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Interconnected Lives: Exploring Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy and the Filipino Concept of Kapwa in Reconstructing Narrative Identity and Solitude for Abandoned Elderly Women

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Abstract

Despite the deep-rooted value of family in Filipino culture, a troubling shift is emerging, as cases of elderly abandonment are on the rise. This contrast between tradition and reality sparks reflection- what factors are driving this change, and how can society rekindle its commitment to caring for its elders? While several studies and conferences are currently directed toward old age, a limited rigorous attempt is directed toward a phenomenological understanding of elderly women's abandonment. Hence, the main objective of this qualitative study was to explore the intersection of kapwa and Ricoeur's philosophy that may offer ethical and practical responses to the abandonment of elderly women. The data were collected through insightful in-depth interviews, through the process of storytelling, and dynamic focus group discussions, where participants engaged in expressive art-painting activities. This creative art-activity approach not only facilitated a meaningful dialogue but also unveiled the deeper perspectives through the artistic expressions of the lolas (grannies). Applying the hermeneutical-interpretative approach of Ricoeur, in relation to the Filipino concept of kapwa, narratives were

reconstructed from the three categories: literal interpretation, symbolic meaning, and language (culture) structure. The analysis revealed significant reconstructed narrative-identities: Recognition of Shared Humanity; The Role of Empathy and Solidarity; Faith and Relational Accountability, and Transformative Growth in Community. By intertwining Ricoeur's concept of solicitude (an ethical responsibility to care for others) with the Filipino cultural value of Kapwa, which emphasizes shared humanity, we can cultivate profound and culturally resonant solutions to support abandoned elderly women. This synergy not only honors tradition but also reinforces a compassionate framework for addressing their unique challenges.

Keywords: Ricoeur, abandoned elderly women, sustainable development goals, solicitude, kapwa

Background of Study

The phenomenon of elderly abandonment in the Philippines, particularly among women, is not merely a social issue. It is a deeply existential one, for it touches on questions of identity, dignity, and relational belonging. This study explored the lived experiences of abandoned elderly women through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy and the indigenous Filipino concept of *kapwa*, aiming to reconstruct narrative identity and illuminate the ethical dimension of solicitude.

The Philippines is undergoing a critical demographic shift toward an aging society. As of 2021, approximately 9.4 million Filipinos were aged 60 and above, comprising 8.6% of the total population, a figure projected to exceed 23 million by 2050 (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2021). This transformation, however, is driven by declining fertility rates, now at 1.9 children per woman, and rising life expectancy, which is expected to reach 75.7 years for females and 69.1 years for males by 2030 (PSA, 2019). Hence, elderly women, who might outlive men, are facing a heightened vulnerability to abandonment, poverty, and neglect due to their longer lifespan and limited economic resources.

Despite the growing number of older adults, the majority remain financially unprotected. According to the Philippine census in the past years, an estimated 80% of senior citizens are excluded from mandatory pension coverage, and only 6% receive formal pensions, forcing many to rely on informal labor or family support (PSA, 2018; PSA, 2023). Moreover, access to healthcare and social services is limited in rural areas, where a significant portion of the elderly population resides (PSA, 2021). This data predicted that the healthcare system is increasingly strained by the demand for "chronic and geriatric care," while traditional caregiving structures are eroding under the pressures of urban migration, economic hardship, and shifting cultural norms (Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD], 2023).

In this demographic shift, the most affected are elderly women who have been abandoned and institutionalized in homes for the aged. These women often suffer from "psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, compounded by the loss of identity and social connection" (De Guzman & Tiamzon, 2020). Their economic precarity is rooted in lifelong unpaid labor and exclusion from formal employment, leaving them with little financial security. Prudente and Pasquin (2024) underscore the persistent gender inequality across domains of unpaid care work, which exacerbates the marginalization of elderly women (p. 191).

Historically, Filipino families upheld strong intergenerational bonds, with caregiving for aging parents embedded in cultural norms. However, recent years have seen a rise in elderly abandonment, colloquially referred to as '*granny*

dumping.’ Weller (2017) describes this practice as the “act of leaving seniors at hospitals or charitable institutions without further care”. This is a phenomenon reminiscent of the Japanese stories related to ‘*ubasute*’, where elders were historically abandoned due to poverty and lack of resources.

In the Philippines, the legal framework for elderly care is built on constitutional mandates, statutory laws, and administrative programs. The 1987 Philippine Constitution affirms the duty of both the State and the family to care for the elderly, emphasizing social justice and health services (Article XIII, Section 11). The Family Code legally obliges children and descendants to support aging parents and grandparents (Executive Order No. 209). Complementary legislation, including Republic Acts 7432, 9257, and 9994, collectively known as the Expanded Senior Citizens Act, provides benefits such as discounts, PhilHealth coverage, and social pensions for indigent seniors (DSWD, 2023).

Despite these provisions in the constitution, implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent. Many elderly Filipinos, particularly in rural areas, are unaware of their entitlements or face bureaucratic barriers in accessing them (PSA, 2021). Often in the news, it is heard that social pensions, while symbolically important, are often insufficient to meet basic needs such as food, medicine, and shelter. Although elder abuse is addressed in laws like the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act (RA 9262) and the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), there is no comprehensive legislation that directly criminalizes elder neglect or abandonment.

Moreover, pending bills such as the Anti-Elder Abuse Act (House Bill 4696) and Senate Bill No. 816 seek to address this legislative gap, but their passage remains uncertain. In practice, the burden of elder care continues to fall heavily on families, with minimal institutional support and limited access to formal caregiving services. The establishment of the National Commission of Senior Citizens (NCSC) marks a step toward coordinated programming, yet its reach and resources remain in development (DSWD, 2023).

This legal and structural inadequacy contributes directly to the rising cases of elderly abandonment in the country. In the absence of enforceable protections, sufficient financial support, and accessible care systems, families, particularly those experiencing economic hardship, may be compelled to relinquish elderly members to hospitals, shelters, or, in the worst cases, the streets. The absence of a cohesive legal response not only fails to prevent abandonment but also perpetuates the invisibility and marginalization of elderly women, whose vulnerability is compounded by gendered labor histories and longer life expectancy (Prudente & Pasquin, 2024). These gaps are not passive oversights; they are active contributors to the systemic neglect of one of the nation’s most vulnerable populations.

Globally, the conversation around aging populations continues to grow, with international forums and policy dialogues addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by older adults. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms in its fourth declaration that "no one will be left behind," emphasizing the need for inclusive progress that honors the dignity of every human being (United Nations, 2015). Yet, in the shadows of this global pledge, abandoned elderly women remain among the most overlooked and voiceless.

The time to act is now. Without targeted interventions and a renewed commitment to inclusive development, the Philippines risks forsaking one of its most vulnerable populations, those who have spent a lifetime contributing to society, only to be forgotten in their final years.

Hence, the context of this study is situated in the Mary Mother of Mercy Home for the Elderly and Abandoned in San Pedro, Laguna. Operated by the Sisters of St. Francis Xavier (SFX), the facility rescues elderly women found neglected or abandoned in public spaces. The lived experiences of these *lolas* (grandmothers) serve as a poignant lens through which this research seeks to understand the deeper implications of abandonment.

Statement of Research Problem and Objectives

In this attempt, the main question explored is: How can the intersection of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy and the Filipino concept of *Kapwa* provide a culturally grounded and ethically responsive framework for understanding and addressing the abandonment of elderly women in the Philippines?

Specifically, the study presents these objectives:

- (1) *to explore the interplay between personal and communal identity reconstruction;*
- (2) *to establish Kapwa as a framework for addressing ethical neglect in caring for others, and;*
- (3) *to propose tangible solutions blending philosophical and cultural insights in responding to the needs and challenges of the abandoned elderly women.*

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study drew upon a multi-layered framework that integrates philosophical, psychological, cultural, and developmental perspectives to understand the lived experiences of abandoned elderly women in the Philippines. By combining Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of narrative identity, the Filipino concept

of *Kapwa*, and humanistic developmental theories, the research attempted to reconstruct the meaning of abandonment and affirm the dignity and worth of elderly women within the context of Sustainable Development Goal #3.

