

Reconstructing Meaning in Absurdity: an Albert Camus-Inspired Framework for Safeguarding Mental Health Among Individuals with Substance Use Disorder

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Abstract. *In contemporary mental health discourse, experiences of meaninglessness and existential distress remain insufficiently integrated with philosophical interpretations of recovery, particularly within substance use disorder contexts. Although Camus' concept of absurdity explains the tension between human search for meaning and life's indifference, limited empirical work has examined how this is lived by individuals in addiction recovery. This study explored how persons with substance use disorder experience meaninglessness and construct meaning within Camusian absurdity in relation to mental health and recovery. A qualitative phenomenological design was used involving eight recovered individuals in Cagayan de Oro City selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using semi-structured interviews, with data analyzed thematically. Findings show that participants initially experienced meaninglessness as suffering marked by emotional distress, identity disruption, anxiety, and relational detachment, often leading to substance use as escapist coping. However, recovery emerged when meaninglessness was consciously acknowledged, enabling acceptance, self-awareness, and behavioral change. Participants reinterpreted suffering as a catalyst for transformation, reconstructing purpose through sobriety, human support, gratitude, service, and spiritual grounding. Consistent with Camus, meaning was found to be not discovered but actively created through conscious engagement with absurdity. Overall, confronting meaninglessness functioned both as a source of distress and as a foundation for psychological resilience and recovery. These findings highlight the existential dimension of addiction recovery as both a psychological and philosophical process of meaning reconstruction. It is recommended that mental health interventions for substance use disorder integrate existential meaning-centered approaches and strengthen relational and spiritual support systems to facilitate meaning reconstruction and sustained recovery.*

Keywords: Absurdity, Meaninglessness, Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder, Meaning-Making

I. INTRODUCTION

In the inner recesses of every human soul, there lurks a profound quest for meaning and purpose in life—for existence itself. Yet, in stark contrast to this deep yearning, the words of the teacher—heralded as the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon—strike his readers head-on with a startling declaration: everything is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:1-18). Without mincing words and perhaps unmindful of how it might unsettle both the strong and the weak, the author of Ecclesiastes repeatedly proclaims the word "meaningless" with unwavering conviction at the very beginning of the chapter.

The word meaningless has been a major theme in the Bible, particularly in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is also an overarching theme in Camus' work on absurdity (Camus, 1942/1991). Today, humans continue to wrestle with the absurdity of life and struggle with the meaninglessness of existence. This study is an attempt to delve into the abyss of meaninglessness, hoping that, in the end, the searcher finds meaning—even in meaninglessness (Ecclesiastes 1:1-18; Camus, 1942/1991).

In the Book of Kings, central to the thoughts of King Solomon is the meaninglessness of everything under the sun. Similarly, Albert Camus finds life absurd but sees humans as capable of assigning meaning to absurdity. Thus, the primary purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning in meaninglessness, as it is found to be crucial in safeguarding mental health. Subsequently, it will delve into describing the perceived meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence and experiences. Doing so might shed light on the role of perceived meaninglessness in a person's mental health. This, somehow, suggests that to emancipate a person from the shackles of meaninglessness, one must enter into the abyss

and gamut of their own existence and come to terms with it. Meaninglessness is a critical mental health issue because perceiving life as devoid of purpose can lead to distress, hopelessness, and maladaptive coping (Camus, 1942/1991). Confronting this existential void challenges an individual's emotional resilience, decision-making, and sense of agency, making the search for meaning essential to psychological well-being (Yalom, 1980).

The searcher finds himself in the same situation as Camus, hitting rock bottom after hearing the words of King Solomon: Everything is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:8). Subsequently, it piqued his interest in Albert Camus, which marked the genesis of his search for meaning amid absurdity. This genesis halted the old belief that meaning can only reside in meaningfulness and never in meaninglessness – a notion that was apparently flawed when the exodus of the so-called quest began. He observed that those individuals unable to find meaning even in meaninglessness divorced themselves from meaningful interaction, which resulted in a profound sense of social isolation. Social isolation is one of the earliest symptoms of mental illness, according to Émile Durkheim in his book *Suicide* (1897). Thus, this study hopes to find an antidote to mental health problems by putting meaning into what appears meaningless and absurd.

In a nihilistic perspective, one may find existence completely pointless and life having no intrinsic meaning or value (Curnick, 2025). Anything toiled and labored under the sun is meaningless, and suicide may seem like the only course of action at the slightest sign of discomfort. Many times, humans need to cognitively and consciously make an effort to put – not just find – meaning into their own life and existence; otherwise, everything under the sun becomes futile and absurd. Albert Camus operates on the belief that man naturally looks for meaning in what he does. This simply means that humans are inherently capable of searching for meaning in life and purpose in existence. As William McDougall (1908) argued, the driving force and innate urge of human consciousness is self-assertiveness.

Purposivism, a school of thought in psychology, contends that humans are basically purposeful and that mental life is, accordingly, hormic or goal-seeking (McDougall, 1908). One can safely conjecture, then, that humans are driven by a certain force called purpose – either consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously. It is along this line that this paper aims to navigate, based on the assumption that humans, by virtue of innate tendency, are able to assign meaning and purpose to their existence.

It is necessary, however, to investigate how meaninglessness affects the mental health of humans in the modern world. Medical experts, social scientists, and even behaviorists claim that self-alienation has the potential to sabotage mental health. “Feelings of alienation are an important indicator of mental well-being and have been associated with depressed mood, anxiety symptoms, alcohol use disorders, psychological distress, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and increased risk of suicide” (Chen, W., et al., 2022). Sound mental health, therefore, requires healthy self-acceptance without necessarily suppressing or burying the past in the sea of forgetfulness, as doing so may also deter mental well-being.

Examining how a sense of meaning and purpose in life enables humans to cope with the odds, angst, and wildebeests of life is equally emancipating, as it warrants careful self-examination that eventually results in self-awareness, paving the road to self-actualization. In the process, one becomes fully aware of who and what he or she is. Implicitly, self-awareness is a path that requires asking the most basic and fundamental existential question: “Who am I?” – which, for Socrates, is essential to living life to the fullest, as he famously said, “An unexamined life is not worth living” in *The Apology* by Plato (translated by G.M.A. Grube in 2002). This idea was later reinforced by René Descartes when he declared *cogito ergo sum* – “I think, therefore I am” – in his book *Discourse on Method* (translated by D.A. Cress in 1998).

Absurdity may be a complex concept, but elucidating it in the context of mental health issues is necessary, as it might, in the process, liberate a person entangled in the complexities and mysteries of life. Talking about it may not necessarily cure absurdity, but it can serve as an antidote to the search for meaning in meaninglessness (Camus, 1942/1991; Yalom, 1980). Hence, the mind must be set free from the entanglement of absurdity by finding meaning in meaninglessness (Camus, 1942/1991).

Providing meaningful insights into the essence of putting meaning into meaninglessness reveals that meaninglessness is, in itself, a form of meaning. This simply means that one is set free from the chains and bondage of absurdity when one finds meaning in meaninglessness, and purpose in absurdity (Camus, 1942/1991). Thus, Camus is, in fact, suggesting that there is meaning in everything – meaninglessness included (Camus, 1942/1991; Hughes, 2007).

On one hand, although numerous philosophical studies have explored Albert Camus' concept of absurdity in relation to human existence, and mental health research has extensively examined substance use disorder, addiction, and psychological distress, there remains a significant gap in integrating these two fields. What has not been sufficiently explored in previous studies is how meaninglessness and absurdity are actually lived, interpreted, and reconstructed by persons with substance use disorder in their everyday experiences of addiction and recovery. Existing literature tends to treat Camus' philosophy as a theoretical framework and mental health as a clinical or behavioral issue, but rarely examines their intersection in lived experience. This study therefore positions itself as a novel inquiry that bridges existential philosophy and mental health by focusing on meaninglessness not only as a concept but as an embodied human

experience within addiction.

In addressing this gap, the study is grounded on the assumption that individuals experiencing meaninglessness are not passive victims of existential emptiness but active agents capable of interpreting, resisting, and reconstructing meaning within their lived realities. It is further assumed that meaninglessness, rather than being purely destructive, can function as a transformative condition that may lead to self-realization, awakening, and recovery when consciously engaged with. In this sense, persons with substance use disorder are viewed as meaning-makers who navigate existential suffering through reflection, choice, and adaptation. By exploring their lived experiences through a Camusian lens, this study seeks to contribute a philosophical understanding of mental health that highlights how meaning can emerge from confrontation with absurdity, thereby addressing an underexplored intersection between existential philosophy and recovery processes.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

As this study is an attempt to delve into finding and putting meaning into meaninglessness, it is perceived as an antidote to safeguarding mental health. Hence, this study employs, first, a phenomenological approach in order to delve into the lived experiences of the participants in terms of absurdity and meaninglessness. A phenomenological approach is employed in order to gain deeper insights into how people understand their experiences without necessarily including the pre-conceived ideas and interpretations of absurdity and meaninglessness. Also, a qualitative research method was utilized, as it was deemed appropriate when one is interested in exploring people's experiences and perspectives on meaning and meaninglessness. This is especially useful as the study aims to uncover how individuals find and put meaning into their experiences.

