



Mag-aruga ay 'di biro: Unveiling the lived experience of overseas Filipino caregivers during armed conflict in Israel

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Abstract

The caregiving profession demands unwavering commitment; however, for Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) caregivers in Israel, these challenges are compounded when armed conflict disrupts daily life. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of OFW caregivers during the armed conflict in Israel. Data were collected through unstructured interviews with five (5) participants selected using snowball sampling. The narratives were meticulously transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and insightful examination of the participants' lived experiences within the context of caregiving during armed conflict. The study identified four (4) major superordinate themes: (1) Navigating the Psychological Turmoil of War, (2) Anchoring Safety and Psychological Resilience, (3) Oars of Connectivity, and (4) Sailing Through Caregiving. The findings revealed that participants faced a precarious balance between fulfilling their professional caregiving responsibilities and ensuring their personal safety. Their reliance on technology played a crucial role in maintaining security and sustaining communication with their families. Furthermore, the study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support, strengthened legal protections, and well-structured crisis response measures to safeguard the safety and well-being of OFW caregivers working in high-risk environments. The insights gained from the participants can inform the development of policies and support systems aimed at enhancing the welfare of caregivers in conflict zones. This study also has significant implications for labor migration policies, caregiving programs, and mental health initiatives designed to address the unique needs of OFW caregivers during times of crisis.

Keywords: *OFW, psychological resilience, caregiver well-being, social support, crisis adaptation, mental health*

Article History:

Received: March 19, 2026

Revised: April 30, 2026

Accepted: December 10, 2026

Published online: June 15, 2026

Suggested Citation:

Francisco, H.A.L., Ocampo, R.M.L.M., Anda, L.G.P., Teves, A.A.D. & San Luis, J.C. (2026). *Mag-aruga ay 'di biro: Unveiling the lived experience of overseas Filipino caregivers during armed conflict in Israel*. *The Research Probe*, 6(1), 180-203. <https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.226>

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1. Introduction

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) constitute a significant segment of the global labor force, with many Filipinos employed as caregivers in various countries. Among them, Filipino caregivers in Israel play a vital role in providing essential care services to elderly individuals and persons with chronic illnesses (Mazuz, 2015; Ayalon et al., 2008). The demand for caregivers in Israel continues to grow due to its aging population and increasing long-term care needs (OECD, 2021). Consequently, Filipino caregivers have become indispensable in addressing these care demands while contributing to both the Israeli healthcare system and the Philippine economy through remittances. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA, 2023), Israel remains a preferred destination for Filipino caregivers because of its competitive salaries, which range from 77,340 to more than 100,000 Philippine pesos per month.

Despite these economic opportunities, Filipino caregivers in Israel face numerous challenges, particularly during periods of armed conflict. The nature of caregiving already requires significant emotional, physical, and psychological commitment; however, working in a conflict-prone environment further intensifies these demands. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) noted that caregivers in conflict settings must balance their professional responsibilities with concerns for their own safety and well-being. During times of war, caregivers often continue providing care while coping with fear, uncertainty, and heightened stress levels (Lu, 2023). These circumstances place them at increased risk of physical harm, emotional distress, and job insecurity. Furthermore, Filipino caregivers who work primarily in private households may have limited access to emergency resources, institutional support, and social networks (Ines, 2023). Despite these hardships, many Filipino caregivers demonstrate remarkable resilience and dedication to their work. They continue to prioritize the needs of those under their care while adapting to the challenges posed by conflict and instability. Their experiences highlight the complex realities of labor migration, caregiving, and survival in high-risk environments.

Recognizing these circumstances, the present study seeks to explore the lived experiences of OFW caregivers in Israel during times of armed conflict. Specifically, it aims to examine the challenges they encounter, the coping strategies they employ, and their perceptions of the support systems available to them. By documenting and analyzing their experiences, the study intends to generate insights that may contribute to policy improvements,

strengthen protections for OFW caregivers, and inform future discussions on labor migration, caregiving, and crisis response. Ultimately, the findings may serve as a basis for enhancing support mechanisms and promoting the safety, well-being, and welfare of Filipino caregivers working in conflict-affected areas.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Challenges of OFW as Primary Caregiver in Israel

The growing global demand for caregiving services has encouraged many OFWs to pursue employment as caregivers in foreign countries, including Israel. While these opportunities provide financial benefits, they also expose caregivers to significant emotional, psychological, and social challenges, particularly when working in conflict-affected environments. Research on OFWs indicates that caregivers commonly experience stress, anxiety, and social isolation resulting from prolonged separation from their families and the demands of caregiving work abroad (Quiroga, 2025; Francisco-Menchavez et al., 2021). These challenges become even more pronounced during periods of armed conflict, when caregivers must balance their professional responsibilities with concerns about personal safety and uncertainty.