The conceptual foundation of this study was anchored in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology, a philosophical method that bridges phenomenology and textual interpretation. Ricoeur's approach emphasizes that language articulates lived experience and that interpretation is a pathway to understanding human existence, particularly through the lens of narrative identity (Tan *et al.*, 2009; Simony *et al.*, 2018). Building on these foundations, Tan *et al.* (2009) introduced a three-level analytical framework for hermeneutic phenomenological research in palliative care. Their model provided a rigorous structure for interpreting qualitative data, aligning closely with Ricoeur's theory of interpretation. This framework has since become a cornerstone in qualitative health research.

To understand the concept of this method, historically, the application of Ricoeur's philosophy in empirical research began in the field of nursing. Birthe D. Pedersen (1999) was among the first to operationalize Ricoeur's hermeneutics in a research context, using narrative analysis to interpret nurses' lived experiences. This pioneering work laid the groundwork for a structured interpretive model that would later be expanded by Lindseth and Norberg (2004), who applied it to patient interviews, emphasizing the centrality of lived experience and narrative identity in understanding human suffering and care.

Furthermore, the refinement of using Ricoeur's method as a research approach came from Simony *et al.* (2018), who developed a Ricoeur-inspired method that integrates participant observation and interviews into a unified textual corpus. This approach deepens interpretive insight by treating all forms of qualitative data as narrative expressions of lived experience, thus enhancing the ethical and existential dimensions of research.

Ricoeur's philosophical trajectory, from eidetic phenomenology to a historical-hermeneutical phenomenology, is marked by his integration of narrative theory (Ricoeur, 1984-1988), ethics, and memory. In his book 'Hermeneutics' (trans. by Pellauer, 2013, writings and lectures, vol. 2), Ricoeur said that the "theory of narrative brings a comparable phenomenon to light" (p. 15-16). He further added that "the plot of a narrative is also a synthesis of the heterogeneous in that by bringing together the facts recounted into one told story it draws a unified narrative from the dust cloud of events, where is doing this the plot combines intentions, causes, and accidents, and in the end pulls together a temporal configuration from a succession of discrete events" (Pellauer, p. 15-16). These elements form the backbone of a critical hermeneutic methodology that is now widely used across disciplines such as education, theology, psychology, and health sciences (Cacciatore, 2016).

In this study, Ricoeur's hermeneutics was employed not merely as a method of data analysis but as a philosophical lens through which the narrative identities of participants are interpreted, allowing for a deeper understanding of their lived realities and ethical self-understanding.

Ricoeur's Philosophy: Narrative Identity and Solitude

Theoretical Framework: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Ethics of Solitude

This study is grounded in the philosophical insights of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology, particularly his concept of narrative identity, which provides a compelling framework for interpreting the lived experiences of abandoned elderly women. Ricoeur's work, especially in *Oneself as Another* (1992), emphasizes that human identity is not a fixed essence but a dynamic and evolving configuration. He asserts that "the self is not given but constituted in time through narrative" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 114), suggesting that individuals come to understand themselves by emplotting life events into coherent stories. This narrative configuration allows for the integration of heterogeneous elements, memory, suffering, hope, and agency, into a meaningful whole (Pellauer, p. 22).

Ricoeur's philosophy also introduces a critical distinction between impersonal description and narrative configuration. He writes, "it is to narrative configuration understood in this sense that one must compare the sort of connectedness claimed by an impersonal description" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 142). This insight underscores the importance of interpreting human experience not through detached observation but through engaged and empathetic understanding. In this study, narrative is not merely a methodological tool. It is used as a philosophical act that reveals the interconnectivity of lives and the ethical dimensions of abandonment.

To deepen this interpretive process, the study drew on Ricoeur's concept of solitude, which is rooted in his broader hermeneutic and phenomenological project. Building upon the traditions of Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, Ricoeur explores how the self is constituted through interpretation, ethical relation, and responsiveness to the other. Solitude, as he defines it, is the moral response to the vulnerability of another person. It is not pity or obligation, but a recognition of shared humanity, grounded in empathy and reciprocity (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 203).

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur elaborates that solitude "denotes the primordial relation of the self to the self's other on the ethical level" (p. 203). This ethical selfhood emerges when the individual recognizes the other not as an object to be managed, but as a subject worthy of care and respect. In the context of this study, solitude becomes both a philosophical ideal and a lived reality, manifested in the ways elderly women express care, seek connection, and respond to the

absence of familial support. Their narratives are not only expressions of suffering but also testimonies of resilience and relational longing.

The study operationalized on how solicitude is enacted and disrupted in the experience of abandonment, using art, storytelling, and relational bonds as mediums for self-reconstruction. Through painting and *kuwentuhan* (group sharing), the participants articulate their identities and reclaim their voices. These practices allow for the interpretation of uttered meaning through text, facilitating a deeper understanding of how narrative contributes to healing and ethical recognition.

The challenges brought about by neglect and abandonment draw significant reflection from Ricoeur's philosophical framework. Solicitude, in this context, does not end with recognition. It extends into the shaping of empathy, the affirmation of dignity, and the call for justice. It invites us to consider how care is enacted not only in interpersonal relationships but also in institutional structures, such as healthcare and social support systems. The accessibility of these services becomes a moral issue, tied to the ethical imperative of solicitude.

Ultimately, the highlight of Ricoeur's solicitude in this study is its correlation with caring for others (as '*hindi ibang tao*'), its ethical demand for accessible healthcare, and its reinforcement of shared identity through *kapwa*. Together, these concepts form a moral compass that guides our understanding of the good life, not as individual achievement, but as interconnected living, where dignity is affirmed, suffering is acknowledged, and care is extended across boundaries of age, status, and circumstance.

Filipino Indigenous Psychology: Kapwa and Pakikipagkapwa as Ethical Grounding

Complementing Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of solicitude is the indigenous Filipino concept of *kapwa*, a foundational value in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology). Coined and developed by Virgilio G. Enriquez and further elaborated by scholars such as Rogelia Pe-Pua and Sylvia de Guia, *kapwa* translates to "shared self" or "fellow human being." It is not merely a linguistic term but a profound ethical and relational worldview that emphasizes interconnectedness, empathy, and mutual respect.

Kapwa affirms that the self is never isolated. It is always constituted in relation to others. This relational identity is expressed through culturally embedded practices such as *pakikipagkapwa* (engaging with others), *pakikiramay* (sympathy), *pakikiisa* (solidarity), *bayanihan* (communal unity), and some other values. From the root word *kapwa*, *pakikipagkapwa* refers to the active engagement with others in a way that acknowledges and respects their shared

humanity. It is a moral act, an affirmation of the other as “*hindi ibang tao*” (not different from oneself). This ethic of care is central to Filipino social life, shaping how individuals relate, support, and respond to one another, especially in times of vulnerability.

These values may help us reflect a moral orientation toward others, promoting fairness, kindness, and non-exploitative interactions. As Enriquez (1994) notes, the Filipino language itself “provides a conceptual distinction in several levels and modes of social interactions” (p. 41), revealing the depth of relational consciousness in Filipino thought.

In her work *Kapwa: The Self in the Other*, de Guia (2005) expands on Enriquez's insights by quoting Ileto, who describes *kapwa* as part of a constellation of Filipino core values attributed to mystic-turned-revolutionary figures. These include *kagandahang-loob* (inner goodness) and *pakikiramdam* (shared inner perception), which together form a culturally grounded ethic of compassion and sensitivity (de Guia, 2005, p. 19). These traits are not abstract ideals but lived expressions of Filipino relationality, deeply rooted in everyday social interactions and ancestral worldviews.