Having this in mind, the researcher utilized the analytical-descriptive approach. The analytical approach is useful for the research as it aids in identifying common themes from the participants' experiences in order to derive deeper insights and conclusions. The descriptive approach is useful in describing characteristics, behaviors, or trends that may arise from the participants.

This framework presents the flow of the study from the philosophical ideas of Albert Camus to the analysis of the participants' experiences of meaninglessness, in order to come up with recommendations for safeguarding mental health. This framework merges philosophical theory with lived experiences to address mental health issues using Camus' philosophy.

Moreover, the choice of a phenomenological research design is grounded in the very nature of the problem under investigation. Ontologically, this study assumes that phenomena such as absurdity and meaninglessness are not objective, measurable entities but are subjectively lived and experienced realities that vary from person to person. These experiences cannot be fully captured through external observation or quantitative measurement, as they exist within the consciousness and personal world of individuals. Epistemologically, the study subscribes to the view advanced by Edmund Husserl that knowledge about such phenomena is best acquired by returning "to the things themselves," that is, by examining how they are directly experienced by individuals. This makes phenomenology the most appropriate approach, as it prioritizes first-person accounts and seeks to uncover the essence of these lived experiences without imposing external interpretations.

Furthermore, the study's engagement with the philosophy of Albert Camus strengthens this methodological choice, as Camus himself situates absurdity not as an abstract concept alone but as something encountered in human experience—particularly in moments of crisis, disorientation, and confrontation with meaninglessness. Since the study aims to understand how persons with substance use disorder live through and respond to these conditions, a phenomenological orientation allows for a faithful exploration of their realities. It enables the researcher to capture how meaning is constructed, resisted, or transformed within the tension between absurdity and the human desire for significance, thereby making it the most fitting design for generating both philosophical insight and practical implications for safeguarding mental health.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data were collected through a one-on-one interview by the researcher with the participants in order to gather in-depth information about their experiences and perspectives.

DATA ANALYSIS

To address the research problems presented in this study, the researcher used thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method allows for the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data, making it well-suited for exploring lived experiences and philosophical relevance.

In terms of coding procedure, the study did not employ invited or external coders; instead, all coding and thematic analysis were conducted solely by the researcher. However, to strengthen trustworthiness, the analysis underwent internal validation through repeated revisiting of transcripts and cross-checking of emergent themes with participants' narratives (member checking). This ensured consistency and minimized interpretive bias while maintaining fidelity to the participants' lived experiences.

For the first research question, the analysis focused on how participants perceive meaninglessness in relation to Albert Camus' discussion of absurdity, particularly as it affects existence, purpose, and mental health. Following phenomenological procedures, the researcher identified significant statements from interview transcripts that reflect feelings of emptiness, lack of direction, and emotional distress. These statements were then grouped into meaning units that reveal meaninglessness as an existential experience rather than a purely cognitive state. The analysis shows that participants commonly perceive meaninglessness as a disruption in their sense of purpose and self-understanding, which also influences their psychological well-being and overall view of life.

For the second research question, the analysis examined the philosophical implications of Camus' concept of absurdity in the context of mental health issues. The clustered themes from participants' experiences were interpreted through Camus' philosophy, highlighting that absurdity emerges in the tension between the human desire for meaning and a seemingly indifferent reality. This tension was found to be reflected in participants' struggles with emotional instability, identity confusion, and existential distress. Philosophically, the findings suggest that mental health challenges linked to substance use disorder can also be understood as manifestations of confronting the absurd condition of human existence, where meaning is not inherently given but continuously sought.

For the third research question, the analysis generated meaningful insights from Camus' reflection on putting meaning into meaninglessness and the idea that meaninglessness itself can become a form of meaning in relation to mental health. Participants' narratives were revisited and synthesized to explore how individuals reconstruct understanding after experiencing existential emptiness. The findings indicate that some participants gradually develop adaptive meaning-making processes such as acceptance, personal reflection, and reorientation of life goals. In line with Camusian thought, these insights suggest that confronting meaninglessness does not necessarily lead to despair but can foster a conscious engagement with life, where individuals actively create meaning despite uncertainty, thereby contributing to psychological resilience and mental well-being.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE

The research study began with the selection of participants, followed by individual orientations to familiarize each participant with the purpose of the study and the essential concepts of Albert Camus' philosophy, enabling them to develop a clearer perspective within the context of the research. This is followed by data collection through an in-depth interview using a semi-structured interview question ensuring consistency and focus and eventually leading to its analysis while maintaining ethical considerations.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

The participants of this study were composed of eight (8) individuals who have previously undergone rehabilitation for substance use disorder (SUD) and have been declared fully recovered. All participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they possess the specific lived experiences necessary to illuminate the phenomena of absurdity and meaninglessness. The rehabilitation setting from which the participants were drawn is located in Cagayan de Oro City, although the name of the center is withheld to maintain confidentiality and ethical research standards.

In terms of recovery, all participants have maintained sobriety for a period ranging from seven (7) to ten (10) years, indicating a sustained and stable recovery process. Their ages range from 25 to 60 years old, allowing for a diverse representation of life stages and perspectives. Regarding civil status, three (3) participants are married, three (3) are single, and two (2) are separated, which provides a varied relational context that may influence their experiences of meaninglessness and meaning-making. These demographic variations are significant, as phenomenological inquiry

recognizes that lived experiences are shaped by one's social, relational, and temporal conditions.

For ethical considerations, fictitious names were assigned to each participant—namely, ANTHONY, BOB, CHARLIE, DINO, EDWARD, FRANCIS, GILBERT, and HAROLD—to ensure anonymity and protect their identities throughout all stages of the research. These measures were strictly observed to uphold confidentiality and to create a safe environment in which participants could openly share their experiences. Overall, the selected participants are deemed sufficient for the study, as phenomenological research prioritizes depth over quantity, and each participant offers rich, reflective insights necessary for understanding the essence of recovery, absurdity, and meaning-making. In phenomenological research, sample size is determined not by quantity but by the depth and richness of lived experience. Thus, the inclusion of eight (8) participants is sufficient, as the study seeks to uncover the essence of absurdity and meaninglessness through detailed, first-person accounts. As Clark Moustakas (1994) emphasizes, phenomenology focuses on rich descriptions rather than generalizations, making smaller samples appropriate, while John W. Creswell (2013) notes that studies of this nature commonly involve 5 to 25 participants. Furthermore, the adequacy of the sample is supported by data saturation, wherein no new themes emerge from additional data; as A. L. Boddy (2016) argues, small samples are sufficient when they yield in-depth and information-rich insights.

Given that phenomenological inquiry deals with subjective lived experiences, measures were taken to mitigate potential researcher bias. The study employed bracketing (*epoché*), as proposed by Edmund Husserl, wherein the researcher consciously set aside preconceived assumptions about absurdity, meaninglessness, and substance use disorder through reflective journaling and continuous self-monitoring during data collection and analysis. Member checking was also conducted to ensure that participants' narratives were accurately represented. In terms of positionality, the researcher acknowledges being an external observer who does not share the lived experience of substance use disorder but approaches the study through the philosophical lens of Albert Camus; thus, reflexivity was practiced throughout to critically examine how personal perspectives and theoretical inclinations may influence interpretation, ensuring a more faithful and balanced presentation of participants' experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How do participants perceive meaninglessness in relation to Camus' discussion of absurdity affecting a person's existence, purpose, and mental health?

Encountering Suffering: The Burden of Existence

The encounters with meaninglessness among the participants manifest as profound suffering that closely reflects Albert Camus's concept of the absurd—the confrontation between the human desire for purpose and the apparent indifference of existence (Camus, 1955, 1991). Anthony's account illustrates this condition most vividly, describing life during active addiction as dominated by chaos and emptiness, where daily existence felt void, unstructured, and self-destructive: [*Sa active pa ko sa akong addiction, akong kinabuhì is hell... useless akong adlaw, tuig, ang oras gigahin nako sa drugs*] His experience reflects how the absurd is not merely conceptual but lived, where time, effort, and attention are invested in pursuits that fail to provide fulfillment, intensifying existential burden and psychological exhaustion (Hughes, 2007; Reker & Wong, 2021).

