing events. It was noted that isolation at home could be detrimental to the participant's mental health and bring about disturbing thoughts.

3) Protective Grandfather

The Protective Grandfather utilized perseverance through hard work, institutional help, and emotional resilience as means of coping during the struggle to seek justice in the face of obstacles. Despite the continued work of the participant to meet his responsibilities, the emotional toll of the case was always with him, especially because there was still no resolution and justice for the victim. Institutional help from the police and DSWD is seen as the most important form of help since the institutions continuously guided and helped the participant during the entire process.

Additionally, family help and institutional help are the main forms of coping to keep seeking justice despite the obstacles faced. The help and support from the family, including the siblings and other relatives, helped the participant deal with the responsibility of taking care of the victim and going through the whole judicial process. The family members gave advice, company, and direct help in times of trouble.

4) Nurturing Grandmother

The coping strategies used by the Nurturing Grandmother involve emotional regulation, positive thoughts, and faith, which are helpful in handling the difficulties faced during the process of justice seeking. The participant was able to consciously avoid getting stressed and ensure emotional balance despite the traumatizing situation. Faith in God was also a crucial factor that helped the participant feel better and become emotionally stable in order to eventually deal with the fear and emotional distress resulting from the event. Nevertheless, the participant also faced stressful situations caused by family-related problems, especially those concerning the spouse’s alcohol consumption and unwillingness to cooperate.

In addition, social guidance, social support, and emotional support constitute coping mechanisms when trying to seek justice under difficult conditions. The social guidance received made the participant learn about the right actions to follow, including where to seek help and the right way to handle the situation without making it worse. Social guidance received assisted the participant in knowing what to do in order to avoid making any other problems, as well as to feel guided and confident during the process of seeking justice. On the other hand, the participant had emotional compassion and consideration for the family of the offender, especially for the

children. While the participant intended to seek justice, he finally resolved to take a more compassionate decision after seeing the emotional appeals of the offender's family.

5) Courageous Mother

The Courageous Mother, parental responsibility, emotional toughness, and community support have been used as coping strategies for the participant in pursuing justice despite emotional and psychological distress. For instance, the motivation and strength to move forward were generated from the participant's other children, which enabled her to slowly overcome her feelings of depression, hopelessness, and loneliness after the experience. Even though the participant endured emotional pain due to the blaming, lack of support, and distrust from her husband, she endured it all for the sake of her children. Besides, the community leaders, including barangay officials, tribal leaders, and council members, were instrumental in helping the participant throughout the process of seeking justice, leading and accompanying her as she reported the case to the police and the Department of Justice.

Community leaders such as barangay leaders, tribal leaders, and members of the council also helped the participant in many ways by supporting and escorting her during the process of filing a case at the police station and the Department of Justice. Moreover, the emotional encouragement as well as advice from family members made it easier for the participant to persist and pursue the case despite the challenges she faced and became discouraged. Family members kept telling her to be strong and courageous as a mother in advocating for her son's rights to get justice. Advice from other people about the process of law and the need to be persistent in the case also assisted the participant to cope with the situation, especially when the medical findings did not reveal the entire story of the abuse.

6) Hopeful Sister

The Hopeful Sister made use of positive distraction, avoidance of emotions, a family-oriented approach, and reliance on reliable relatives as coping techniques despite the emotional struggles associated with the search for justice. In order to deal with stress, the participant deliberately distracted his attention from the traumatic event, concentrating on enjoying himself, spending time with his family members, and engaging in social interaction with other people to eventually forget about all that painful emotional distress associated with the event. Another way to avoid emotional depletion and stress was to refrain from any conversation regarding the traumatizing event. In addition, a great role was played by the help of a reliable cousin in dealing with the situation.

Also, faith in God and hope were key factors that acted as sources of emotional resilience for the participant. The idea that God will always give direction, assistance, and solutions to problems facing an individual gave the participant hope and ensured that he/she remained optimistic despite all the challenges faced in the process of obtaining justice. It was crucial for the participant not to lose hope but keep hoping that he/she will finally get justice. Besides, the participant received help from a close cousin who assisted him/her during the process, especially in finding the victim and the whereabouts of the suspect.