In this sense, *kapwa* resonates strongly with Ricoeur's concept of solicitude, which he defines as the ethical response to the suffering of the other, grounded in empathy and mutual recognition (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 203). Both frameworks reject the notion of the self as autonomous and instead affirm that identity and morality are formed through relational bonds. Ricoeur's solicitude, emerging from his hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition, emphasizes that the self becomes ethical when it recognizes the other not as an object, but as a subject worthy of care. *Kapwa*, similarly, insists that the self is always in relation to the other and that care is a communal responsibility.

The convergence of *kapwa* and solicitude provides a culturally resonant and philosophically rigorous lens for understanding the lived experience of abandoned elderly women. Their condition is not simply one of physical isolation. It is a rupture in relational identity and communal belonging. Abandonment, in this context, is a moral wound that disrupts the shared self. Reclaiming *kapwa* in elder care offers a pathway to restore dignity, rebuild social inclusion, and affirm the ethical imperative of care.

As de Guia (1992) reflects on Enriquez's theory, the worldview of ancestral Filipinos was shaped by a strong belief in *loob* (inner being), and the traits of compassion and empathy (p. 19). These values provided a sense of belonging and moral grounding, especially for those who were neglected or marginalized. In the context of this study, revisiting and reinterpreting these core Filipino values, particularly *kapwa*, becomes a vital task. It challenges us to

reimagine elder care not merely as a service, but as a moral commitment, rooted in shared humanity and cultural wisdom.

Thus, integrating *kapwa* into the philosophical framework of Ricoeur's solicitude enriches our understanding of ethical care. It bridges Western hermeneutics with indigenous Filipino psychology, offering a holistic approach to restoring identity, dignity, and relational wholeness among the abandoned elderly. This synthesis affirms that the good life is not lived in isolation, but in interconnected lives, where care is both a cultural practice and a philosophical principle.

Sustainable Development Goals: Ethical Imperatives for the Abandoned Elderly

The integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into this study affirmed the global relevance of addressing the lived experiences of abandoned elderly women, particularly through the lens of ethical care, relational inclusion, and human dignity. Specifically, SDG 3 and SDG 10 serve as guiding frameworks that align with the philosophical and cultural insights of Paul Ricoeur's solicitude and the Filipino concept of *kapwa*, both of which emphasize the moral responsibility to care for the vulnerable and affirm their place within the community.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to “reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being” by 2030 (Global Goals, n.d.). This goal is particularly significant for the *old-old elderly*, those aged 80 and above, who are often at heightened risk of physical decline and psychological distress. In the context of abandonment, promoting mental health and well-being is not merely a clinical concern but a moral imperative, echoing Ricoeur's notion of solicitude as the ethical response to suffering.

Ricoeur (1992) emphasizes that care must be grounded in empathy and mutual recognition, where the self acknowledges the other as a subject worthy of dignity and concern. In this light, SDG 3.8's call for universal health coverage becomes a concrete expression of solicitude, ensuring that elderly individuals, regardless of their social status, have access to essential services that affirm their humanity. Health care, when viewed through Ricoeur's lens, is not just a system but a structure of ethical responsibility, where institutions respond to the vulnerability of those who have been marginalized.

Sustainable Development Goal 10 seeks to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” (Global Goals, n.d.). This goal resonates deeply with the Filipino concept of *kapwa*, which affirms that

no one is truly “*ibang tao*” (an outsider), but rather “*hindi ibang tao*” (not different from oneself). *Kapwa* calls for communal responsibility, where inclusion is not a policy, but a cultural ethic rooted in shared identity and mutual care.

In the case of abandoned elderly women, SDG 10 challenges the structural and relational exclusions that have rendered them invisible. It affirms the global commitment to inclusive action, which, when interpreted through *kapwa*, becomes a call to restore interpersonal and communal bonds. Inclusion, therefore, is not only about access to resources but about reintegrating the elderly into the moral fabric of society, where their stories, wisdom, and presence are valued.

The convergence of SDG 3 and SDG 10 with Ricoeur's solicitude and *kapwa* offers a humanistic vision of sustainability, one that prioritizes ethical care, relational justice, and cultural resonance. Sustainable development, in this context, is not limited to economic growth or institutional reform. It is about reimagining the good life for those who have been abandoned, ensuring that their physical, emotional, and existential needs are met with compassion and respect.

This vision affirms that sustainability must include the elderly poor, the institutionalized, and the socially neglected. It calls for a transformation of systems and attitudes, guided by the principles of narrative recognition, empathetic care, and shared humanity. In doing so, it aligns global goals with local values, bridging the philosophical depth of Ricoeur with the cultural wisdom of *kapwa* to advocate for a future where no one is left behind.

Humanistic Theories and the Lived Experience of Abandoned Elderly Women: Intersections with Ricoeur's Solicitude and Kapwa

To grasp the complexity of abandonment among elderly women, particularly those institutionalized in care centers, it is essential to draw from a constellation of humanistic theories that illuminate the psychological, existential, and ethical dimensions of aging. Two foundational frameworks, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, offer valuable insights into the inner life and developmental challenges of older adults. When placed in dialogue with Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of solicitude and the Filipino concept of *kapwa*, these theories converge to form a holistic understanding of identity, care, and relational belonging in later life.

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory: Ego Integrity and the Crisis of Abandonment

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development outlines eight stages of personality formation, each marked by a central conflict that must be resolved for healthy psychological growth. In late adulthood, typically beginning at age 65, the

individual faces the existential task of reconciling life's experiences in the stage of ego integrity versus despair (Crain, 2000, p. 285). This stage involves a reflective process in which the elderly assess the meaning of their life, the choices they made, and the legacy they leave behind.

This theory articulates that ego integrity is achieved when one accepts one's life as a coherent whole, embracing both triumphs and regrets with a sense of peace. As Erikson described, it is "the acceptance of one's only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions" (as cited in Crain, 2000, p. 286). Bee and Boyd (2002) further explain that this acceptance requires coming to terms with one's identity, decisions, and missed opportunities (p. 487). Failure to achieve ego integrity, however, results in despair, marked by feelings of hopelessness and the fear that it is too late to make meaningful changes (Bee & Boyd, 2002, p. 487).

For abandoned elderly women, this psychosocial crisis is intensified by social isolation, loss of familial bonds, and institutionalization. The absence of relational affirmation and the erosion of traditional caregiving structures can hinder the process of ego integration. As Craig (2000) notes, the trajectory of development is shaped not only by biological maturation but also by social expectations and cultural context (p. 290). In Filipino society, where familial care is deeply embedded in cultural norms, abandonment disrupts the expected narrative of aging, leading to emotional dissonance and existential distress.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Self-Actualization and the Barriers to Fulfillment

Maslow's hierarchy of needs presents a layered model of human motivation, beginning with physiological survival and culminating in self-actualization, the full realization of one's potential. Though the term was first introduced by Kurt Goldstein, it was Maslow who popularized it in his seminal work. He defined self-actualization as the drive to become "what a man can be, he must be" (as cited in Selva, 2017). This concept involves the development of one's creative, intellectual, and emotional capacities, driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external rewards.

Perera (2024) describes self-actualization as the complete realization of one's abilities and appreciation for life, a state of fulfillment that reflects inner harmony and purpose. However, Maslow emphasized that higher-level needs, such as esteem and self-actualization, can only be pursued when lower-level needs (e.g., safety, belonging) are met.

For abandoned elderly women, the path to self-actualization is often obstructed. The lack of stable housing, emotional support, and social recognition undermines their ability to cultivate meaning and personal growth. Institutional care may provide basic physiological needs, but it rarely addresses the deeper psychological and existential dimensions of aging. Without relational affirmation and opportunities for creative expression, the elderly may struggle to experience the fullness of life that Maslow envisioned.

Ricoeur's Solitude and Kapwa: Ethical Resonance and Cultural Grounding

While Erikson and Maslow offer developmental and motivational frameworks, Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of solitude and the Filipino concept of *kapwa* provide the ethical and relational grounding necessary to interpret the lived experience of abandonment.