Harold's reflection extends this existential disruption into the relational and moral domain, emphasizing disorientation regarding familial roles and responsibilities. His questioning of fundamental duties—such as loving his wife and caring for his children—illustrates how the absurd destabilizes conventional anchors of meaning and coherence in daily life (Camus, 1955, 1991). This condition reflects what existential psychology identifies as meaning collapse, where individuals lose their sense of direction and moral grounding, thereby negatively affecting mental health and identity stability (Yalom, 1980; Frankl, 1959). Harold's narrative demonstrates that meaninglessness is not only philosophical but also deeply psychological, influencing lived relational engagement and emotional functioning (Reker & Wong, 2021).

Similarly, Gilbert describes a past life characterized by chaos and aimlessness, stating that his existence was once [*nagkayagaw*] before gradually becoming more stable through recovery. His account suggests that while suffering intensifies disorientation, it may also function as a threshold for self-awareness and transformation (Heinonen & Watson, 2021). This aligns with existential perspectives that interpret crisis not only as breakdown but also as potential groundwork for meaning reconstruction and identity reformation (Frankl, 1959; Yalom, 1980). Gilbert's experience indicates that recovery may emerge from confronting rather than avoiding existential disruption.

The experiences of Francis, Edward, and Dino further reinforce a pervasive sense of purposelessness and obscurity. Francis expresses difficulty in even identifying meaning in life: [*Daghan man kaayo way hinungdan, di lang nako mapoint out*] Edward articulates a complete absence of purpose, stating: [*Wala nako'y purpose atong time-ma, zero*]

na]. Dino reinforces this existential void, declaring: [*Wala gyud pulos ang akong kinabuhi*]. Collectively, these accounts reflect existential emptiness consistent with Frankl’s (1959) concept of the “existential vacuum,” where individuals experience profound lack of meaning that affects motivation, emotional regulation, and future orientation (Frankl, 1959; Reker & Wong, 2021). This condition is also consistent with addiction literature suggesting that substance use may function as maladaptive coping for unbearable emotional and existential distress (Khantzian, 1997).

Philosophically, these findings align with Camus’ (1955, 1991) articulation of the absurd as the tension between human longing for meaning and the world’s silence, as well as Hughes’ (2007) interpretation of absurdity as a lived existential condition rather than an abstract idea. Reker and Wong (2021) further emphasize that meaninglessness directly shapes psychological functioning, influencing cognition, emotion, and life orientation. From this perspective, suffering is not merely individual pathology but an existential tension—the burden of existence that arises when expectations for coherence and significance collide with the limitations of lived reality (Camus, 1955, 1991; Yalom, 1980).

Collectively, these narratives illustrate that mental health struggles among persons with substance use disorder are deeply intertwined with encounters with the absurd. Participants consistently perceive their lives as lacking purpose and meaning, resulting in profound suffering that permeates daily existence and destabilizes identity formation (Frankl, 1959; Reker & Wong, 2021). The philosophical implication is that confronting absurdity is simultaneously destabilizing and potentially transformative: while it generates psychological distress and existential disorientation, it also creates conditions for reflection, responsibility, and recovery (Heinonen & Watson, 2021). In this sense, “Encountering Suffering: The Burden of Existence” frames mental health challenges not only as clinical concerns but as existential encounters in which recognition of life’s limitations becomes the starting point for possible renewal, meaning reconstruction, and transformative growth (Camus, 1955, 1991; Yalom, 1980).

Anxiety beneath the Ordinary

Through the lens of Albert Camus, the participants’ experiences reveal that mental health struggles often expose an underlying existential anxiety that persists beneath the routines of ordinary life, where the absurd emerges as the confrontation between the human longing for meaning and the inability of the world to provide ultimate answers (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). In the participants’ accounts, this confrontation manifests not only in dramatic crises but in persistent disturbances such as regret, irritability, compulsive substance use, and difficulty envisioning a meaningful future (Reker & Wong, 2021). Bob’s reflection illustrates this existential foreclosure when he states: “what I cannot visualize myself, my future self... if I can only visualize death, para sa ako that’s meaningless.” This reflects an existential collapse of projection, where the future becomes reducible only to finality, aligning with Frankl’s (1959) existential vacuum and Camus’ (1955, 1991) idea that absurd awareness disrupts temporal coherence and narrative continuity.

Harold’s experience demonstrates how confusion and inner turmoil lead to repetitive coping mechanisms that temporarily mute existential distress but ultimately intensify it, as seen in his statement: [*Dili nako masabtan during that time, akong*] coping is to use again. In short, affected jud [*akong mental health*]. This reflects Camus’ (1955, 1991) notion of escaping lucidity, where distraction replaces confrontation with absurdity, thereby deepening psychological fragmentation (Khantzian, 1997). Edward’s narratives reveal emotional volatility tied to dependency, expressed in: [*Pero ug baba na gani na, diha na dayon nga iritable na kaayo ko... gamayng kuan ni mama suko na ko*]. This illustrates how emotional stability becomes externally regulated, and how the absurd becomes visible when substance effects diminish, exposing underlying existential tension (Hughes, 2007; Reker & Wong, 2021).

The Frustrations and Regrets theme further deepens this understanding of meaninglessness as lived absurdity, where human desire for coherence collides with fragmented lived experience (Camus, 1955, 1991). One participant stated: “Useless. [*Sayang akong pagkinabuhi ba kay dapat didto ko nag focus sa akong family, sa akong bata*] This reflects retrospective moral awareness and regret, where life is reinterpreted as “wasted” due to substance use overriding relational responsibilities, consistent with Frankl’s (1959) and Yalom’s (1980) view that regret arises from disjunction between lived behavior and valued meaning structures. Dino similarly expresses this absurd disjunction through regret over family neglect, illustrating the gap between desired life and enacted life (Camus, 1955, 1991).

Edward’s statement, [*Kalipay raman akong gusto ato. Mas malipay man gud ko ug maka-inom, makasuyop ko*] highlights addiction as a paradoxical pursuit of pleasure that erodes meaning, aligning with Khantzian’s (1997) self-medication theory. Gilbert’s intrusive regret and sleeplessness—[*di man ko katulog kay manulod man tanan pagmahay ug nganong in-ani akong kinabuhi*]—reflect unresolved existential rumination, where nighttime becomes a space of intensified absurd awareness (Reker & Wong, 2021). Collectively, these experiences demonstrate how frustration and regret emerge from recognition of wasted time, moral dislocation, and relational rupture, all of which are grounded in Camusian absurdity (Camus, 1955, 1991).

The Uncertainties theme further illustrates how meaninglessness manifests as future-oriented disintegration and

impaired self-projection. Bob’s statement, “what I cannot visualize myself... if I can only visualize death,” reflects existential foreclosure, where the inability to imagine a future self-signals collapse of temporal continuity (Frankl, 1959). Camus (1955, 1991) situates this within absurdity, where the absence of transcendent meaning destabilizes orientation toward the future. Charlie’s account, [*Dili na ko ka focus ba... Wala nako naghunahuna sa akong mga responsibilidad sa akong mga anak*]. shows how anxiety narrows consciousness, reducing life to immediate craving and disrupting relational responsibility (Yalom, 1980; Reker & Wong, 2021).

Edward’s emotional instability – [*mobaba na gani na... irritable na kaayo ko*]—demonstrates affective dysregulation linked to dependency, where withdrawal exposes underlying existential fragility (Khantzian, 1997). Dino’s regretful reflection on family neglect further illustrates how uncertainty about meaning produces retrospective anguish and identity disruption (Camus, 1955, 1991). These narratives collectively show that uncertainty is not only cognitive but existential, affecting cognition, emotion, and relational functioning (Frankl, 1959; Reker & Wong, 2021).

Collectively, these narratives demonstrate that mental health issues often bring individuals into contact with what has been described as “anxiety beneath the ordinary” (Philopedia, 2024), where absurdity persists through irritability, distraction, compulsive escape, and regret (Vorster & Bornman, 2021). Charlie’s narrowing focus on substance use – [*Ang naa ra pirmi sa akong hunahuna kay makagamit*]—illustrates how anxiety contracts existential horizons, replacing relational and future-oriented meaning with immediate relief-seeking behavior (Yalom, 1980). Edward’s prioritization of pleasure and Gilbert’s sleepless rumination further demonstrate how ordinary life becomes saturated with unresolved existential questions, where meaninglessness is silently experienced rather than explicitly articulated (Hughes, 2007; Camus, 1955, 1991).