7) Compassionate Social Worker

Organizational support, teamwork, and inter-agency collaboration are coping mechanisms for managing the challenges encountered in pursuing justice and assisting victims. Support from family members, CSWD management, and partner agencies was crucial in helping the participant cope with emotionally and psychologically demanding situations involving vulnerable individuals. She emphasized that guidance, assistance, and collaborative problem-solving from management and partner institutions helped address difficult cases and stressful incidents more effectively. Furthermore, the availability of external support systems reduced the burden of handling complex situations alone, particularly given limited personnel and resources.

She also highlighted the significant role of the Department of Justice's Witness Protection Program in managing high-profile, potentially dangerous cases. The program provided protection, security assistance during court hearings and medical examinations, and financial support for victims, helping ease participants' concerns about the safety and welfare of the child under their care. In addition, support and cooperation among coworkers served as an important coping mechanism, as colleagues became a source of assistance and emotional support during difficult situations. The participant further recognized the importance of acquiring additional skills and training, particularly in handling suicidal individuals, crises, and victim pacification, in order to better manage emotionally challenging cases.

Social Support. Social support systems have been found to be strongly linked to lower levels of psychological distress, better coping mechanisms, and emotional well-being among

Table 4

The coping mechanism employed by secondary victims to continue pursuing justice amidst the challenges encountered

Emerging Theme	Core Ideas
Social Support	• Sought emotional support and advice from family. [P 1&4] • Received care, assistance, and encouragement from family, relatives, and community members. [P3, 5 & 6] • Experienced reassurance through the presence of a reliable support system. [P2&7]
Distraction and Diversion	• Engaged in work and daily activities to divert attention [P1,2 &3) • Participated in enjoyable activities with family. [P6]
Cognitive Coping	• Practiced cognitive control to maintain emotional stability and resilience. [P1] • Regulate thoughts and emotions to minimize the impact of stressors. [P2 & 6] • Demonstrated efforts to sustain a strong and composed mindset. [P2 & 7]
Divine Intervention	• Engaged in prayer. [P1&6] • Relied on faith in God. [P4&7]
Finding a Purpose	• Focused on family roles and responsibilities as a source of purpose. [P1] • Strengthened emotional bonds with family members to foster motivation and resilience. [P1&5]

persons who have suffered through traumatic events. Emotional comfort, empathy, and encouragement from the individual's family, peers, and society at large can assist in helping the second victim overcome the fear, helplessness, emotional loneliness, and psychological weight that come with dealing with sexual abuse cases (Hailes et al., 2021).

In cases 1 to 7, participants emphasized the importance of social support from family members, relatives, community members, and reliable support systems in helping them cope with the emotional burden of sexual abuse and the challenges of the justice process. Emotional reassurance, guidance, care, encouragement, and practical assistance from trusted individuals and support networks contributed to emotional comfort and resilience and strengthened coping among secondary victims. Gewirtz-Meydan et al. (2022) emphasized that supportive interpersonal relationships, emotional reassurance, and consistent social support play a significant role in reducing secondary traumatic stress and psychological distress among family members and support persons exposed to sexual abuse cases—similarly, Tekin et. Al. 2025 highlighted that emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and the presence of reliable support systems contribute to strengthened resilience, improved coping capacities, and better emotional adjustment among individuals indirectly affected by trauma.