Ricoeur's solitude is the ethical response to the vulnerability of the other. It arises from the recognition that the self is constituted in relation to others, and that care is not merely a duty but a moral affirmation of shared humanity (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 203). In the context of elderly abandonment, solitude calls for a re-engagement with the elderly as subjects of dignity, not objects of care. It demands that we listen to their stories, honor their suffering, and respond with empathy and justice.

The Filipino concept of *kapwa*, meaning "shared self," complements Ricoeur's solitude by embedding care within a cultural ethic of relationality. *Kapwa* affirms that the self is never isolated but always in connection with others. It rejects the notion of the other as "*ibang tao*" (outsider) and embraces them as "*hindi ibang tao*" (not different from oneself) (Maninang, 2025; Solitario, 2025). In Filipino culture, *kapwa* is enacted through *pakikipagkapwa*, a practice of mutual respect, empathy, and communal responsibility.

Together, solitude and *kapwa* offer a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of lives. They challenge the fragmentation of identity caused by abandonment and provide a pathway for reconstructing narrative identity through relational care. Ricoeur's hermeneutics allows us to interpret the stories of elderly women with depth and ethical sensitivity, while *kapwa* situates those stories within a communal and cultural context.

Integrative Insights: Humanistic Theories in Dialogue

When placed in dialogue, these humanistic theories offer a multi-dimensional understanding of the lived experience of abandoned elderly women. Erikson's psychosocial theory illuminates the existential crisis of aging, particularly the inner

struggle for ego integrity in the face of loss and reflection. Maslow's hierarchy of needs underscores the motivational barriers to fulfillment, emphasizing the importance of holistic care that addresses both physiological and psychological well-being. Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy, on the other hand, deepens this perspective by framing suffering as an ethical call, where narrative and solicitude become pathways to restoring dignity and identity. Finally, the Filipino concept of *kapwa* grounds these insights in a culturally resonant ethic, affirming relational identity and moral responsibility through shared humanity and compassionate care.

Thus, this integrative framework does not merely analyze the elderly woman's condition. It restores her voice, reclaims her dignity, and reimagines care as a shared moral endeavor. It affirms that aging is not a descent into despair, but a potential ascent into wisdom, meaning, and relational wholeness, if met with empathy, recognition, and cultural resonance.

Operational Framework

The concepts of Ricoeur's solicitude and *kapwa* practically guided the operational processes of the study. This was speculated to properly address the research goal and objectives. Moreover, art - through painting, was used to mediate or facilitate the process of reflection from the lived experience of the elderly on abandonment. See Figure 1 below for the presentation of the operational framework of the study.

Figure 1.

Operational Framework



In executing the process of the study, two indicators of identifying the themes and meaning from the interpretation of narratives was based on the principles of Ricoeur's philosophy (solicitude) and the concept of *kapwa*. The

principles highlighted the correlation and interconnectivity of persons or lives in the philosophy of solicitude. This goes beyond the concept of duty. In solicitude, there is an acknowledgement of the inherent dignity and uniqueness of individuals. Both *pakikipagkapwa-tao* and solicitude emphasizes the importance of shared human experiences and emotions in this sense. According to Rogelia Pe-Pua and Elizabeth I. Marcelino, *pakikipagkapwa* refers to the social manifestations of the core Filipino value of *kapwa* (Meneses, 2019; Clemente, 2008). Through art, people can express their feelings and stories, which resonate with others, creating a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. Art facilitates communication and interaction, which are central to *pakikipagkapwa-tao*. Hence, when people engage in artistic activities together, they form bonds, share perspectives, and deepen their relationships. Art allows individuals to explore and convey their inner worlds, helping others to see things from different viewpoints (Aguas, 2016). This fosters empathy and compassion, some key components of *pakikipagkapwa-tao*. Participating in community art projects and exhibitions promotes collective creativity and teamwork too, aligning with the values of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* by bringing people together for a common purpose. Art serves as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, which is often deeply rooted in the concept of *pakikipagkapwa-tao*.

Ricoeur's methodological principles of distanciation and appropriation guide the interpretive process. Distanciation allows the narrative to stand apart from its author, enabling analysis beyond its original context. Appropriation, conversely, involves the reader's internalization of meaning through reflective engagement. These principles ensure that the researcher remains ethically responsive to the voices of the participants, uncovering layers of meaning while honoring their lived realities.

Methodology

The approach of the study is qualitative-interpretive or hermeneutical. Employing qualitative research provides a comprehensive perspective to researchers (Rubin & Babbie, 2017, p. 435). "Qualitative studies occur in natural settings. This includes places where people interact (e.g. in the classroom, at the board meeting, in the park, etc.) and to the study of inanimate objects (e.g. how textbooks are written, how buildings are designed, how classrooms are organized, etc.)" (Bueno, 2016, p. 18). Moreover, Bueno (2016) added that "qualitative studies are non-manipulative, that is they tend to study situations and objects intact - - the researcher observes, interviews, records, describes, interprets, and appraises settings as they are" (p. 18). In this sense, this study was conducted using the qualitative-interpretative design from the hermeneutical proposal of Paul Ricoeur. The method of 'casual' interviewing and '*kuwentuhan*' (group sharing) was used to gather and deepen the narratives of the participants of the study. "An interview is a method of collecting qualitative information from individuals through a series

of questions posed to individuals either face-to-face, by phone, or through another medium, such as email” (Brancati, 2018, p. 137).

Traditionally, interviewing is viewed as a straightforward way of collecting data (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012, p. 27). However, in recent years, this method of gathering information has been used without reservations. As Gubrium and Holstein stated, interviewing was no longer viewed unilaterally as the best way to ‘excavate’ information (p. 27). Moreover, they added that “it is being reevaluated in terms of its structure, interactional dynamics, situational responsiveness, and discursive dimensions” (p. 27).

Nonetheless, in this study, the interviewing method was structured in a way to facilitate a more interactive group discussion (*kuwentuhan*) among the elderly or *lolas* in the center. Interviewing was used to draw out support statements coming from the initial activities and to elaborate further on what had been uttered in the group activities of the *lolas* in the “*kuwentuha*” (group sharing) and in the art activity (painting as a means to listen to their narratives).

Ricoeur (2013) explains that “the theory of narratives brings a comparable phenomenon to light: The plot of a narrative is also a synthesis of the heterogeneous in that by bringing together the facts recounted into one told story it draws a unified narrative from the dust cloud of events, where in doing this the plot combines intentions, causes, and accidents, and in the end pulls together a temporal configuration from a succession of discrete events” (pp. 15-16). This helps us unite a common narrative from the diverse collected data.

Thirteen elderly women participated in the study. However, only seven narratives were substantial enough to be analysed using Ricoeur’s concept of solicitude (literal meaning, symbolic representation, and narrative structure) and the concept of *Kapwa* as both expressions of compassionate care and moral responsibility. The task for hermeneutics in this study was to ‘discover meanings’ and reconstruct them from the perspective of the readers.

In conducting the hermeneutical analysis using Ricoeur’s interpretive framework, we employed a tripartite categorization of narrative meaning: literal meaning, symbolic representation, and narrative structure. This approach was grounded in Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation, which emphasizes the movement from naive understanding to deeper comprehension through the hermeneutic circle. The literal meaning was examined by analyzing how participants verbalized and clarified their statements, reflecting the prefiguration stage of mimesis, where lived experience is already shaped by cultural and linguistic structures (Lee, 2025). These utterances served as the foundational layer of interpretation, allowing us to access the referential content of the narratives.

We then explored symbolic representation, which involved interpreting the general meanings conveyed by symbols within the narratives. This aligned with Ricoeur's hermeneutics of faith, which seeks to restore meaning rather than merely decode it (APA PsycNet, 2004). Symbols were not treated as static signs but as dynamic carriers of existential and cultural significance, consistent with Ricoeur's view that symbols "give rise to thought," as Ricoeur would state it. For instance, recurring motifs such as "home" or "firefly" were interpreted considering their broader cultural and psychological resonances (Artsrn, 2025).