Providing care in conflict zones introduces additional hardships, including exposure to emotional trauma, restricted access to emergency assistance, communication difficulties with family members, and financial instability. Parreñas (2015) and Asis (2017) found that Filipino caregivers often rely on emotional resilience, faith-based practices, support from fellow OFWs, and regular communication with loved ones as coping mechanisms to manage stress and adversity. Social support networks are important in reducing psychological strain and sustaining well-being (Acoba, 2024).

The significance of support systems is further highlighted by Torres and Tajima (2025), whose meta-analysis on the well-being of OFW caregivers in high-risk environments underscored the need for accessible mental health resources, employer support, legal protections, and financial assistance. Their study identified several persistent challenges, including discrimination, language barriers, restricted mobility during wartime, and limited access to psychological first-aid training. To cope with these difficulties, caregivers frequently employ problem-solving strategies such as proactive planning, cognitive reframing, and participation in community-based support groups.

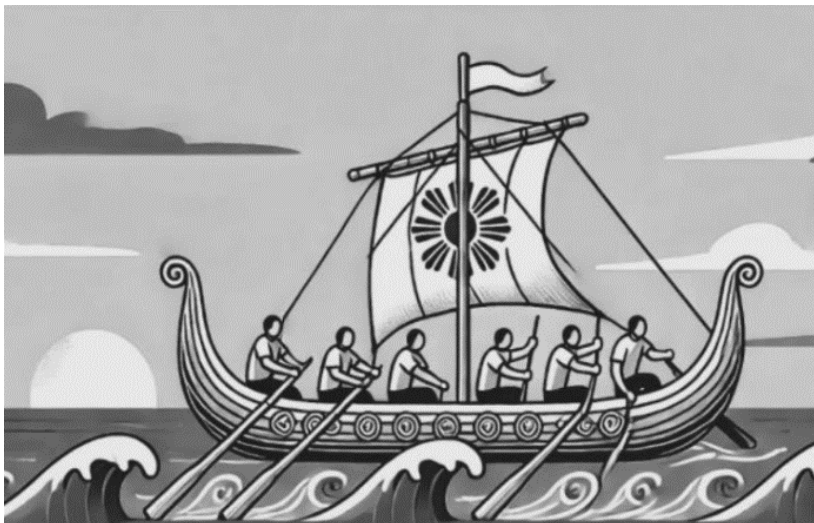
Recent studies also demonstrate the influence of cultural, spiritual, and systemic factors on the mental health and well-being of Filipino caregivers in Israel. Hannink et al. (2024) reported high levels of emotional distress, anxiety, and depression among Southeast Asian migrant care workers, including Filipinos, while emphasizing the protective role of social support and community connections in fostering resilience. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2020) observed that cultural norms, stigma, and financial constraints often discourage Filipinos from seeking formal mental health services. Moreover, Ayalon and Shiovitz-Ezra (2010) further documented experiences of loneliness and isolation among live-in Filipino caregivers and emphasized the value of informal peer networks and culturally grounded coping strategies in mitigating psychological distress. Caregivers in migrant and displaced populations must continually balance cultural expectations, available resources, and personal resilience in managing trauma-related mental health challenges.

From a Filipino cultural perspective, caregiving abroad often intensifies socio-emotional difficulties because of prolonged separation from family and homeland. Reyes-Espiritu (2022) noted that despite these hardships, many OFW caregivers demonstrate remarkable resilience and perseverance, motivated by their commitment to securing financial stability and improving the lives of their families. This resilience is further reinforced by a strong sense of responsibility, religious faith, and active participation in Filipino community organizations within host countries.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Thematic scheme of the lived experiences of OFW caregivers in Israel during armed conflict