In the theme of Embodied Attachments and Self-Resistance, Anthony’s experience of addiction as “hell” reflects embodied fragmentation, where self-blame and compulsive behavior express tension between desire for coherence and lived disintegration (Camus, 1955, 1991). Gilbert’s loss of self-care and Dino’s attachment to substances illustrate how the body becomes a site of existential misalignment, where external substances replace internal meaning structures (Khantzian, 1997). Francis’ displacement of responsibilities through substance dependence further highlights how embodied attachment restructures priorities and intensifies existential rupture (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022).

These embodied struggles show that mental health challenges are not merely cognitive but existential and corporeal, where attachment and resistance coexist in tension (Camus, 1955, 1991). Recovery, therefore, emerges as a negotiation between these forces, where individuals begin to recognize destructive patterns and gradually reclaim agency and relational responsibility (Heinonen & Watson, 2021). As participants move from compulsive use toward reflection, meaning is not discovered but actively constructed through conscious engagement with lived experience (Frankl, 1959; Reker & Wong, 2021).

Overall, the participants’ narratives demonstrate that frustrations, regrets, uncertainties, anxiety, and embodied attachments are interconnected expressions of Camusian absurdity, where meaning collapses but the desire for it persists (Camus, 1955, 1991). Mental health struggles in substance use disorder therefore reflect not only psychological dysfunction but existential confrontation with fragmentation, identity disruption, and temporal collapse (Yalom, 1980; Hughes, 2007). Recovery, as reflected in these accounts, involves lucidity, responsibility, and deliberate action despite meaninglessness, transforming absurdity from paralysis into existential awareness and potential reconstruction (Pettersen et al., 2023; Vorster & Bornman, 2021).

Embodied Attachments and Self-Resistance

The participants’ narratives reveal that mental health struggles often involve a complex interplay between attachment to harmful patterns and the resistance of the self—a dynamic that resonates with Albert Camus’s conception of the absurd. Anthony’s experience demonstrates the paralyzing effect of self-blame and the inability to accept one’s life circumstances, reflecting the confrontation with meaninglessness that Camus describes. As Anthony expressed, [*Walay pulos kay kargado man kog kanang mahay-mahay bitaw, blaming... dili ko kadawat, walay acceptance sa akoang kinabuhì bay*] his account illustrates an internal state of rejection and psychological fragmentation, where self-blame becomes both a response to and reinforcement of existential distress. The internal resistance Anthony faces is both psychological and existential: while he longs for coherence and fulfillment, he is trapped by patterns of judgment, regret, and denial. Philosophically, this reflects how absurdity manifests as a tension between embodied desire for meaning and conscious recognition of meaninglessness, resulting in self-fragmentation.

Gilbert’s reflection emphasizes the loss of self-love and distraction born from perceiving life as meaningless. His statement, “because meaningless [*akong kinabuhì sauna*].I was distracted... I didn’t love myself,” underscores how the experience of meaninglessness can erode self-relationship and lead to emotional neglect. This illustrates how the absurd can become embodied as self-alienation, where the individual becomes estranged from their own capacity for care and

continuity of identity. Similarly, Dino’s attachment to substances demonstrates how the body becomes a site of existential displacement and reliance on external objects to compensate for inner voids. His admission, “nag engage ko sa drugs, [*mura na ug gipakaslan nako ang drugs*] metaphorically portrays substance use as a distorted form of relational attachment, where drugs assume the role of a stabilizing “partner” in the absence of meaningful connections. In the same trajectory, Francis’ account reinforces this displacement of relational and moral priorities, as reflected in his statement, [*Mas love pa nako ang drugs kaysa akong mga anak*] showing how addiction can reconfigure affective hierarchies, replacing fundamental human commitments with compulsive dependence.

Together, these narratives reveal that mental health challenges are not solely cognitive or behavioral; they are embodied existential experiences in which attachment to destructive patterns both expresses and intensifies confrontation with the absurd (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022). The struggle lies in simultaneously resisting and inhabiting these attachments, revealing a paradox of self-resistance where individuals must confront the very patterns that sustain their suffering. Philosophically, this affirms Camus’ view that absurdity is inseparable from lived experience – meaninglessness is not only conceptual but deeply felt in the body, shaping desires, relationships, and agency (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007).

In this context, recovery can be understood as a gradual negotiation between attachment and self-resistance. Awareness of the absurd allows individuals like Anthony, Gilbert, Dino, and Francis to recognize the limitations of destructive attachments and begin reclaiming agency. The participants’ experiences suggest that meaningful engagement with life does not arise from the elimination of struggle, but from conscious confrontation with it and the reorientation of the self toward responsibility and care. Thus, the theme of “Embodied Attachments and Self-Resistance” highlights the deeply existential dimension of mental health: suffering, addiction, and self-neglect are manifestations of the absurd, while recovery becomes a courageous process of embodied meaning-making and relational reconstitution (Pettersen et al., 2023).

Overall, the overarching narratives show that confrontation with meaninglessness significantly shapes mental health experiences, where denial, self-blame, and escape through substances initially intensify anxiety, regret, and self-alienation. In line with Camus’ philosophy of the absurd, healing emerges not from discovering inherent meaning, but from accepting meaninglessness and choosing to act despite it (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). Through sobriety, self-care, service, and renewed relational engagement, participants reconstruct meaning, identity, and self-worth. Happiness and freedom are redefined as presence and clarity rather than escape, while humility and faith function as grounding supports for resilience. Ultimately, the narratives demonstrate that mental health recovery is an ongoing existential process of transforming suffering into conscious, purposeful engagement with life.

Pleasure in the Midst of Absurdity

The participants’ experiences illustrate how the pursuit of fleeting pleasure can emerge as a response to the confrontation with Albert Camus’ absurdity, highlighting the tension between the desire for meaning and the recognition of life’s inherent indifference. Charlie’s narrative reveals that initially engaging in pleasurable activities may provide temporary relief, yet over time these pursuits lose their appeal, leaving a lingering sense of emptiness and lack of direction, as reflected in his statement: [*Lingaw at first pero ang ending dili na malipayon*]. In the long run, [*moabot jud ka sa punto nga mapul-an ka, wala na’y pulos, wala na’y direksyon ba*]. This illustrates Camus’ notion that pleasure, when used to obscure the absurd, is inherently limited and incapable of providing lasting fulfillment (Camus, 1955; Hughes, 2007).

Bob’s experience similarly underscores the search for immediate gratification as a strategy to navigate existential disorientation. His account, “I was living without direction and I was in constant search of temporary and instant [nga mga] pleasures in life,” reflects the human tendency to distract oneself from the tension between expectation and reality through constant pursuit of stimulation. Yet, as Camus argues, such attempts ultimately confront the individual with their own limits, since pleasure is ephemeral and cannot resolve the underlying awareness of absurdity (Camus, 1955; Hughes, 2007). Anthony’s experience further reinforces this existential struggle. His reflection, [*Lisod kayo i-describe*]. Kay during that time mura ko ug [*gaginhawa pero patay na*] All I want is to get high during that time,” captures the paradox of feeling temporarily alive through intoxication while simultaneously experiencing emotional numbness and existential deadness. Even intense substance-induced states fail to produce genuine satisfaction or purpose, and instead deepen alienation and internal void.

Philosophically, these narratives suggest that mental health challenges involving compulsive pursuit of pleasure can be understood as encounters with the absurd that function both as coping mechanisms and as sites of continued psychological suffering (Orford et al., 2021). The participants’ reliance on temporary pleasure masks the confrontation with life’s lack of inherent meaning, yet the resulting dissatisfaction continually reintroduces the absurd into lived experience. In this sense, the theme “Pleasure in the Midst of Absurdity” highlights the paradoxical nature of enjoyment: it offers momentary engagement and escape, yet simultaneously reinforces awareness of life’s limitations and the

instability of externally derived fulfillment.

Ultimately, the experiences of Charlie, Bob, and Anthony suggest that confronting absurdity requires recognizing that pleasure alone cannot resolve existential tension. Their narratives show that while fleeting enjoyment temporarily soothes distress, it also contributes to cycles of emptiness, disorientation, and dependence. Recovery, therefore, cannot rely solely on the pursuit of gratification but must involve deeper processes of awareness, responsibility, and meaning reconstruction within an indifferent world.