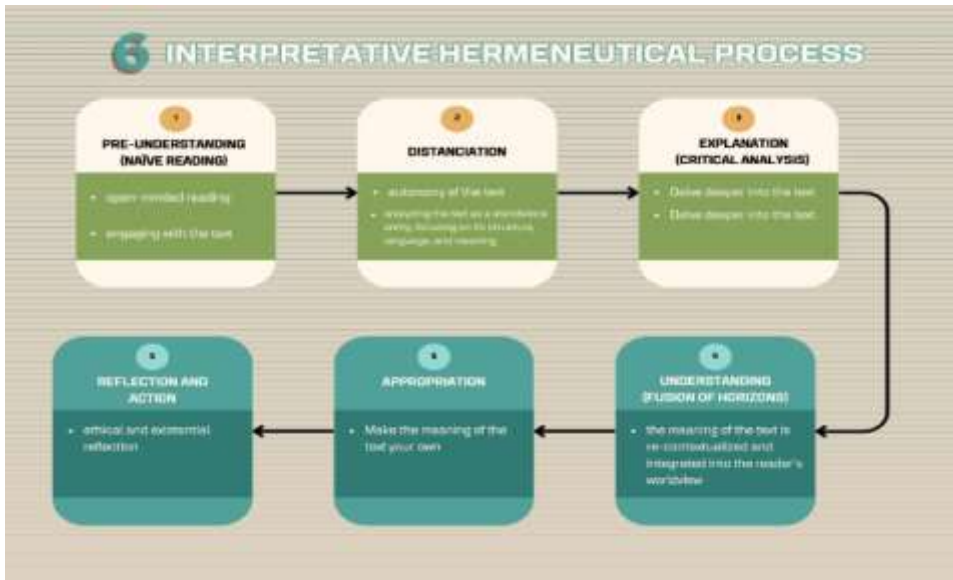
Finally, we analyzed the narrative structure by examining how events were emplotted and sequenced, corresponding to mimesis-2 and mimesis-3, where the configuration of narrative and its refiguration by the interpreter occur (Remodo, 2015). This stage revealed how participants constructed identity through storytelling, negotiating between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*) in the Ricoeurian method or approach. The cultural usage of narrative forms, such as redemption arcs or resilience themes, provided insight into how individuals situated their experiences within socially recognizable frameworks (Lee, 2025).

With the identification of meanings, the key findings were assisted by the hermeneutical principle of *distanciation* and *appropriation*, finding the most probable meaning of the narratives and 'suspending' at first the meaning from the worldview of the reader. *Distanciation* in this sense was the separation of the text from the author, allowing the narratives (text) to be independent beyond its original context. *Appropriation*, on the other hand, was the association of meaning by the researchers after the process of internalization and integration.

The application of the Ricoeurian hermeneutics was used to analyze deeply how storytelling (of the narratives) contributes to identity reconstruction (see Figure 2 for the process of analyzing the narratives). Art or painting was used as a means or an activity to gather the elderly and facilitate group sharing, and to record the narratives.

Figure 2.

Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Process as used in the study



Ricoeur's hermeneutical process was observed in executing the method: First, the Pre-Understanding (Naïve Reading). It begins with an initial, open-minded reading of the transcribed narratives. This involves engaging with the text as it presents itself, without preconceived judgments, allowing its surface meaning to emerge. Second is the concept of *Distanciation*. This involves the recognition of the autonomy of the text. The idea of Ricoeur here is being emphasized, "that a text, once written, becomes independent of its author and original context". This step involves analyzing the text as a standalone entity, focusing on its structure, language, and meaning. Third is the 'Explanation' or the Critical Analysis. It delves deeper into the text by examining its historical, cultural, and linguistic context. This step involves uncovering the layers of meaning within the text, including its symbols, metaphors, and narrative structure. Fourth is the understanding or the 'Fusion of Horizons.'

Move beyond critical analysis to interpret the text in relation to the reader's own context and experiences. This step involves a "fusion of horizons," where the meaning of the text is re-contextualized and integrated into the reader's worldview. This is somehow quite different from the other hermeneutical approaches, like that of Husserl or Heidegger.

The last step is the '*Appropriation*.' Here, the 'meaning' or meanings that had been drawn out of the text are made as our 'own' (readers). Ricoeur emphasizes that interpretation is not complete until the reader internalizes the

insights gained from the text and applies them to their own life or understanding. An extension of the hermeneutical process of Ricoeur is the reflection and action. Finally, Ricoeur's hermeneutics often leads to ethical and existential reflection. Hence, this is now the goal and objective of the study to derive insights gained from interpretation that should inspire action or deeper engagement with the community or the world.

Here, the participants are named and presented numerically to conceal and protect their identity and privacy (*see* Table 1). Moreover, for the benefit of the study, they are numerically identified to properly indicate statements personally uttered, verbalized, or articulated by the research respondents.

Table 1.

Research participants and respondents

Name	Birthdate	Age	Date of Rescue/Admission
Respondent #1 (R1)	Dec 25, 1953	69	Nov 20, 2020
Respondent #2 (R2)	May 5, 1963	60	Sep 25, 2018
Respondent #3 (R3)	Dec 5, 1939	84	June 28, 2012
Respondent #4 (R4)	Jun 19, 1944	79	Apr 28, 2019
Respondent #5 (R5)	Jul 19, 1949	74	Mar 21, 2012
Respondent #6 (R6)	Mar 21, 1934	89	Sep 7 2018
Respondent #7 (R7)	Dec 18, 1942	80	June 28, 2013
Respondent #8 (R8)	Dec 25. 1941	81	Jul 21, 2015

From the perspective of Ricoeur, the social, cultural, and some other factors affects or influences the meaning we derive from narratives. The background here was presented to assist also the factors that may arise from the interpretation of the transcribed narratives. This study was submitted and approved by the Ethics Board Committee of the San Beda University. All the necessary ethical consideration was applied and practice before, during and after the study was conducted.

Result and Discussion

The key statements from the narratives are posted in Table 2. Here, the statements from the gathered narratives are selected that portray the structure of the interplay between personal and communal identity reconstruction as presented by their symbol (painting). Selected statements (vernacular) were presented with their rough translation according to their significant meaning to the theme.

Table 2.

Narratives from the symbolic representation of the lived experience

Name	Symbols	Key Meanings in the Narratives
Respondent #1 (R1)		<p><i>She was able to present and was eager to share her masterpiece. However, our respondent #1 was inaudible. We kept on listening to her for some time, considering her enthusiasm to mingle and relate with others, too. It takes some time for her to murmur some words. She can pronounce single words with clarity, but when speaking, her tendency is to mumble her words, and it becomes incomprehensible.</i></p>
Respondent #2 (R2)		<p><i>“Habang nabubuhay ka sa daigdig na ito., ang naidrawing ko po ay sememteryo. Dalawa ang kamatayan. Ang buhay pag dumating... sa buhay natin kahit anong mga paghihirap at mga suliranin... ay hanggang doon na lang wala ka na talagang magagawa kaya habang nabubuhay ka iano mo na lang ang sarili mo, magpakasaya ka, ‘wag ka lang makalimot palagi sa Panginoon...”</i></p> <p>When you are still alive here in this world... My painting is a cemetery (coffin). There are two – signifying two kinds of death. In our lives, there are a lot of sufferings and problems. If it is really the case, you cannot do anything anymore about it. Now, if you are still alive, just inculcate in yourself to be happy and do not forget about God. That’s it, I think. I drew two coffins because when my siblings and mother were still alive, you can never truly say that it is all happiness. The time will come when you part ways. That’s all.</p> <p>Then, one thing that helped me when I was already here is the way I relate with other people... same thing with what I needed in my past life.</p>

Table 2.
Continued.