The conceptual framework takes the form of the Balangay (Ancient Filipino Boat), symbolizing the caregivers' journey through turbulent waters, navigating challenges with resilience, adaptability, and communal support. The visual representation provides a compelling and relatable framework that underscores the psychological, emotional, and practical dimensions of caregiving during war. The Balangay's hull embodies the caregivers' strength, while the sails and oars signify the major themes that guide their caregiving voyage. The Paddlers (Bayanihan Spirit) represent the collective effort that propels the Balangay forward, highlighting the solidarity, perseverance, and support mechanisms caregivers rely on in times of crisis. This conceptual model intertwines with four (4) major themes that emerged from the analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. It is a multi-method approach that adopts an interpretive and naturalistic perspective to investigate phenomena within their real-world contexts and understand the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This approach is particularly suited to studies that seek to capture the significance and meaning of human experiences (De Jesus & Adducul, 2024). Furthermore, phenomenological inquiry systematically examines the ethical and experiential dimensions of everyday life and investigates complex human experiences that may be difficult to study through other research methods.

The study was guided by a descriptive phenomenological design, which focuses on describing and understanding individuals' experiences as they naturally occur. According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research aims to portray events or conditions by examining them in their natural settings. Similarly, descriptive phenomenology seeks to investigate the nature and essence of phenomena as they are experienced and brought into consciousness. Through the process of uncovering layers of thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and relationships, researchers can reveal the fundamental structure of an experience and describe "things as they are" (Leigh-Osroosh, 2021).

By employing descriptive phenomenology, the researcher sought to capture the essence and meaning of participants' experiences and provide a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.2. *Participants of the Study*

The study employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select participants. Purposive sampling was chosen because of its effectiveness in identifying information-rich participants who could provide relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). In addition, snowball sampling was utilized to facilitate access to participants within a population that may be difficult to reach through conventional recruitment methods (Gupta, 2023). Participants were selected based on the following criteria: must be an OFW caregiver who has been working in Israel for at least five (5) years; must have experienced armed conflict or war while working in Israel; and must be willing to share and discuss their experiences.

Following the application of these criteria, an initial pool of five to ten potential participants was identified. Additional participants were considered when necessary to ensure the collection of sufficient and meaningful data for the study. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Duration
Jackie	F	45 y/o	5 years and 6 months
Princess	F	32 y/o	7 years and 8 months
Mikha	F	35 y/o	6 years and 6 months
Rhon	F	40 y/o	8 years
Mary	F	38 y/o	10 years

3.3. *Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process*

The researchers formally proceeded to the data collection phase after the research questions and interview instrument were validated by the research adviser. Following the validation process and the approval of ethical clearance, informed consent forms, endorsed by the research adviser, were provided to the participants. Participation in the study commenced only after the participants had reviewed and signed the informed consent forms.

To establish trustworthiness, the study addressed the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to recognize and minimize potential researcher bias. Credibility was

strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of data sources, and participant validation of the researchers' interpretations. Peer debriefing with external qualitative researchers was also conducted to refine interpretations and enhance analytical depth.

Dependability was reinforced through systematic documentation of the research process and the maintenance of an audit trail. Confirmability was achieved through comprehensive field notes and verification that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives. Transferability was supported by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' lived experiences to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

3.4. Data Analysis

Consistent with its phenomenological orientation, the study moved beyond procedural rigor toward interpretive depth and meaning-making. Data were analyzed through a process of phenomenological interpretation rather than relying solely on thematic categorization. While initial coding was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, the procedure was extended to identify significant statements, formulate meaning units, and cluster these into structures of lived experience. These structures were subsequently synthesized to articulate the essence of the participants' experiences.

The study was further informed by the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which provides a framework for understanding responses to stress. The theory posits that stress arises when valued resources are threatened, lost, or insufficiently gained, and that individuals are motivated to obtain, preserve, and protect these resources. According to COR Theory, resource loss is more salient than resource gain, and loss often leads to further loss. The theory has received substantial empirical support and has been widely applied in research on chronic illness, disaster recovery, occupational burnout, trauma, and health outcomes (Holmgreen et al., 2017).

Within the context of armed conflict, COR Theory helps explain how OFW caregivers experience threats to essential resources such as safety, emotional stability, financial security, and social support. These threats influence their coping mechanisms, resilience, and overall well-being as they navigate the challenges of caregiving in a conflict-affected environment. Additionally, the study was informed by the Filipino cultural concept of *Mag-Aruga* (to nurture

and care), which reflects deeply rooted values of compassion, sacrifice, relational responsibility, and commitment to the welfare of others. In this research, *Mag-Aruga* served not only as a cultural expression but also as a conceptual lens for understanding the lived experiences of Filipino caregivers.