The overarching themes across the participants reveal that meaninglessness is experienced as an encounter with Camus' absurdity, marked by confusion, emotional emptiness, and a profound loss of direction that significantly impacts mental health. Life under this condition is described as disorienting and internally fractured, where constant pursuit of temporary pleasure replaces a stable sense of purpose. However, this confrontation with absurdity also becomes a turning point. For participants such as Anthony, Charlie, Bob, and others, rock-bottom experiences lead not only to suffering but also to self-realization and awakening. Through acceptance, humility, and responsibility – especially in acknowledging the consequences of addiction – participants begin to shift from passive searching to active meaning-making. Hope, self-satisfaction, and sustained behavioral change emerge not from escaping absurdity, but from confronting it directly and choosing to live deliberately despite it. In this way, meaninglessness itself becomes transformative, turning psychological suffering into a foundation for resilience, agency, and reconstructed purpose.

Existential Freedom and Self-Realization

The participants' experiences illustrate that encounters with meaninglessness, as conceptualized by Albert Camus, can function as both a destabilizing and transformative force in mental health and self-perception. Anthony's reflection – [*Makaingon man ko nga wala'y pulos pero nakita nako nga dili man diay meaningless ang nahitabo sa akoo*] – reveals that what was initially perceived as purposelessness is later reinterpreted as containing latent significance. This shift suggests that confrontation with absurdity can catalyze critical awareness of one's lived experience, where meaning is not discovered as fixed but reconstructed through reflection. Similarly, Bob's statement – "I realized and I decided [*nga di ko gusto magpuyo ani nga meaningless nga kinabuhi*] – demonstrates a conscious rejection of a life perceived as meaningless, illustrating how recognition of absurdity can provoke existential freedom through deliberate choice and intentional redirection of one's life trajectory.

Charlie and Dino both describe experiences of reaching their lowest points or "rock bottom" as paradoxically generative. Charlie's reflection on life as [*katong lowest part nako sa akong life... mao sad to ang nakahatag sa akoo*] ug strength" and Dino's parallel experience show that extreme suffering, while initially emblematic of absurdity's destabilizing effects, becomes a catalyst for resilience and reconstruction of purpose. In this sense, rock-bottom experiences function not only as moments of breakdown but also as turning points for self-reconstruction. This aligns with Camus' assertion that the absurd confronts individuals with the lack of inherent meaning in life while simultaneously creating the conditions for authentic engagement and self-assertion (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). Edward further strengthens this perspective by emphasizing that transformation is sustained through struggle and reflection, captured in his idea that "people change not because they see the light but they feel the heat... but they continue changing because of the light," highlighting the dynamic relationship between suffering, insight, and sustained personal growth.

Francis situates meaning within conscious direction and warns against unreflective pleasure-seeking, stating that "a life that is meaningless kay life that is in constant search for pleasure... is like hell." His reflection underscores that existential stagnation arises when individuals remain trapped in cycles of instant gratification without vision or purpose. Together, these narratives suggest that awareness of absurdity does not inevitably lead to despair; instead, it can orient individuals such as Anthony, Bob, Charlie, Dino, Edward, and Francis toward intentionality, reflection, and self-realization.

Several participants – including Gilbert, Harold, and Dino – emphasize the importance of acceptance as a foundational step in transformation. This is clearly expressed in Gilbert's reflective prayer: [*Hatagi ako ug lawm nga kalinaw sa pagdawat sa mga butang nga dili nako mausab, ang kaisog sa pag-usab sa mga butang nga angay pa nako mausab, ug kaalam sa pag-ila sa kalainan*] which signifies the movement from cognitive closure to openness and self-awareness. Dino also articulates acceptance in practical terms when he states, [*kailangan dawaton pud nako nga... tangtangan nako ning bisyo sa kaugalingon*] especially [*ning*] drugs or alcohol." These accounts reflect Camus' notion of lucidity – facing reality without illusion while still choosing to act meaningfully within it (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). Acceptance, in this sense, becomes a prerequisite for existential freedom, enabling participants to disengage from destructive patterns and reclaim agency. Charlie's belief that "until ga breath ko, [*naa pay chances... naa pay chance*] reinforces this temporally grounded freedom, emphasizing that transformation remains possible as long as life continues.

Collectively, these narratives demonstrate that perceived meaninglessness operates as both an existential

challenge and a catalyst for self-realization. Participants such as Anthony, Bob, Charlie, Dino, Edward, Francis, Gilbert, and Harold transform confrontation with the absurd into a framework for agency, reflection, and purposeful action. Philosophically, this suggests that mental health recovery can be understood as an exercise in existential freedom: the recognition of absurdity compels individuals to navigate the tension between acceptance and responsibility, despair and agency, ultimately fostering a more coherent sense of self and intentional engagement with life (Brijan et al., 2025). The theme of “Existential Freedom and Self-Realization” thus captures how experiences of meaninglessness, rather than immobilizing the participants, become the very conditions for conscious transformation, resilience, and sustained mental health recovery.

What are the philosophical implications of Albert Camus’ absurdity in the context of mental health issues Camusian Philosophy and Mental Health

Albert Camus’ philosophy of absurdity provides an important philosophical framework for understanding certain dimensions of mental health issues, particularly experiences associated with meaninglessness and existential distress. As explained by Albert Camus, absurdity arises from the conflict between humanity’s persistent desire for meaning, order, and rational understanding and the silent, indifferent nature of the universe. This tension produces what Camus calls the absurd condition, where individuals become aware that the world does not provide inherent meaning despite their continual search for purpose (Camus, 1942/1991).

Kanu and Ogbunkwu (2024) explain that absurdity emerges from the relationship between human consciousness and the world’s lack of ultimate meaning, challenging traditional assumptions that life possesses predetermined or divine purpose. Through narratives such as the myth of Sisyphus, Camus illustrates the human struggle to continue living despite recognizing the repetitive and seemingly purposeless nature of existence. Rather than escaping this condition through suicide or a metaphysical “leap of faith,” Camus proposes revolt as the authentic response—an active and conscious engagement with life despite its uncertainties (Kanu & Ogbunkwu, 2024). Philosophically, this perspective suggests that meaning must be created through human action and awareness rather than discovered as an external or predetermined reality.

Within the context of mental health issues, this philosophical insight becomes particularly relevant in understanding experiences of existential emptiness and psychological distress. The study of Ndubueze Fabian Mmagu links substance use and drug addiction to what he describes as “noögenic pathology,” a condition rooted in existential frustration and the loss of meaning in life rather than purely biological or psychological dysfunction (Mmagu, n.d.). According to the study, individuals experiencing feelings of purposelessness, alienation, and existential emptiness may turn to drugs as a coping mechanism to temporarily escape psychological distress. Existential psychology suggests that substance use disorder can develop as a response to the anxiety produced by confronting existential realities such as meaninglessness, isolation, and mortality. Substance use functions as a coping mechanism that temporarily shields individuals from existential distress by providing an escape from confronting life’s inherent uncertainty and lack of meaning (Grech, 2021).

This perspective aligns with Camus’ analysis of the absurd condition, where the absence of meaning can create internal conflict and emotional tension within human consciousness. When individuals are unable to construct or sustain meaningful life narratives, this existential vacuum may increase vulnerability to maladaptive coping behaviors, including substance use (Mmagu, n.d.). Similarly, research in existential psychology suggests that crises of meaning are strongly associated with psychological distress, depression, and self-destructive behaviors when individuals fail to find purpose or direction in their lives (Frankl, 1963; Yalom, 1980).

In this sense, Camus’ philosophy offers a conceptual lens for understanding how experiences of meaninglessness may contribute to certain mental health challenges. Qualitative research on addiction indicates that individuals often experience substance use within a broader existential struggle between meaning and meaninglessness. Drugs or alcohol may temporarily alleviate feelings of emptiness and isolation, even though they ultimately deepen existential suffering over time (Lindholm & Eriksson, 2008).

Furthermore, the philosophical implications of Camus’ concept of revolt may also offer insight into possible pathways for psychological resilience. Camus argues that acknowledging the absurd condition does not necessarily lead to despair but can instead encourage individuals to live consciously and responsibly despite the absence of ultimate meaning (Critchley, 2008). Kanu and Ogbunkwu (2024) emphasize that revolt involves embracing life with awareness, freedom, and persistence while rejecting escapist solutions that deny the reality of absurdity.

In relation to mental health, this perspective resonates with therapeutic approaches that emphasize meaning-making and personal agency as essential components of psychological well-being (Steger, 2006). For instance, existential and logotherapeutic approaches highlight the importance of reconstructing personal meaning and purpose in addressing

psychological suffering (Frankl, 1963). Similarly, Mmagu (n.d.) argues that addressing substance abuse requires interventions that extend beyond medical treatment to include strategies that restore meaning, identity, and psychosocial connection in individuals' lives. Empirical studies examining addiction and existential variables have found associations between addictive behaviors and low perceived meaning in life. These findings suggest that individuals who experience existential meaninglessness may be more vulnerable to substance use as a coping response to existential anxiety (Vatikioti et al., 2025).