Family tapos atong management, ang cswd management. Kung naa koy mga challenges like mga LWOP or leaving without permission na mga bata, among management kay mutabang ra man jud para ma copes up or maresolve to na mga issues like same kanang mga laslas or whatsoever. Atong mga partner agencies jud kay ready raman pud muhelp para matabanga mi kay dili jud baya mi fully equipped personnel na magdeal with different situations. (PQ3-PQ1-C7)

The family, the management of the institution where I work, and the CSWD management have been my sources of assistance. Every time that I come across difficulties like the LWOP of the kids or cases of self-harm, our management never fails to be at hand to aid us in dealing with such problems. The same can be said for our partner institutions, who are always ready to lend a helping hand when needed since we understand that we cannot handle everything alone." (PQ3–PQ1–C7)

Distraction and Diversion. Through adaptive coping methods such as recreation, engagement in social activities, work, among others, trauma survivors may be able to momentarily turn their attention from negative emotions and experiences and thus reduce stress and achieve emotional regulation and psychological stabilization. Distraction and diversion can be applied by secondary victims of sexual abuse as a way of coping with intense emotions arising from the abuse and the entire process of seeking justice. Through engagement in work, spending time with friends and family, recreation, or just carrying out regular activities, secondary victims may be able to momentarily escape from intrusive thoughts, worry, and excessive thinking about the trauma (Ahn et al., 2025).

Oh syempre pagkabuntag, naa nana sila dira, magsuroy suroy nana sila sa amoa, lingaw lingaw ko nila. Unya kay hilig man lagi ta anang games, dad on ko nila didto aron malingaw ko, pagkahuman manguli raman sad mi hantod na murag nalimtan na nako ang kasakit sa panghitabo sa akoa. (PQ3-PQ2-C2)

Yes, of course. Every morning, they would come to our house and spend time with me. They would invite me to go around with them and keep me company. Since I enjoy playing games, they would take me with them so I could have fun and distract myself. Afterward, we would all go home together. Little by little, spending time with them helped me forget, even if only for a while, the pain of what had happened to me. (PQ3–PQ2–C2)

In Cases 1, 2, 3, and 6, participants used work, daily routines, social interaction, and enjoyable activities with family as forms of distraction and diversion to cope with emotional distress related to the traumatic experience. These activities helped them temporarily reduce emotional burden, manage overthinking and stress, maintain a sense of normalcy, and gain emotional comfort and relief throughout the justice process. Ogińska-Bulik et al. (2023) explained that individuals exposed to secondary trauma often utilize coping mechanisms such as engagement in daily activities, social interaction, and meaningful routines to reduce emotional distress and improve psychological functioning. Adaptive coping strategies may help individuals temporarily shift attention away from intrusive thoughts and emotional suffering associated with traumatic experiences. Similarly, Barutcu (2025) noted that family caregivers and support persons experiencing secondary traumatic stress commonly engage in diversionary activities and social participation to manage emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and prolonged psychological burden.

Cognitive Coping. Studies by Taku and Efthemiou (2025) also revealed that people who have undergone traumatizing events can be prone to reflective thinking, emotional regulation, and cautious decision-making. This is considered a way of developing resilience and post-traumatic growth. Cognitive coping can aid in reinterpreting the stressful experiences of an individual while decreasing the level of emotional overload and maintaining a feeling of control over one's emotions. Additionally, Ahn et al. (2025) suggested that trauma-based interventions tend to concentrate on enhancing cognitive coping and emotional regulation skills.

Mag enjoy sa sarili. Ang problema kay ibalewala lang na. magfocus nalang sa pamilya nako, sa mga katawhan. Ienjoy ang sarili para makalimtan ang tanan problema. Enjoy yourself. (PQ3-PQ1-C6)

I started enjoying my life once more. Rather than being preoccupied with my troubles, I attempted to put them behind and concentrate on my loved ones and the surrounding people. I understood that giving myself the opportunity to enjoy life and spending time with my beloved ones allowed me to forget about my burden and sufferings little by little. I learned to appreciate enjoying my life despite all the problems. (PQ3-PQ1-C6)

For cases 1, 2, 6, and 7, the participants used cognitive coping mechanisms, as they regulated their emotions and thoughts, controlled themselves emotionally, and remained stable and composed in mind in an attempt to cope with stress and anxiety arising from their experiences and the process of dealing with justice. This is consistent with the findings by Rosner et al. (2021), which indicated that people who have been subjected to long-term emotional distress and experiences of trauma develop coping mechanisms that enable them to deal with grief, psychological pain, and emotional distress. They stated that continuous exposure to emotional distress may make individuals regulate their thoughts, emotions, and reactions deliberately in an effort to remain psychologically functional. Furthermore, according to Yunitri et al. (2022), emotional and psychological distress related to trauma stress and post-traumatic symptoms are associated with dysregulation of emotions and anxiety; hence, the need for adaptive coping mechanisms. Cognitive coping mechanisms like emotional regulation and maintenance of psychological control may help them overcome fear and emotional stress.