3.5. Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the conduct of this study. Prior to data collection, the researchers obtained approval from the research adviser and secured informed consent from all participants. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, their rights as participants, and any potential risks associated with participation. Their involvement was entirely voluntary, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were assigned and used in all research records and reports. All personal information and responses were treated with strict confidentiality and accessed only by the researchers. Interviews were scheduled according to participants' availability to promote comfort and convenience throughout the data collection process. Furthermore, all communication, data collection, storage, and handling procedures adhered to established ethical and legal standards, ensuring transparency, integrity, and respect for participants throughout the research process.

4. Findings and Discussion

Four (4) major themes emerged from the data through a reflexive and interpretative process using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, but the study is grounded in a Heideggerian phenomenological orientation that moves beyond simple coding to a deeper interpretation of lived experience. The analysis involved identifying significant statements, forming meaning units, and clustering these into structures of lived experience to understand how participants made sense of their being-in-the-world under conditions of war, uncertainty, and caregiving. The findings are further interpreted using COR Theory and the Filipino cultural concept of *Mag-Aruga* (nurturing care).

Theme 1: Navigating the Psychological Turmoil of War

This theme describes the emotional and psychological struggles experienced by participants during wartime, showing how their sense of normal life was disrupted and replaced by fear and uncertainty.

Unfamiliarity to terror. The sudden onset of war on October 7, 2023, profoundly disrupted the daily lives of OFW caregivers in Israel. Many respondents described their initial shock upon hearing air raid sirens for the first time. One caregiver recounted an experience while taking a bath:

“First time kong makarinig ng sirena... naliligo ka.. then bigla na lang sumereno so wala kang choice kailangan kong magtapis first time ko, hindi ko alam gagawin ko.” (It was my first time hearing the siren... I was taking a bath... then suddenly the siren went off, so I had no choice—I had to wrap myself with a towel. It was my first time; I didn’t know what to do.)

This statement highlights the overwhelming sense of disorientation and panic triggered by war’s unpredictability. The abrupt shift from routine activities to survival instincts illustrates the mental struggle of adapting to an unfamiliar and life-threatening environment.

Imminent threat and rapid anxiety. The caregivers shared that the constant sound of sirens, bomb explosions, and the looming threat of armed attacks caused extreme anxiety. The unpredictability of the attacks, especially the fear of terrorists infiltrating homes intensified their stress. One respondent described a chilling experience:

“Noong nag-gyera noong October 7, 2023, nagpasok sila ng mga namamasok sila ng mga bahay e, so kailangan lagi kang sarado... Kailangan tanggalin mo ‘yung susi kasi si lola tuwing sa may laging nakatok kapag nagbubukas, hindi niya sinisilip o hindi siya nagtatanong.” (When the war broke out on October 7, 2023, they were entering houses, so you always had to keep everything locked. You had to remove the key because Grandma, whenever someone knocked, would immediately open the door, she wouldn’t look first or ask who it was.)

This response reflects the heightened sense of vulnerability among caregivers, who not only had to protect themselves but also the elderly individuals under their care. The fear of potential intrusions added another layer of psychological distress.

Experiencing war violence. For many caregivers, the war was not only about personal fear but also the horror of witnessing violence firsthand. Respondents recalled how they received videos of the killings happening in Gaza:

"Lahat kami naka-receive ng videos ng mga uhm mi-nurder binagbabaril in Gaza... so nakapasok sila ng bording sa Israel may mga village doon na kalapit bayan ng Gaza... which is doon silang nagbababaril, nag-murder." (All of us received videos of people being murdered, shot, in Gaza. So, they crossed the border into Israel. There were villages there near the towns bordering Gaza, and that's where they were shooting people and committing murders.)

The exposure to such graphic violence, even though digital means, deepened the psychological trauma. It reinforced a sense of helplessness and paranoia, making it difficult for them to feel safe even within their homes.

Local to national war conflict. The caregivers also observed how their immediate environment transformed into a ghost town. The normally busy streets of Tel Aviv and other cities turned eerily silent, with people staying indoors for safety.