Thus, the philosophical implications of Camus' absurdity suggest that mental health challenges associated with meaninglessness may be addressed not only through clinical treatment but also through existential reflection and the active creation of personal meaning. These insights indicate that experiences of existential tension, purposelessness, and the search for meaning are deeply intertwined with mental health, highlighting the relevance of Camus' philosophy in interpreting lived experiences of psychological struggle.

Building on these insights, it is important to examine how individuals who have recovered from substance use disorder perceive experiences of meaninglessness, their struggle to find purpose, and the ways they ultimately achieve transcendence in their lives. Exploring their lived experiences can illuminate how Camus' concept of absurdity manifests in the recovery process and its impact on existential understanding, purpose, and mental health.

What meaningful insights can be drawn from the reflection of Albert Camus on putting meaning to meaninglessness and meaninglessness is meaning itself in relation to mental health

Importance of Human Support

The participants' reflections suggest that engagement with others is a crucial mechanism for navigating the existential tension described by Albert Camus, where meaninglessness confronts individuals with the absurdity of existence. Anthony highlights that reaching out for help becomes a turning point in recovering from cognitive and emotional disorientation, as seen in his statement, [*Isa ato katong nayagaw ko nga wala nako sa insaktong panghunahuna ba hantod sa nangayo ko ug tabang*], illustrating that the acknowledgment of personal limits often requires the relational scaffolding provided by others. This moment of help-seeking marks a shift from internal confusion toward external grounding, where recovery begins through connection rather than isolation.

Bob's experience underscores the rediscovery of family relationships as a stabilizing force in recovery. His reflection, [*pwede pa man diay ko mabalik sa akong pamilya ug nakita nako nga need ko sa akong pamilya ug nakita pud nakita nga need pud nako akong anak*], shows how human bonds function as both mirrors and anchors of identity. Through recognizing mutual need and belonging, Bob reframes his existence within a relational context, counterbalancing the disorienting effects of prior meaninglessness and reinforcing a renewed sense of purpose grounded in family connection.

Charlie's narrative further demonstrates that seeking guidance from both formal and informal support systems provides practical and emotional structure for coping. His statement, [*Ug maabot man gani ang time [nga di nako makaya akong problema, mangayo jud ko ug tabang or mangayo ko] ug suggestion. Kung related [sa akong addiction or sakit nako nga SUD, diri akong duolan sa akong mentors nako sa] recovery. [Usahay mangayo pud ko ug tabang sa akong pamilya pud]*], reflects a deliberate and sustained reliance on mentors and family. This illustrates how structured relational engagement becomes a coping strategy that allows him to face difficulties without being overwhelmed by helplessness or existential fatigue.

Dino reinforces this procedural and intentional dimension of support through his reflection, "Ang step 2 is asking for help," emphasizing that help-seeking is not incidental but an essential stage in the recovery process. This highlights that reaching out is itself an act of agency, where individuals consciously position themselves within supportive networks to rebuild stability and direction.

Collectively, these narratives indicate that human support functions as a mediating force between the recognition of absurdity and the capacity to act meaningfully. For Anthony, Bob, Charlie, and Dino, relationships provide accountability, affirmation, and emotional grounding that transform experiences of disorientation into opportunities for recovery and reconstruction of selfhood. Philosophically, this aligns with Camus' assertion that while life lacks inherent meaning, meaning can still be created through conscious engagement and revolt against absurdity (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). In this context, relational support – whether through family, mentors, or recovery communities – serves as both a practical and existential resource, enabling individuals to confront vulnerability, endure despair, and gradually rebuild coherence in their lives. Ultimately, the participants' experiences demonstrate that although absurdity may generate isolation and disorientation, intentional connection with others transforms these conditions into pathways toward resilience, agency, and sustained recovery.

Sense of Gratitude

The participants' reflections reveal that encounters with life's absurdity and meaninglessness can cultivate a profound sense of gratitude, particularly when the support and guidance of others are recognized as transformative. Edward's reflection highlights this turning point, as he shared, [*nakita nako karon ba nga instrument diay to sila kay kung wala ko nila gipa rehab diay, magpadayon diay gihapon ko ug lakaw-lakaw sa dalan*], emphasizing that intervention through rehabilitation and guidance redirected him from a path of self-destruction. This demonstrates how relational and contextual support becomes a crucial factor in generating meaning within an otherwise indifferent or chaotic life experience. Edward further reinforces this realization in his acknowledgment that [*sila ang instrument sa akoo diay, maoy nagpabag-o sa akoo ba*], showing that gratitude emerges through recognizing others as agents of transformation in his recovery journey.

Similarly, Francis underscores the instrumental role of others in his personal change, stating, [*sila ang instrument sa akoo diay, maoy nagpabag-o sa akoo ba*], which reflects the understanding that human assistance does not only support recovery but also reshapes how past suffering is interpreted. Through this lens, experiences of pain and disruption are re-evaluated as necessary conditions for growth rather than purely destructive events.

Gilbert extends this insight into a philosophical and spiritual interpretation of suffering, expressing that "Actually, you can never question [*sa*] wisdom [*sa Ginoo*]. [*Mao nga*] sometimes the pain, sorrow, and failures or challenges [*nga agian nato*], they could be blessings [*nga wala lang nato nakita dayon*]. His reflection illustrates a cognitive and spiritual reframing of adversity, where hardships are understood as latent blessings that reveal their meaning only in hindsight. This aligns with Camus' idea that meaning is not inherent but constructed through reflective engagement with experience (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007), though here it is further enriched by spiritual interpretation.

Harold adds another dimension to this theme by emphasizing the transformative potential of suffering, stating, [*Nahimo nga dalan para matabangan nako akong kaugalingon ug makatabang pud ko*]. His narrative shows that gratitude is not only directed toward those who provided help but also toward the lived experience of suffering itself, which becomes a pathway toward self-recovery and service to others. In this way, gratitude evolves into an active orientation toward meaning-making and social contribution.

Philosophically, these narratives suggest that gratitude functions as a reflective acknowledgment of the interplay between human support, personal agency, and the inherent absurdity of existence. While Camus emphasizes the confrontation with meaninglessness, participants such as Edward, Francis, Gilbert, and Harold demonstrate that recognition of help, guidance, and the transformative potential embedded in suffering can reconfigure existential tension into a constructive and generative perspective (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). In the context of mental health, this implies that cultivating gratitude – toward both others and life's adversities – can strengthen resilience, reframe suffering, and sustain a renewed sense of purpose. Ultimately, meaninglessness itself becomes the ground from which gratitude and meaningful engagement arise, illustrating how relational support and existential reflection converge in the process of recovery and self-realization.

Embracing and Becoming

The participants' experiences illustrate how Albert Camus's concept of absurdity manifests in mental health challenges and recovery, particularly as a dynamic process of self-reclamation and personal transformation. Francis' narrative reflects conscious detachment from destructive patterns and a deliberate reorientation toward recovery, as seen in his statement, [*nalipay ko nga mag-recover ko, wala sa akoo ang drugs, wala ang alcohol*]. This illustrates that recovery involves not only abstaining from substances but also an active choice to live differently after recognizing the consequences of past dependence. In Camusian terms, this reflects the confrontation between the human desire for coherence and life's indifference, where meaning is not given but chosen through action (Camus, 1942).

Charlie's account highlights the intersubjective dimension of meaning-making, where relational affirmation and engagement in service strengthen identity and purpose. His reflection, [*malipayon kaayo ko nga ang pareho diay nako nga nag-volunteer is pwede diay atimanon pud diay sa mga tao bitaw nga nagtoo pud sa akoo nga nag-reporma*], shows how recognition by others and participation in communal recovery reinforce a sense of belonging and value. This demonstrates that while the absurd exposes the fragility of meaning, relational engagement enables individuals to reconstruct significance through shared human experience.

Anthony's reflection emphasizes self-awareness as a foundation for transformation, particularly through confronting past emptiness. His statement, "I started with my recovery. Mao to ang [*nakapa*] bounce back [*nako*]. I

acknowledged [sa] meaningless [nako nga] life to regain myself,” illustrates that acceptance of meaninglessness becomes the starting point for rebuilding identity. This aligns with Camus’ idea that lucidity about the absurd is necessary for authentic action, where clarity about one’s condition enables the reassertion of agency rather than passive resignation (Camus, 1942).