Divine Intervention. The role of spirituality and God-focused thoughts might contribute to self-transcendence and emotion regulation through enabling people to take their mind off personal distress to an extent where there is an increased perception of meaning, direction, and emotional well-being. The importance of relying on God and having spiritual contemplation was stressed in this experiment since these factors can limit self-absorption, emotional overstimulation, and emotional burden during distressing times. For the secondary victims of sexual abuse, religion and prayer can aid people in dealing with emotional pain, ambiguity, and hope (Lin et al., 2022).

Dako kaayog tabang akong pagsalig sa Ginoo ma'am. Ampo lang jud ko pirmi na mahatagan ug hustisya akong igasoon. Akong pamilya ug higala nga andam maminaw ug naghatag ug kusog sa akoa ma'am. Akong pagsalig sa Ginoo wala jud nawala kay kabalo ko na ihagtag ra jud niya ang para sa akong manghod ma'am. (PQ3-PQ2-C1)

My faith in God was the greatest source of strength to me, Ma'am. I always kept praying for my younger brother to get his due. My family and friends stood with me all the way, and they were always ready to lend an ear and help me gather the strength to go ahead. Through everything that happened, my faith in God remained undeterred because I knew that in the end, He would surely do justice to my younger brother. (PQ3-PQ2-C1)

In Cases 1 and 6, participants engaged in praying as an expression of emotional burden as well as an effort towards finding consolation and inner peace in light of their experiences. In turn, participants of Cases 4 and 7 found comfort in their faith in God for the purpose of sustaining hope, emotional stamina, and resilience while dealing with emotional and stress-related challenges associated with abuse and its repercussions. Such results are aligned with the views of Kent et al. (2020), who noted that private spirituality and religious participation were positively correlated with better mental health and emotional well-being of individuals facing challenging conditions. According to the research, spirituality could provide emotional comfort, hope, inner peace, and meaning in life that could help people cope with their suffering and psychological distress. Faith-based activities such as praying and trusting God could increase emotional stamina and decrease fear and helplessness.

In a similar way, Lin et al. (2022) stated that spirituality and god-centricity can be seen as helpful when it comes to regulating emotions and achieving psychological balance since people have an opportunity to divert their attention from the distressing thoughts to more meaningful aspects of life, such as a greater source of guidance and hope.

Finding a Purpose. Park and Blake (2021) explained that finding a purpose helps trauma-exposed individuals cope with distress by allowing them to reinterpret painful experiences and maintain a sense of purpose despite adversity. Focusing on meaningful roles and responsibilities may help individuals regain emotional stability, strengthen resilience, and reduce feelings of helplessness associated with trauma.

Isa sa nakatabang sa akoa kay ang akong mga anak nan aa sa akoa. Dili ko mawal an ug paglaum kay naa pakoy uban mga anak pud na naghulat sa akoa. Mao to nga hinay hinay pud ko ug akong huna huna kay ug mawala ko, mag unsa nalang pud akong mga anak. Kung masobraan sad akong kadepress ug kaguol sa nahitabo sa iyaha. Dili nako halos mukaon, naa ra ko sulod sa kwarto. Dili ko gusto na nay mangita lain tao sa akoa. (PQ3-PQ1-C5)

My children were my source of strength. I never lost hope because I still had my other children who were waiting for me and depended on me. Little by little, I reminded myself that if something happened to me, what would become of my children? There were times when I became overwhelmed by depression and grief because of what had happened. I hardly ate, stayed inside my room most of the time, and did not want to see or talk to anyone. (PQ3–PQ1–C5)