"Nung during siguro mga first to second week ng war, dun talaga parang ghost town 'yung place. Wala kang makikitang mga tao sa labas. Talagang 'yung mga tao, hindi lumalabas ng bahay." (During probably the first to second week of the war, the place really felt like a ghost town. You couldn't see anyone outside. People truly did not leave their homes.)

This silence was not just a reflection of fear but also of the war's nationwide impact. Despite being in different locations, caregivers collectively experienced the country's descent into chaos, further amplifying their anxieties.

Psychological impact of war. Beyond the immediate fear, the war left lasting emotional scars on the caregivers. Many expressed lingering paranoia, distrust, and anxiety even after the initial wave of violence subsided. One respondent admitted:

"Kada alarm, kada siren, punta kami ng mamad kung tawagin or ng bomb shelter namin. So doon kami nagtatago... Pero may mga amo naman kami na nagsasabi na 'wag kayong mag-alala hindi makakarating dito 'yung mga terrorist...' pero hanggang may shelter tayo, makakatago tayo." (Every time there was an alarm,

every time the siren sounded, we would go to what we call the mamad, or our bomb shelter. That's where we hid. But our employers would also tell us, 'Don't worry, the terrorists won't reach here. Still, as long as we had a shelter, we could hide there.)

While shelters provided physical security, they did little to alleviate the caregivers' psychological distress. The uncertainty of future attacks and the fear of being caught outside without protection weighed heavily on their mental well-being.

Theme 2: Anchoring Safety and Psychological Resilience in the Shelter Experience

This theme captures how participants experienced seeking safety during attacks while also developing emotional resilience in the face of fear and uncertainty. Their narratives reflect the challenges of living in a conflict zone, where survival depends not only on physical protection but also on psychological strength and meaning-making.

Seeking and maintaining physical safety. The importance of having immediate access to a shelter was a recurring theme in participants' accounts. Many expressed reliefs at having a private shelter within their residence, reducing the need to run to public shelters during attacks. One participant noted:

"Ang maganda lang noon ay may sarili kaming shelter sa baba hindi naming kailangan pumunta sa public shelter para lang magtago." (The only good thing back then was that we had our own shelter downstairs, so we didn't need to go to a public shelter just to hide.)

The urgency of moving to a shelter as soon as the sirens sounded was emphasized, with participants highlighting that they had less than a minute to reach safety:

"Once na may rocket, regular papasok ka ng shelter. Before one minute dapat nakapasok ka na sa bomb shelter or sa safe place para makacover ka na if ever na may bumagsak na rockets." (Once there was a rocket alert, you had to go into the shelter immediately. Within one minute, you were supposed to be inside the bomb shelter or a safe place so you could take cover in case rockets fell.)

However, fear persisted despite the presence of shelters. Participants expressed concerns over potential structural weaknesses in older buildings and the unpredictability of

attacks. Some also avoided specific areas due to fear of potential threats from individuals they perceived as dangerous, even within the confines of Israel:

"Takot naming na hindi kami pupunta sa part na 'to kase eto yung mga county o mga tirahan ng mga Arab... pare-parehas silang Muslim, same country, baka gawin din nila sa amin 'yon kaya nag avoid kami pumunta doon. 'Yun yung takot naming." (We were afraid to go to that area because those are the counties or neighborhoods where Arabs live. They're all Muslim, from the same country, we were afraid they might do the same thing to us, so we avoided going there. That was our fear.)

However, the effectiveness of shelters varied, with some participants expressing concerns about the structural integrity of older buildings. Despite this, they acknowledged that having any form of shelter was preferable to being exposed during an attack. Participants also highlighted the Iron Dome defense system as a crucial protective measure, though some expressed frustration that blame for the conflict was often placed solely on Israel.

Information management and control. The role of communication devices in managing fear and staying updated on security conditions was significant. Mobile phones played a vital role in providing reassurance, allowing participants to stay connected with family members and receive real-time updates:

"So hanggat may cellphone, nao-overcome naman namin. May cellphone kami..." (So as long as we had a cellphone, we were able to cope. We had our cellphones...)

Despite their access to information, some participants expressed concerns about misinformation and the emotional toll of constantly monitoring the news. Others mentioned that the Israeli government provided structured information and counseling services for those in distress.

Psychological coping mechanisms and resilience. Fear and anxiety were prevalent emotions among participants, especially when sirens sounded or explosions were heard. Some described physical symptoms of distress, such as trembling:

"Nanginginig ako tuwing nakakrinig ako ng siren. Hindi mo maano basta nanginginig ka, natatakot ka na." (I would tremble whenever I heard the siren. You can't control it, you just start shaking, you're already afraid.)