Name	Symbols	Key Meanings in the Narratives
Respondent #3 (R3)		<p><i>“Nagsasama- sama kami dito sa kabutihan, mapagkumbaba, huwag kang mapagmalaki, maging mabait ka sa mga kasamahan mo parang mga kapatid mo sila, Ang mga tumutulong sa amin madre ay napakabait, kaya nagpapasalamat ako at dito ako dinala dahil ito ang pinaglalagyan ko...”</i></p> <p>With my parents, I offer them in my prayers because of struggle and sacrifices for us. I saw God here, in my present place. I draw a woman reaching for a cross in the mountain. I am happy here to be with the nuns. They are truly helpful, and all things here come from them and to the visitors. I am happy to be here because God brought me here. All of us will really call on God. Right now, I do feel the pain in my past when I recall the hurts in my previous experiences. God brought me here because I have nowhere else to go.</p> <p>We are all good here together. We humble ourselves... you should not be boastful, be good with your companions. Treat them like your siblings. The sisters are helping us to be good. That is why I am thankful to them that they brought me here right now.</p>
Respondent #4 (R4)		<p><i>“Ginawa ko po ito para sa mga nangangailangan, ito po ang sabi sa akin ng Panginoon, dahil kawawa po ang mga nangangailangan tulad po ng tinutuluyan namin ngayon...”</i></p> <p>I drew a house. I drew a house because God said whoever remembers (gives) a house to the poor ones is a big help. I drew this house for those in need. This is what God instructed me because those in need are pitiful like us who are here right now.</p>

Table 2.*Continued.*




Name	Symbols	Key Meanings in the Narratives
Respondent #5 (R5)		<p><i>“Oo, ok lang naman, natulungan kami, scare kami pero pag may painting masaya kami. Ito ay isang firefly— nag enjoy ako sa dagat at yon ay hapon na at nakita ko sya na nahulog at yong pakpak nya ay kinain ng isda at nasaktan sya. Di na sya nakalipad at nanatili na lang sa dagat...”</i></p> <p>Hi, good afternoon to all of you. I am thankful to all of you. I am thankful for the paintings... and this is what I painted.</p> <p>Yes, I am just okay. We are being helped. We are scared but when we have paintings, we are happy. This is a firefly... I do enjoy the ocean... and it is already twilight, and I saw the firefly falling... and its wings are being bitten by the fish... it hurts. It could not fly anymore, that is why it stays in the ocean.</p> <p>It is like our life... that is my life before. Now, I continue to become a good person.</p>
Respondent #6 (R6)		<p><i>“Pag namatay ako yon uli si ano ang kasama. Iwanan natin kung kukunin tayo ni Lord. nagdadasal ako na bigyan ako ng lakas ng katawan, nakahanda tayo...”</i></p> <p><i>“Salamat Lord ha, wag muna akong kukunin kasi uuwi pa ako wala pa akong pera pamasaha. Kailangan akong mamatay sa aming lugar, sa Mindanao...”</i></p> <p>My painting is a flower that is red, orange. I like it. When I die, I want it to be my companion. Let us leave it behind when God gets us. I am praying for bodily strength but let us be ready. Of course, let us be prepared, pray, be good and it will be favourable so that God will not punish me. I will tell them to be good here because I am already dying.</p>

Table 2.
Continued.

Name	Symbols	Key Meanings in the Narratives
		<p>Yes, let us pray for bodily strength but let us be ready. They should be good like how I treat them. Love your neighbour. And let us not forget to advise them, please be good, like me be good so that God will accept us when we are gone. Right?</p> <p>It is important for them to be good, not to harm their ‘<i>kapwa</i>’.</p> <p>I am thankful to God that I am still alive until now. Thank you, God. Please do not get me yet because I will still go home but I do not have my fare yet. I need to die in my place in Mindanao. Life is hard here. Please help me. I really feel sad that I do not see them anymore. I had been here for quite too long. I hope you may help me. I am just sad because I have been here for too long. I will still be back here. I just want to see them.</p>
Respondent #7 (R7)		<p>“Ipakita natin ang pakikipagkapwa natin ay makikisama tayo sa kahirapan, kung anu ang kailangan ng kapwa mo ay tulungan mo, , ang maitutulong ko ay games, tinatanong syempre , kinakausap ko sila...”</p> <p>We can show our relatedness with each other when we are together in pain (struggle). Help others with what they need. Here, what I can help is through games, then I also asked them. I talk to them. What I drew is a flower. Because in my province, in my home, I have not done anything other than to plant flowers.</p> <p>Flowers are pleasing in your eyes and mind. And it helps in our health and the environment. Here, we do not have areas to plant, so I just drew my flowers. When I was painting my flowers, my mind was also flowering with happiness and it makes you feel better, so it</p>

helps too. I want to do this again because it makes me feel better.

Name	Symbols	Key Meanings in the Narratives
Respondent #8 (R8)		<p><i>"Puno ang aking painting. Nasisiyahan tayo at meron tayong tanim. Masaya po ang aking nakaraan. Kumain ang masaya sa nakaraan..."</i></p> <p>Tree is my painting. We are happy that we are having plants. I am happy with my past. I ate happily in the past. Let us be together where we can be happy.</p>

Table 2.

Continued.

Objective #1: Exploring the interplay between personal and communal identity reconstruction.

Two important questions were asked here about the meaning or representations of their painting. First was on the narratives of their selfhood: *"Looking back on your life, how would you describe your personal journey or story?"* (*"Sa paglingon sa iyong buhay, paano mo ilalarawan ang iyong personal na paglalakbay o kwento?"*). Next, to facilitate the exploration of the first objective of the study, the respondents were also asked about the social connections and *kapwa*: *"How important is your connection with others, such as friends, caregivers, or community members, for your well-being?"* (*"Sa iyong pananaw, gaano kahalaga ang ugnayan mo sa ibang tao, tulad ng mga kaibigan, tagapag-alaga, o komunidad, para sa iyong kabuuang kalagayan?"*)

Based on the narrative structure, symbolic representation, and literal analysis, the interpretation is presented in the table below. Here are the key elements of the shared narratives in objective number one (*see* Table 3 below):

Table 3.

Critical Analysis of the Narratives

<i>Respondent #</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Symbolic representation</i>	<i>Narrative structure</i>
1	-----	-----	-----
2	The respondent describes drawing two coffins to symbolize different kinds of death. She reflects on life’s inevitable suffering, emphasizing the importance of embracing happiness while alive. She recounts how relationships in the present echo the needs and connections they experienced in the past.	Two coffins may symbolize not only physical death but also metaphorical death—loss of relationships, identity, or stages of life. This duality reflects the complexity of human loss. The cemetery represents a place of reflection, closure, and the enduring presence of memories and loved ones. Relating with others highlights the healing power of community and human connection, both in the past and the present. Faith and Happiness suggests that resilience and joy in life are spiritual practices that counterbalance suffering.	Drawing the coffins to represent both death and life’s struggles. Reflection on the past is an acknowledgment of pain and loss, especially the passing of loved ones. Moreover, she focuses on the present too which emphasize happiness, faith, and relationships as sources of strength and resilience.

Table 3.*Continued.*

<i>Respondent #</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Symbolic representation</i>	<i>Narrative structure</i>
3	The respondent reflects on her own relationships—with family, faith, and others around them. She describes finding solace in their current situation with the nuns, expressing gratitude to both God and their companions.	The woman reaching for a Cross symbolizes perseverance, faith, and a striving toward spiritual fulfillment despite challenges. The mountain may represent the difficulties or struggles faced in this journey. Her belief in God reflects the universal human need for divine support, particularly during times of hardship.	There is an acknowledgement of the past, an expression of gratitude for parents' sacrifices, and a reflection on past pain. She also embraces the present by finding peace and joy in the current setting with the nuns. She is hopeful for the future, a commitment to spiritual and moral growth through faith, humility, and kindness.
4	The respondent draws a house and links it to God's instruction to help the poor. The house becomes a symbol of shelter, hope, and security for those in need. The narrative acknowledges the shared suffering of marginalized individuals, including the respondent.	The house represents stability, safety, and care. Drawing the house is an act of visualizing and expressing hope for others. Highlights the interconnectedness of human experiences as the speaker draws from their own struggles to empathize with others.	The structure progresses from personal action (drawing a house) to spiritual reflection (following God's command) and concludes with a broader ethical perspective (helping others in need).

Table 3.