Research by Barutcu (2025) further emphasized that family caregivers and support persons exposed to secondary traumatic stress often cope with emotional burden by finding meaning and purpose in caregiving responsibilities, family support, and helping others. Focusing on the well-being, protection, and recovery of loved ones may provide individuals with a sense of direction, responsibility, and emotional fulfillment despite experiencing stress and trauma-related distress. Similarly, Rzeszutek et al. (2024) highlighted that adaptive functioning and resilience among trauma-exposed individuals are strongly associated with maintaining meaningful social roles, emotional connectedness, and a clear sense of personal purpose. Remaining engaged in important family, caregiving, or professional roles may help trauma-exposed individuals preserve psychological functioning and emotional balance despite adversity. Emotional connectedness with loved ones may also strengthen coping capacities by fostering feelings of belonging, support, and motivation to continue moving forward.

F. Cross-Case Analysis

Table 5 presents across-case analysis, and it describes the similarities and differences between the seven case units in relation to the experiences, long-term impacts, and coping mechanisms of the secondary victims of sexual abuse. It becomes clear from the data that the participants seem to have had similar experiences, such as emotional distress, various types of institutional support, and social support. On the other hand, this implies a huge burden that a person should feel while supporting a primary victim throughout the justice process, which sometimes never seems to end. Furthermore, it becomes evident from the analysis that there are some long-term impacts of secondary victimization, which may include fear and anxiety, sleep disruptions, trauma, lack of motivation, family

Table 5
Cross-case analysis based on similarities, and differences identified across the case units