Harold’s experience underscores the embodiment of recovery through sustained, intentional practice. His reflection, [gi] practice [nako tanan] healthy copings [sa] recovery... [Padayon gihapon ko ug volunteer diri kay nakita gyud nako ang impact sa service work ba]. demonstrates that coping strategies and service are not abstract ideals but lived, daily responses to existential struggle. In this sense, revolt against the absurd is enacted through disciplined engagement in behaviors that sustain sobriety, stability, and purpose.

Gilbert’s narrative further highlights the construction of meaning through service and purposeful action. His statement, [Kibali nabutangan ko ug meaning ug purpose sa akong life ba... Padayon gihapon ko ug volunteer diri,] reflects how engagement in helping others transforms recovery into a sustained source of fulfillment. Through service, personal healing and social contribution become mutually reinforcing processes, allowing meaning to emerge through action rather than abstraction.

Collectively, these narratives reveal that mental health recovery can be understood as a process of embracing and becoming—embracing one’s limitations, vulnerabilities, and past actions, while becoming an agent of transformation through intentional choice, relational engagement, and purposeful living. Philosophically, Camus’ notion of absurdity (1942) underscores that suffering and existential confrontation are not endpoints but catalysts for self-realization. The participants—Francis, Charlie, Anthony, Harold, and Gilbert—demonstrate that recovery involves negotiating between acknowledging life’s inherent meaninglessness and actively constructing personal significance. In this way, embracing the absurd enables individuals to reclaim autonomy, cultivate resilience, and develop a coherent sense of self, illustrating the profound convergence of existential philosophy and lived experiences of mental health recovery.

The Courage to Submit

Every experience of participants confronting mental health challenges involves negotiating the tension between personal agency and the acceptance of forces beyond one’s control—a dynamic that resonates with Albert Camus’s notion of absurdity. Bob’s journey illustrates the reclamation of self-trust and confidence after periods of disorientation, as reflected in his statement, [Nabalik napud ang akong paghatag ug salig and confidence sa akong self. So far, nag arang-arang gyud, Sir]. This demonstrates that restoring faith in one’s capacity is an act of conscious resistance against the destabilizing effects of past addiction and meaninglessness. However, Bob’s growth is also anchored in relational responsibility, as he emphasizes, [Mao na nga di najud ko mobalik bitaw, maguba naman sad gud akong relasyon sa akong pamilya, ilang salig. Gihinay-hinay baya na nako pag-build], showing that sustaining recovery requires not only self-confidence but also the deliberate repair of fractured family trust.

Anthony’s reflections similarly demonstrate a grounded awareness of consequences and limits shaped by prior experiences. His recognition of recovery as a turning point, “I started with my recovery. Mao to ang [nakapa] bounce back [nako]. I acknowledged [sa] meaningless [nako nga] life to regain myself,” reflects a deliberate decision to move away from self-destructive patterns. This aligns with Camus’ idea that absurdity confronts individuals with the contradictions and boundaries of existence (Camus, 1955; Hughes, 2007). In this context, Anthony’s acceptance is not passive resignation but disciplined awareness—an acknowledgment that while not all aspects of life can be controlled, one must still choose responsible action within those limits.

Harold’s experience introduces a spiritual dimension to submission, where surrender becomes a conscious and stabilizing response to existential uncertainty. His declaration, [niabot sa pagtuo nga ako nang itugyan akong kinabuhi sa akong Ginoo. ‘Lord, I surrender. Ikaw na bahala sa akoo], reflects an act of faith that does not deny struggle but instead reorients it within a transcendent framework of trust. This form of surrender embodies courage, as it involves facing life’s unpredictability without denial while relying on a guiding order beyond immediate understanding.

Gilbert further emphasizes the ethical and personal significance of humility in transformation, stating, [Diha jud nako na] realize [nga] instead of practicing first honesty, I should practice humility. So, personally [giilisan nako] ang honesty ug humility.” His reflection highlights humility as a foundational shift away from ego-centered responses toward openness, relational awareness, and personal growth. This repositioning of humility underscores that recovery involves subordinating self-assertion in favor of learning, accountability, and meaningful connection with others.

Collectively, these narratives indicate that mental health recovery is not solely about self-assertion or resistance to adversity, but also about the conscious capacity to submit—to personal limits, relational responsibilities, and, for some, a higher spiritual order. Philosophically, Camus’ concept of absurdity highlights the tension between the human desire for control and the unpredictability of life (Camus, 1955; Hughes, 2007). The experiences of Bob, Anthony, Harold, and

Gilbert demonstrate that submission, when practiced consciously, becomes a form of existential engagement rather than defeat. It allows for self-restoration, relational repair, and moral development, showing that surrender and agency are not opposites but complementary forces that together support psychological stability and existential balance.

Awakening

The participants' reflections illustrate that confronting the tension between meaninglessness and the search for purpose can lead to a profound process of awakening, consistent with Albert Camus's notion that meaning is not given but must be actively created (Camus, 1942). Across the narratives, participants demonstrate how awareness of past emptiness becomes a catalyst for self-directed transformation, ethical reflection, and renewed engagement with life.

Anthony describes a decisive turning point in his understanding of his past, stating, [*Makaingon man ko nga wala'y pulos pero nakita nako nga dili man diay meaningless ang nahitabo sa akoa*], and further emphasizing, "I realized and I decided [*nga*] di ko gusto [*magpuyo ani nga*] meaningless [*nga kinabuhi*]. His reflection illustrates how recognition of futility does not lead to resignation but instead generates a conscious decision to change direction. This aligns with Camus' idea that awareness of absurdity can provoke deliberate choice and self-reconstruction rather than despair.

Bob's reflection emphasizes the latent meaning within experiences once perceived as purposeless, as seen in his statement, [*Katong*] lowest part [*nako sa akong*] life, [*katong*] rock bottom [] Here, rock-bottom experiences are reinterpreted as sources of strength and moral grounding. Bob's awakening illustrates that meaning is not eliminated by suffering but often revealed through it, allowing individuals to resist relapse and sustain recovery through reflective awareness of their own transformation.

Charlie extends this realization into relational and social dimensions, as reflected in his statement, "people change not because they see the light but they feel the heat but people continue changing, sustain and maintain their recovery because of the light, so mao na ang meaning dayon." His narrative highlights that suffering initiates change ("heat"), while sustained recovery is guided by insight and renewed purpose ("light"). This suggests that awakening is not only internal but also relational, as individuals like Charlie begin to translate personal recovery into empathy and support for others undergoing similar struggles.

Dino emphasizes the cognitive and moral conditions necessary for awakening, particularly openness and self-honesty. His reflection, "a life that is meaningless kay life that is in constant search for pleasure, a life that has no vision is like hell..." demonstrates a critical re-evaluation of pleasure-driven existence. For Dino, awakening involves recognizing the limitations of impulsive gratification and developing vision, discipline, and self-awareness as foundations for meaningful living.

Taken together, the narratives of Anthony, Bob, Charlie, and Dino show that awakening is both an internal and relational process. Individuals confront their limitations, reinterpret past suffering, and begin to translate insight into purposeful action and connection with others. From a Camusian perspective, this reflects the paradox that meaninglessness itself can become the source of meaning (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007), where lucidity about the absurd gives rise to agency, responsibility, and ethical awareness.

In the broader synthesis of findings, the participants' experiences reveal a coherent trajectory of transformation across interconnected themes such as Between Absurdity and Transcendence, Embodied Attachments and Self-Resistance, The Courage to Submit, Importance of Human Support, Sense of Gratitude, and Awakening. These themes collectively demonstrate that while mental health struggles are marked by suffering, disorientation, and relational rupture, they also create conditions for reflection, connection, and change. Participants consistently show that recovery is sustained not through avoidance of the absurd but through engagement with it – through humility, acceptance, relational support, spiritual surrender, and active meaning-making.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that even in the face of despair and uncertainty, individuals such as Anthony, Bob, Charlie, and Dino are able to reclaim agency, reconstruct purpose, and develop coherence in their lives. Philosophically, this supports Camus' insight that life's apparent absurdity does not negate meaning but instead opens the possibility for its conscious creation. In this way, awakening becomes the transformative point where suffering is reconfigured into insight, and meaninglessness is reworked into a foundation for resilience, ethical growth, and sustained recovery.

Connection with the Divine

The participants' reflections suggest that experiences of meaninglessness, as articulated by Albert Camus, can be transformed into existentially significant experiences through conscious engagement, ethical action, or connection with a higher power (Camus, 1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007). However, it is important to emphasize that the responses shared by the

participants represent their own personal interpretations, choices, and lived experiences rather than direct applications of Camus' philosophical position—particularly in relation to the Divine, which Camus himself did not frame as a solution to the absurd.