Continued

<i>Respondent #</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Symbolic representation</i>	<i>Narrative structure</i>
5	<p>Finding happiness through painting, even in the midst of fear.</p> <p>A symbolic story of a firefly whose wings are damaged by fish and is left to stay in the ocean.</p> <p>A reflection on past struggles and a commitment to moral growth and renewal.</p>	<p>A firefly represents light, delicacy, and fleeting beauty. Its fall and injury symbolize the fragility of life and the pain of setbacks.</p> <p>The ocean often symbolizes vastness, mystery, and change. Here, it may represent the challenges or depths of life where the firefly is now bound.</p> <p>Twilight is a transitional time, symbolizing endings and beginnings, sadness and hope.</p>	<p>In the beginning, she describes vulnerability, and the solace found in painting.</p> <p>Then, there was a shift to the metaphor of the firefly, illustrating pain and being held back by life’s struggles.</p> <p>She concludes with transformation, showing gratitude for progress and a commitment to moral renewal.</p>
6	<p>A deep connection to a flower painting as a source of comfort and a symbol of life and beauty.</p> <p>A sense of preparation for death, accompanied by prayers for strength and moral goodness.</p> <p>A longing to return home (Mindanao) and reconnect with loved ones, reflecting feelings of displacement and sadness.</p>	<p>The vibrant colors may symbolize vitality, warmth, and emotional connection. The flower as a “companion” in death could represent the enduring beauty of life even in the face of mortality.</p> <p>This reflects a moral framework centered on <i>kapwa</i> (the Filipino value of interconnectedness with others) and an ethical duty to guide others towards goodness.</p> <p>Returning home symbolizes a desire for</p>	<p>From the start, there is a personal attachment to beauty and creativity (painting a flower), which sets a reflective tone.</p> <p>Afterwards, themes of preparation for death and moral teachings emerge, blending personal faith with communal responsibility.</p> <p>Towards the end, a sense of longing and unresolved sadness about displacement surfaces, leaving the</p>

	belonging and closure in one's final moments, highlighting the importance of place and cultural roots.	narrative open-ended yet emotionally charged.
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Table 3.*Continued.*

<i>Respondent #</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Symbolic representation</i>	<i>Narrative structure</i>
7	The author connects relatedness to communal struggles and expresses joy through flower painting as a therapeutic act.	The act of planting flowers and drawing them symbolizes growth, resilience, and flourishing amidst challenges. "Flowering with happiness" metaphorically conveys how creativity fosters emotional healing. Helping others through games and conversations represents relational reciprocity, emphasizing shared humanity.	The narrative progresses from identifying a communal need (helping others) to individual expressions of joy and fulfilment (flower painting). This structure highlights the interconnectedness of communal and personal healing.
8	The respondent expresses joy through the symbol of a tree painting, a representation of nature and life. Happiness is linked to having plants, memories of the past, and sharing moments with others.	The tree symbolizes life, growth, and rootedness. As a painting, it may represent the creative act of capturing and preserving the essence of nature. This suggests nostalgia and contentment rooted in cherished memories. The phrase "Let us be together where we can be happy" symbolizes a longing	It begins with an individual creative act (tree painting), transitions into reflections on the past (personal happiness), and culminates in a communal call to action (togetherness in happiness). This progression reflects a shift from personal fulfilment to collective well-being.

	for communal joy, harmony, and shared experiences.
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Objective #2: Establishing Kapwa as a framework for addressing ethical neglect in caring for others.

Ricoeur's hermeneutical analysis brings out the deeper meanings and symbols embedded in each narrative, while the Filipino concept of *Kapwa*, shared identity and interconnectedness, provides a prevailing cultural framework for addressing ethical neglect in caring for others.

After the critical interpretation through the process of appropriation, four main categories were identified from the literal, symbolic, and narrative structure’s interpretation: *Recognition of Shared Humanity*; *The Role of Empathy and Solidarity*; *Faith and Relational Accountability*, and *Transformative Growth in Community*. These were reflected in identifying the key indicators in establishing *Kapwa* as a framework for addressing ethical neglect in caring for others (objective #2). See Table 4 below to see the appropriations of meaning (key themes) in relation to the concept of *Kapwa* and Ricoeur’s *Solicitude*. This highlights the interconnectedness of lives among the elderly.

Table 4.

Appropriations of meaning (Key Themes, Kapwa, Solicitude)

<i>Key Themes</i>	<i>Kapwa (Filipino)</i>	<i>Solicitude (Ricoeur)</i>
<i>Recognition of Shared Humanity</i>	The act of helping others, empathizing with their pain, and providing symbolic offerings (like a house or flower) reflects <i>Kapwa</i> as shared humanity, recognizing others as integral parts of one's own moral and emotional landscape.	Ricoeur’s concept of appropriation, making meaning personal, complements <i>Kapwa</i> by showing how narratives internalize ethical responsibility toward others.
<i>The Role of Empathy and Solidarity</i>	The imagery of shared struggles, like the "firefly in the ocean," resonates with the relational dimension of <i>Kapwa</i> . Here, empathy moves beyond emotion into	Ricoeur’s focus on interpretation, understanding symbols and metaphors, aligns with <i>Kapwa</i> ’s ethical stance, encouraging individuals to interpret suffering as a call

solidarity, actively working to uplift others.	to action rather than neglect.
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Table 4.*Continued.*

<i>Key Themes</i>	<i>Kapwa (Filipino)</i>	<i>Solicitude (Ricoeur)</i>
<i>Faith and Relational Accountability</i>	<i>Kapwa</i> encourages ethical care through relational accountability, not only to God but also to one's neighbors (<i>kapwa-tao</i>).	Ricoeur's distancing highlights the autonomy of each text while revealing how faith shapes the narratives' calls for moral action. This complements <i>Kapwa's</i> relational accountability, which obliges individuals to act ethically toward others.
<i>Transformative Growth in Community</i>	Treating companions as siblings and appreciating support from the nuns reflects <i>Kapwa's</i> emphasis on mutual care and interdependence	Ricoeur's fusion of horizons, bringing the past and present into meaningful dialogue, aligns with <i>Kapwa</i> by encouraging people to carry lessons from shared struggles into future ethical practices.

The responses were gathered through intimate group sharing and *kuwentuhan* sessions with the *lolas*, where stories flowed naturally, revealing layers of emotion, memory, and resilience. These conversations became more than data. They were windows into the soul of abandonment, survival, and hope. As the narratives unfolded, the Filipino value of *Kapwa* emerged not merely as a cultural backdrop but as a lived reality, observed in the shared experiences, emotional resonance, and relational depth among the elderly women. *Kapwa*, which signifies shared identity and interconnectedness, was evident in how the *lolas* recognized themselves in each other's stories, mirroring Paul Ricoeur's concept of *oneself as another*, where the self is understood through the lens of relationality and ethical regard (Ricoeur, 1992).

This intersubjective bond, “part in a whole, the whole in a part,” reinforced the idea that well-being is not an isolated pursuit but a communal endeavor. The narratives revealed that healing began when the elderly women felt seen, heard, and valued, not just by caregivers, but by fellow residents, nuns, guards, and volunteers who participated in their daily lives. In practice, *Kapwa* encouraged active engagement and mutual care, transforming the caregiving space into a community of *malasakit* (genuine concern). The Mary Mother of Mercy Homecare exemplified this ethos, where care was not transactional but relational, rooted in empathy and shared humanity.

Ricoeur's notion of *solicitude*, the ethical imperative to care for the vulnerable, resonated deeply in this setting. It was verbalized through gestures of kindness, shared meals, collaborative art sessions, and the simple act of listening. These practices affirmed the dignity of the abandoned elderly women and reestablished their place within a moral community. Moreover, the integration of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) was reflected in the center's commitment to holistic care. Accessible healthcare was not limited to physical treatment but extended to mental, emotional, and spiritual support, addressing the complex trauma of abandonment.