Research Domain	Themes	Case Unit Similar	Case Unit Different	Remarks
The experiences of secondary victims of sexual abuse	Emotional Distress	Cases 1,2,3,4,5,6, & 7	-	Participants in Cases 1 through 7 expressed emotional distress manifested through intense pain, confusion, instability, and psychological overwhelm. While family members directly expressed grief and emotional breakdown, the social worker (Case 7) demonstrated distress through empathetic pain toward the victims.
	Institutional Delay	Cases 1,3,4 & 7	Cases 2,5 & 6	Delays in legal process, such as delays in hearing and case filing, were pointed out by the participants in Cases 1, 3, 4, and 7, causing prolonged stress and uncertainty. This theme was not as apparent in Cases 2, 5, and 6.
	Institutional Support	Cases 1,2,3,4,5,6, & 7	-	Systemic support, such as institutional support from the police, DSWD, barangays, and the courts, was indicated by all participants. In addition, system efficiency through referral process and quick response in court were noted by the participants in Case 7.
	Social Support	Cases 1,2,3,4,5, & 6	Case 7	Family, neighbor, and community support were mentioned by the participants in Cases 1 to 6.
	Blame and doubt	Cases 4,5, & 6	Cases 1,2,3 & 7	Participants in Cases 4, 5, and 6 experienced stigma through blaming, disbelieving, and invalidating from other people especially from family or community. This increased their emotional burden and made it difficult for them to seek justice. This theme is absent in Cases 1, 2, 3, and 7.
The long-term impact of sexual abuse on secondary victims.	Lingering Emotional Impact	Cases 1,3 & 6	Cases 2,4,5 & 7	Participants in Cases 1, 3, and 6 described persistent emotional pain, including grief, anxiety, and distress that continued over time. This suggests that emotional impact remains unresolved even after prolonged periods. This theme was less explicitly emphasized in Cases 2, 4, 5, and 7, where emotional responses were either moderated or expressed differently.
	Fear and Anxiety	Cases 1,3,4,5, & 6	Cases 2 & 7	Fear and anxiety appeared frequently among participants in Cases 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and were mostly associated with security problems and uncertainty in the outcome of justice. Sometimes these emotions were accompanied by physiological symptoms such as trembling. The expression of this theme was not as obvious in Cases 2 and 7.
	Sleep Disruption	Cases 1,2,3,4 & 6	Cases 5 & 7	The physical consequences of emotional suffering were described by participants in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 through sleep disorders and physical fatigue.
	Loss of Motivation	Cases 1,2,4,5, & 6	Cases 3 & 7	Participants in Cases 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 experienced reduced motivation, including loss of appetite and inability to perform daily tasks.
	Family Disruption	Cases 5 & 6	Cases 1,2,3,4, & 7	Participants in Cases 5 and 6 reported breakdown and strain in family relationships, highlighting the relational consequences of the incident. This theme was not strongly evident in other cases.
	Trauma	Cases 1,2,4, & 6	Cases 3,5 & 7	Participants in Cases 1, 2, 4, and 6 experienced recurring traumas through intrusive thoughts and reminders of the incident. This indicates long-term psychological impact. This theme was less emphasized in Cases 3, 5, and 7.
	Protective Behavior	Cases 1,4,6 & 7	Cases 2,3 & 5	Participants in Cases 1, 4, 6, and 7 demonstrated increased protectiveness and vigilance toward family members, especially children. This shows adaptive responses to trauma. This theme was less emphasized in Cases 2, 3, and 5.
	Resilience and Careful Decision Making	Cases 1,2, & 6	Cases 3,4,5, & 7	In cases 1, 2, and 6, resilience was shown by participants through building up their character and being more careful in their decision-making processes. This suggests personal development amid difficult times.
The coping mechanisms employed by secondary victims to continue pursuing justice amidst the challenges encountered	Social Support	Cases 1,2,3,4,5,6 & 7	-	Participants across all cases relied on social support from family, community, and institutional networks. While Cases 1–6 emphasized familial and community support, Case 7 highlighted professional and organizational support systems.
	Distraction and Diversion	Cases 1,2,3, & 6	Cases 4,5 & 7	In Cases 1, 2, 3, and 6, participants carried out such acts as work and socializing in order to distract themselves from their suffering. The theme is not strongly represented in Cases 4, 5, and 7.
	Cognitive Coping	Cases 1,2,4,6, & 7	Cases 3 & 5	Participants in Cases 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 demonstrated cognitive coping through emotional regulation, mindset control, and boundary-setting. This shows conscious efforts of participants to manage psychological distress. This theme was less evident in Cases 3 and 5.
	Divine Intervention	Cases 1,4,6 & 7	Cases 2, 3 & 5	Participants in Cases 1, 4, 6, and 7 relied on prayer and faith in God as a primary coping mechanism. This theme was less emphasized in Cases 2, 3, and 5.
	Finding Purpose	Cases 1,2,5 & 7	Cases 3,4 & 6	In Cases 1, 2, 5, and 7, participants were able to deal with problems through focusing on roles, responsibilities, and purpose. This is an example of meaning-making as a coping strategy. In cases 3, 4, and 6, this theme did not come up much.

disruptions, and resilience and careful decision-making. Nevertheless, the level of impact and its nature were not identical in all cases. However, the participants still employed several coping strategies, such as seeking social support, performing distraction and diversions, employing cognitive coping strategies, relying on faith and divine intervention, as well as gaining a sense of purpose through personal and professional responsibilities.

4. Implication and Concluding Remarks

In this section, the implication of this study for practice, the implication for future research, and the conclusion are provided. In the process of studying the experiences of secondary victims of sexual abuse, in terms of seeking justice, important insights have been revealed regarding the psychological, social, and institutional barriers faced by them. The findings of the research will help in improving the interventions and victim support services.

A. Implication for Criminology Practice

These findings demonstrate the need for criminology practitioners, especially law enforcement officers, victim assistance practitioners, and criminal justice practitioners, to understand that the effect of sexual abuse goes beyond the immediate victim and includes family members who experience emotional and psychological effects as well. In the participant's story, it can be seen that despite all the grieving involved, parental duty was a source of resilience.