Many also emphasized their ability to self-regulate emotions through distraction, work, or religious faith. A strong sense of resilience was evident in their refusal to seek professional psychological help, with most participants believing they could manage their emotions without formal counseling:

"Wala, hindi ako pumunta. Hindi naman ako ganon ka-stress na para pumunta sa psychologist." (No, I didn't go. I wasn't that stressed to the point of needing to see a psychologist.)

Even though the Israeli government offered mental health services for those experiencing severe distress, most participants chose not to avail themselves of such support, instead relying on internal coping mechanisms.

Faith and family as sources of resilience. Faith played a central role in the participants' coping strategies. Many recounted how they turned to prayer during attacks, drawing strength from their beliefs:

"Basta marunong ka magdasal, iniisip mo pamilya mo. Lagi lang ako nagdadasal... dasal lang, bahala na ikaw, Lord, sa amin lahat." (As long as you know how to pray, you think of your family. I always just prayed... just prayed, 'It's up to you, Lord, to take care of all of us.)

Family also served as a source of emotional support. Participants frequently contacted their loved ones after attacks, both to reassure them and to gain comfort:

"Pagkatapos ng sirena at mga pagsabog, tatawag agad ako sa pamilya ko para alam nila. Kasi kung takot ako, mas triple ang takot nila para sa akin." (After the sirens and explosions, I would immediately call my family so they would know. Because if I'm scared, their fear for me would be three times as much.)

Some found solace in their relationships with employers and co-workers, who offered words of encouragement and guidance during difficult times:

"Wag kang mag-alala kasi hindi ka din naming pababayaan." (Don't worry, because we also won't abandon you.)

The shelter experience. Although shelters provided a crucial sense of security, participants described the emotional toll of prolonged confinement. Fear of going outside, even for basic needs such as sunlight, was a common sentiment:

"Talaga hindi kami naglalabas kasi 'yung takot nga namin...kahit sa may labas ng pinto ng building, kahit magpa-araw? Hindi na namin ginagawa." (We really didn't go outside because of our fear... even just stepping outside the building door, even to get some sun, we didn't do that anymore.)

The uncertainty of war was also a source of distress, with participants recalling moments when the entire country seemed to be under attack:

"Siguro nung malalayong war, nung buong Israel na yung may alarm, dun na siguro ako medyo natakot... parang ibang level na yung ganitong klase ng war." (Maybe when the war spread far, when all of Israel had alarms, that's when I probably got a little scared... this kind of war felt like a whole different level.)

Despite these challenges, participants exhibited remarkable adaptability. Many acknowledged that enduring such conditions required patience and mental fortitude:

"Dapat meron kang mahabang pasensya at malakas ang loob mo, yun lang yon, dalawang bagay lang yan." (You need to have a lot of patience and strong courage, that's it, just those two things.)

The experience reinforced their work ethic, as they emphasized the need to continue working despite the risks:

"Kailangan mong mag work hard kasi hindi naman laging nasa abroad. Yung ibang bansa, iba kasi talaga ang Israel pagdating sa hanap-buhay." (You need to work hard because you're not always abroad. Other countries are different, Israel is really unique when it comes to earning a living.)

Theme 3: Oars of Connectivity

This theme highlights how connectivity becomes both a source of support and a burden for individuals living in conflict situations. Participants relied heavily on communication technologies to access real-time information and maintain contact with others, yet this constant connection also intensified fear, uncertainty, and emotional strain.

Reliance on technology for information and communication. Participants expressed their dependence on technology for real-time updates and information on security threats. The use of alarms and sirens played a crucial role in warning civilians of incoming attacks, but it also induced anxiety and distress. The unpredictability of rocket strikes heightened fear among

individuals, making them constantly reliant on digital platforms and news sources for immediate updates. One participant shared:

"Nagpapadala ng rockets sa amin. Yun ang nakakatakot kasi hindi naming alam kung saan tatama eh... Yung mismong ano lang pag merong nag-alarm lang talaga, nagpapanic. Kitang kita mo dun sa langit yung rockets na may paparating. Nakakatakot kasi hindi mo alam, baka may mga debris na babagsak sa 'yo." (They were sending rockets at us. That's what's scary because we didn't know where they would hit...Just the moment there's an alarm, people panic. You can clearly see the rockets coming in the sky. It's frightening because you never know, there might be debris that could fall on you.)