The inclusive approach adopted by the center recognized that the needs of the elderly were multifaceted. Physical care was complemented by social interaction, psychological counseling, and spiritual nourishment. Art therapy, storytelling, and communal rituals became avenues for expression and connection, allowing the *lolas* to reclaim their narratives and reweave their identities. In this space, abandonment was not the end of the story - it was the beginning of a new chapter shaped by recognition, relationship, and renewal.

Thus, Ricoeur's philosophy deepens the understanding by uncovering layers of meaning in symbols, metaphors, and relationships in the lived experience of the abandoned elderly women. His hermeneutical approach allows ethical reflection rooted in narrative experiences and how it is interwoven in the different humanistic theories and concepts (*kapwa*). At the later stage of the abandoned elderly women, when faced with challenges of ‘ego integrity’ and ‘despair’, Erikson's theory can be reflected and integrated in the practice of *solicitude* and *kapwa* by reinforcing a sense of belonging and purpose. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, on the other hand, particularly underscoring the importance of love, belongingness, and self-actualization, can be reflected and integrated also in terms of making the elderly women realize the benefit of strong social connections, recognition, and opportunities for continued growth, which *kapwa* and *solicitude* naturally encourage.

Objective #3: Call to Action- Proposing tangible solutions blending philosophical and cultural insights in responding to the needs and challenges of the abandoned elderly women.

In responding to Objective #3 of the study, we explored how the intersection of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy, particularly his concept of *solicitude*, and the Filipino cultural value of *Kapwa* could offer a culturally grounded and ethically responsive framework for addressing the abandonment of elderly women in the Philippines. This inquiry led us to recognize that the abandonment of elderly women was not merely a social issue but a deeply ethical and existential concern, requiring a response that honored both individual dignity and collective responsibility.

Ricoeur's notion of *solicitude*, which emphasized ethical responsibility, benevolent spontaneity, and mutual recognition, provided a philosophical lens through which care for the elderly could be reimagined, not as an obligation, but as an act of recognition and affirmation of the other's humanity (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur, 1981). This ethical imperative resonated with the Filipino concept of *Kapwa*, which views the self in relation to others, emphasizing shared identity, empathy, and interconnectedness (Aguila, 2025; Enriquez, 1992). Together, these frameworks illuminated the possibility of transforming abandonment into belonging through culturally resonant practices.

Our findings revealed three key pathways for operationalizing this ethical-cultural synthesis. First, we discovered that incorporating art and creativity into care practices served as a powerful medium for healing. Ricoeur had long argued that creativity was a transformative act that allowed individuals to reconfigure their suffering into meaning through narrative and symbolic expression (Ricoeur, 1984). In the Filipino context, *Kapwa* enabled art to become a communal experience, nurturing relationships, fostering empathy, and strengthening a sense of shared humanity. Artistic activities such as storytelling, painting, and music allowed elderly women to reconnect with others and reclaim their voices, thereby restoring their sense of agency and belonging (Aguila, 2025).

Second, we identified intergenerational engagement as a vital strategy for bridging the social gap between the elderly and the youth. Ricoeur's emphasis on narrative identity underscored the importance of storytelling in shaping selfhood and transmitting values across generations (Ricoeur, 1992). In practice, this meant creating spaces where elderly women could share their life experiences, wisdom, and cultural knowledge with younger generations. Programs such as mentorship circles and story-sharing initiatives were found to be effective in fostering mutual recognition and solidarity. Institutions like San Beda University had already begun implementing such models through their NSTP and Theology 4 (Social Justice) courses, which facilitated meaningful intergenerational dialogue and community engagement (Remodo, 2015).

Third, we examined how the principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #3, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, could be harnessed to empower elderly women as active contributors to society. Rather than viewing them as passive recipients of care, we advocated for livelihood programs tailored to their capacities and interests. These initiatives not only addressed economic vulnerability but also reinforced their sense of purpose and social relevance. The Filipino cultural reverence for elders as bearers of wisdom and tradition supported this approach, aligning with humanistic theories that emphasized self-actualization, dignity, and the intrinsic worth of every individual (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1961).

By integrating Ricoeur's philosophical framework of *solicitude* with the cultural values of *Kapwa*, these solutions collectively aimed to restore the dignity, agency, and shared humanity of abandoned elderly women. Ricoeur's ethics of recognition and *Kapwa*'s ethos of interconnectedness challenged the dominant narrative of elderly abandonment, urging society to see these women not as burdens but as vital contributors to collective identity and moral imagination. In doing so, we affirmed that ethical care must be both culturally situated and relationally grounded, rooted in the lived experiences of those who have been marginalized, and responsive to the values that define their communities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study illuminated the profound ethical and cultural dimensions of elderly abandonment in the Philippines, particularly among women, by weaving together Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy of *solicitude* and the Filipino value of *Kapwa*. Through this intersection, we recognized that addressing abandonment required more than institutional care. It demanded a reconfiguration of societal attitudes, relational ethics, and culturally grounded interventions.

Ricoeur's concept of *solicitude* emphasized the moral responsibility to care for others, especially those rendered vulnerable by neglect. It was expressed through empathy, relational bonds, and the affirmation of human dignity (Ricoeur, 1992). In parallel, *Kapwa*, and its active expression *Pakikipagkapwa*, encouraged a communal ethos rooted in shared humanity, mutual respect, and *malasakit* (genuine concern). These values were not abstract ideals but lived practices, evident even in simple acts such as offering oneself to play *sungka*, which fostered connection and inclusion among the elderly.

We found that art served as a transformative medium for healing and relationship-building. Artistic activities such as painting, drawing, and collaborative crafting allowed elderly women to express emotions, share stories, and engage in meaningful interactions. These art sessions cultivated a sense of community, strengthened interpersonal ties, and elevated the level of

Pakikipagkapwa within care centers. Creativity, as Ricoeur asserted, was not merely aesthetic. It was existential, enabling individuals to re-narrate their lives and reclaim agency (Ricoeur, 1984).

Moreover, intergenerational engagement emerged as a vital strategy. Programs that facilitated storytelling and mentorship between elderly women and youth, such as those implemented by San Beda University through NSTP and Theology 4, demonstrated how narrative identity could be preserved and passed on, fostering mutual recognition and solidarity across generations.

To translate these insights into actionable frameworks, we turned to existing legal and institutional structures. The Philippine Constitution (Article XV, Section 4) mandated the family's duty to care for elderly members, while Republic Act No. 9994 (Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010) provided benefits such as social pensions, PhilHealth coverage, and discounts on essential services. Republic Act No. 7876 further established senior citizens centers in every locality, offering recreational, educational, and health programs under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). However, despite these provisions, the rising number of abandoned elderly women revealed gaps in enforcement, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity.

Residential care facilities like the Mary Mother of Mercy Home for the Elderly and Abandoned in San Pedro, Laguna, or some other elderly home-care facilities provided temporary shelter and services, yet many provinces lacked adequate infrastructure and trained personnel. Legislative efforts had been initiated to mandate nursing homes in every local government unit (LGU), but implementation remained uneven.

In light of these findings, we proposed a clearer line of action:

- *Strengthen enforcement of family support obligations under the Family Code, with legal remedies for neglect and abandonment.*
- *Expand government and LGU-run residential care facilities, ensuring they are culturally attuned and adequately resourced.*
- *Promote community-based programs that embody Kapwa and Pakikipagkapwa, encouraging volunteerism, intergenerational engagement, and inclusive social participation.*
- *Integrate art therapy and psychosocial support into elderly care programs, recognizing creativity as a tool for healing, expression, and connection.*
- *Empower elderly women as active contributors, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal #3, through livelihood initiatives and community involvement that affirm their dignity and purpose.*

Ultimately, the convergence of Ricoeur's *solicitude* and the Filipino ethos of *Kapwa* offered a compelling framework for reimagining care, not as charity, but as ethical recognition. It called for a society that did not merely shelter its elders but embraced them as integral to its moral and cultural fabric. Though the path to rebuilding relationships and systems of care appeared difficult, the hope expressed by the elderly women themselves reminded us that healing was possible through empathy, creativity, and shared humanity.

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