Firstly, these findings show the need for more emphasis on implementing trauma-informed practices among criminology practitioners, especially law enforcement officers, victim assistance practitioners, and investigators. While the participant showed resilience because he/she was able to draw strength from parental duty, the emotional weight, social isolation, and psychological strain experienced during the pursuit of justice suggest that secondary victims need ongoing emotional support. Hence, there is a need for criminal justice practitioners to be trained to identify the psychological needs of secondary victims, practice compassionate communication, carry out well-being checks and make prompt referrals to mental and psychosocial health support services.

Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of integrating family-centered approaches into victim assistance programs. The participant's children became a primary source of hope and motivation to persevere despite overwhelming grief, illustrating the significant role of family in fostering resilience among secondary victims. Consequently, criminology practitioners should extend victim support beyond the primary victim by actively engaging family members in counseling, case updates, and psychosocial interventions. Such an approach not only strengthens the family's coping capacity but also enhances their ability to provide sustained emotional support to the victim throughout the legal process.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of stronger collaboration among criminal justice agencies, social workers, mental health professionals, and community-based organizations in addressing the complex needs of secondary victims. Since the participant experienced prolonged emotional distress while navigating the justice process, coordinated interventions are essential to ensure that families receive comprehensive legal, psychological, and social support. Accordingly, criminology practitioners should establish clear referral pathways and interagency protocols that facilitate seamless service delivery from case reporting through post-trial support. Such multidisciplinary collaboration can contribute to a more responsive, victim-centered, and compassionate criminal justice system that recognizes and addresses the needs of both primary and secondary victims.

B. Implication for Future Research

As can be seen from the results of this study, the process of seeking justice for secondary crime victims of sexual abuse is a complicated one, which is influenced by psychological problems, institutions, social support, and societal responses. In order to understand the role of such factors in this process, future research can explore them with larger and more diverse populations in order to find out how demographic and other factors affect this experience.

First, it would be interesting to find out what secondary crime victims go through, with the help of a larger sample of participants coming from different geographic locations, as well as from various cultures and social environments, in order to identify whether or not some similar themes come up. As the sample of the current research was small, there might be more insights about secondary victimization here.

Second, future studies may choose to explore the experience of certain categories of secondary victims independently of others, including, for example, parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, intimate partners, friends, social service providers, police officers, as well as professionals engaged in cases linked to sexual violence. A comparative study may highlight different emotional responses, coping mechanisms, support needs, and perceptions of justice for each group of secondary victims. Thirdly, future studies may adopt longitudinal research designs to track changes in emotional, psychological, and social consequences among secondary victims over time. Longitudinal research would assist in understanding the routes of recovery, resilience-building, opportunities for post-traumatic growth, as well as the lasting consequences of lengthy, drawn-out processes of justice.

Lastly, quantitative and mixed-methods research may be undertaken to confirm and elaborate on the results of this study. The relationships between emotional distress and institutional support, social support, coping mechanisms, resilience, and psychological well-being of secondary victims may be investigated in more rigorous ways.

C. Concluding Remarks

The cross-case analysis demonstrated that the process of seeking justice for secondary victims of sexual abuse is an emotional, complex, and transformative journey, which involves psychological distress, institutional experiences, social experiences, and coping processes. In all cases, the participants had experiences of being emotionally distressed,

fearful, anxious, traumatized, unable to sleep, and lack of motivation, indicating that sexual abuse not only affects primary victims but also has severe consequences for families, caregivers, and supporters seeking justice. Delayed responses in legal and institutional contexts made the participants suffer emotionally even more, while some participants experienced additional emotional distress due to being blamed and doubted.

Despite this challenging process, the findings demonstrate the crucial importance of institutional support, social support networks, resilience, spirituality, cognitive coping, and sense-making in enabling participants to keep on seeking justice. While there were differences in participants' experiences between different cases, this study demonstrates that secondary victims experience long-lasting psychological, emotional, and relational consequences of sexual abuse. Therefore, the findings stress the need to develop appropriate interventions and practices of justice that take into account victims' experiences and needs.

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