Anthony emphasizes that his recovery was catalyzed by spiritual grounding and surrender, as reflected in his statement, [*And number 1 pud nga nakatabang sa akoa is ang akoang Ginoo. Siya gyud ang hinungdan nga naka-recover ko tungod sa tabang*]. His narrative shows how the belief in God functions as an anchor that stabilizes him during periods of mental and emotional disorientation, offering coherence where earlier experiences were marked by chaos and meaninglessness. Bob reinforces this insight through his description of prayer and structured spiritual practice, stating, [*Sugod nga naabot ko sa facility sa rehab, sige na ko ug ampo, every time matulog ko mao na akong ginabuhat. Attitude ug gratitude, mao na akong ginadala-dala karon*]. For Bob, faith is not abstract but embodied in daily routines of prayer and gratitude, which provide emotional regulation and a framework for navigating recovery.

Charlie's reflection highlights the continuity of divine presence even in the midst of addiction and suffering, as seen in his statement, [*I have my God nga maskin sa height sa akong addiction, wala jud siya mobiya nako*]... There's God [*gyud nga naghelap sa akoa*] all these years." This illustrates how perceived divine constancy provides emotional stability during existential rupture, allowing him to maintain hope despite personal struggles. Dino and Francis echo this orientation toward surrender, emphasizing trust in God as a coping strategy. This is reflected in statements such as [*kay kung dili na nimo kaya, ihatag sa Ginoo*] and [*ihatag na nako ang will sa akong God*], which demonstrate that surrender is not experienced as passivity but as a deliberate existential strategy for managing overwhelm and uncertainty.

Edward and Gilbert further emphasize how hope and divine recognition reframe suffering into meaningful life experience. Edward's assertion that "there is hope... there is a solution... there is God" situates divine belief as the foundation for resilience and continuity, while Gilbert's reflection—"I recognized that there is a higher power, there is A God working in our life"—indicates a cognitive shift toward interpreting life events as part of a larger purposeful design. Harold adds to this perspective by linking surrender, action, and trust in God, as seen in his reflection, "Surrender, seek help, and God... [*niabot sa punto nga akong kinabuhi nas diay meaning, naa diay life nga dili yagaw, dili samok, nagmalinawon na*]. For Harold, spiritual surrender leads not only to emotional peace but also to a restructured and meaningful way of living.

Collectively, these accounts suggest that individuals such as Anthony, Bob, Charlie, Dino, Francis, Edward, Gilbert, and Harold experience meaning-making through spiritual engagement as their own response to existential distress. Their narratives reflect how perceived meaninglessness can be reframed through faith, surrender, and trust in a higher power, resulting in resilience, emotional stability, and renewed purpose. While Camus (1955, 1991; Hughes, 2007) emphasizes that meaninglessness should be confronted without recourse to metaphysical assurance, the participants demonstrate their own ways of interpreting and responding to existential tension through spiritual frameworks that are meaningful within their lived realities.

Philosophically, this suggests that mental health recovery can be understood as an intersection of existential awareness and personally grounded spiritual belief. The participants' experiences show that even within conditions of suffering and absurdity, meaning can be constructed through relational and spiritual orientation. In this sense, Anthony, Bob, Charlie, Dino, Francis, Edward, Gilbert, and Harold illustrate how divine connection becomes a source of hope, structure, and moral agency. Ultimately, their narratives demonstrate that meaning emerges not from the denial of absurdity but from engaging it through faith-based interpretation and lived spiritual practice, fostering resilience, coherence, and self-realization in ways that reflect their own convictions and experiences rather than Camus' original philosophical stance.

FINDINGS

The findings show that Albert Camus' concept of absurdity closely reflects the mental health experiences of persons with substance use disorder, particularly during addiction when life was perceived as meaningless, confusing, and emotionally distressing. This state intensified anxiety, self-alienation, and escapist behaviors, supporting Camus' view that denying absurdity worsens psychological suffering (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942). Recovery began when participants acknowledged meaninglessness with acceptance and responsibility, allowing clarity and emotional stability to emerge.

Participants experienced meaninglessness as a disruption of existence, identity, and purpose, leading to detachment from relationships and daily responsibilities. However, acceptance of this condition transformed meaninglessness from a source of despair into a catalyst for self-awareness and change. Rather than eliminating hope, confronting the absurd enabled participants to live intentionally and regain agency over their lives.

Finally, the study affirms Camus' insight that meaning is created through conscious action rather than discovered

(1942). Participants developed purpose through sobriety, service, and human connection, while faith functioned as psychological grounding that supported resilience. Overall, meaninglessness did not undermine mental health; instead, when consciously faced, it became the foundation for recovery, purpose, and deliberate living despite life's inherent uncertainty.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study was grounded on the assumption that experiences of meaninglessness contribute to psychological distress among persons with substance use disorder, often leading to maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance use as a response to existential emptiness. It was further assumed that individuals experiencing meaninglessness are not passive victims but active meaning-makers capable of interpreting, resisting, and reconstructing meaning, and that recovery becomes possible when meaning is generated through reflection, social connection, or spiritual engagement. These assumptions are affirmed in the findings of the study, as the participants' narratives demonstrate both the destructive and transformative dimensions of meaninglessness in lived experience.

The findings reveal that encounters with meaninglessness are often accompanied by emotional distress, disorientation, and substance use as a coping strategy. However, these same experiences also function as turning points that enable reflection, self-awareness, and transformation. This suggests that meaninglessness is not a fixed or purely pathological condition but a potentially transformative experience that can lead to recovery when consciously engaged with. In this sense, the participants' experiences validate the assumption that individuals are capable of reconstructing meaning even in states of psychological struggle and addiction.

The theoretical perspectives integrated in this study further support these findings. Consistent with Viktor Frankl, Leo Tolstoy, and Émile Durkheim, the results highlight that meaning-making through purpose, spirituality, and social connection serves as a protective factor against psychological decline. Likewise, William McDougall's purposivism reinforces the idea that human behavior is inherently goal-directed, affirming that individuals retain the capacity for self-direction even in existential crisis.

From the perspective of Albert Camus' philosophy of the absurd, the participants' experiences illustrate that while life may appear inherently meaningless, this does not inevitably lead to despair or self-destruction. Rather, individuals may confront life's uncertainty with awareness and resilience, engaging in reflective practices, responsibility, and relational repair as forms of meaning-making. In this way, their experiences reflect a lived negotiation with absurdity, where suffering becomes a condition for awareness and transformation.

Ultimately, this study supports the proposition that "putting meaning in meaninglessness" is not the discovery of a fixed or predetermined purpose, but the active exercise of human agency in constructing meaning amid existential uncertainty. The experiences of persons with substance use disorder demonstrate that recovery involves transforming suffering and emptiness into opportunities for self-awareness, relational restoration, and renewed purpose. Through existential reflection, social support, and spiritual or personal belief systems, individuals are able to reconstruct meaning and move toward sustained recovery and psychological well-being.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, several key implications and recommendations can be drawn for future research.

First, the study revealed that experiences of meaninglessness and rock-bottom moments among persons with substance use disorder often become turning points for awakening, self-realization, and recovery. This suggests that future philosophical and qualitative studies may further explore how crisis experiences function not only as sources of distress but also as catalysts for meaning reconstruction and behavioral transformation. In particular, deeper inquiry into how individuals reinterpret suffering as strength may enrich understanding of existential recovery processes.

Second, the findings highlight the central role of spiritual connection, surrender, and perceived divine guidance in sustaining recovery, trust, and emotional stability. Since this study shows that participants consistently framed recovery through connection with God and surrender, future research may examine how spirituality interacts with existential coping mechanisms in addiction recovery. Comparative studies may also explore how spiritual meaning-making differs from purely secular existential approaches in shaping resilience and psychological well-being.

Third, the study underscores the importance of human support systems (family, mentors, and community engagement) in rebuilding trust, confidence, gratitude, and sustained recovery. Future research may therefore focus on how relational support systems function as protective and transformative factors in long-term sobriety, particularly how trust restoration and social reintegration contribute to identity reconstruction.

Lastly, one limitation of this study is that it primarily captures retrospective self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by memory, interpretation, and current recovery status. Future studies may consider longitudinal approaches or include multiple data sources to better understand how meaning-making evolves over time during recovery.

Overall, these recommendations emphasize that recovery from substance use disorder is not only a behavioral process but also an existential, relational, and spiritual transformation, as reflected in the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

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