This constant need for information created a paradox where access to updates provided both a sense of control and an increased state of anxiety. The use of digital communication platforms also allowed participants to stay connected with family members in different locations, reassuring them of their safety.

Challenges and limitations on technology. Despite the advantages of digital communication, participants encountered difficulties in fully relying on technology. Power outages, network disruptions, and limited access to secure communication channels added to the uncertainty of the situation. Additionally, misinformation and unverified news sources exacerbated fears, making it difficult to discern reliable information from speculation. A participant shared their experience:

"Nagkaroon ng balita na may mga teroristang nakapasok, so yun yung nakakatakot. Wala silang sinasanto. Baka hindi naming alam, makasalubong namin biglang may mambaril, may manaksak or merong suicide bomber. Yun ang medyo nakakatakot na part." (There was news that terrorists had gotten in, and that's what was scary. They didn't spare anyone. You never knew, you might suddenly encounter someone who would shoot, stab, or even a suicide bomber. That part was the frightening one.)

The rapid spread of alarming news through online platforms contributed to heightened paranoia, forcing participants to remain hyper-vigilant about their surroundings and potential threats.

Shelter and safety considerations. Finding safe spaces during attacks was a major concern for participants, as they navigated the uncertainty of whether their current location

provided adequate protection. The fear of being in an exposed area during an air raid or encountering an armed attack led to calculated decisions on movement and shelter. One participant recalled their fear of traveling due to potential terrorist threats:

"Nag-alert, ganon. Hindi ako bumalik ng trabaho kase natakot ako kase sabi nakapasok na raw dito. Hindi namin alam kung if ever na sumakay kami ng bus o kung ano mang transportation, baka pagbabarilin kami." (They issued an alert, something like that. I didn't go back to work because I was scared—because they said they had already gotten in here. We didn't know if, in case we took the bus or any form of transportation, we might get shot.)

The unpredictability of attacks and the necessity of constantly seeking shelter added to the physical and emotional exhaustion of individuals living in conflict zones. Connecting with loved ones and community. Amidst the crisis, participants emphasized the significance of staying connected with family and their broader community for emotional support. However, geographical distance and the volatile nature of the situation made communication inconsistent. Families in the Philippines were also deeply affected by the distressing news, increasing the emotional toll on participants:

"Yung pamilya namin sa Pilipinas, sa mga nangyayari dito, worried din sila. Tapos yun kaba, grabe ang takot. Hindi mo ma-explain na takot ka kasi hindi mo talaga alam kung yung mga makakasama mo sa bus, kung civilian pa ba 'yon o terorista na." (Our family in the Philippines, because of what's happening here, they're worried too. And then the anxiety, the fear is intense. You can't really explain it, you're scared because you truly don't know if the people you're with on the bus are still civilians or already terrorists.)

The shared experiences of fear and distress within their community created a bond among individuals facing the same crisis. However, the uncertainty of their surroundings made it difficult to fully rely on anyone outside their immediate circle of trust.

Theme 4: Sailing Through Caregiving

This theme reflects the lived experiences of OFW caregivers as they continue their caregiving roles amid the challenges of war, highlighting both the burdens and meaningful aspects of their responsibilities. It shows how caregiving becomes a complex experience shaped by fear, duty, resilience, and emotional connection.

The demands of caregiving. Living in a conflict zone brings an overwhelming sense of fear and anxiety, particularly when individuals are uncertain about their surroundings and safety. The unpredictability of terrorist threats and rocket attacks leads to heightened stress among residents.

“Hindi mo ma-explain na takot ka kase hindi mo talaga alam yung mga makakasama mo sa bus kung civillian pa ba yon o terrorista na yon. So doon sila nag-alala at baka kung napaano na daw ako, ganoon ganiyan so nag-alala rin ako, alala ko na sarili ko inaalala ko pa rin pamilya ko kasi nasaksihan nila e rinig na rinig nila ‘yung sirena.” (You can’t explain that you’re scared because you truly don’t know if the people, you’re with on the bus are still civilians or already terrorists. So that’s why they got worried, and if something were to happen to me... that’s how it is, so I also got worried. I worried for myself, but I was still thinking of my family because they witnessed it, they clearly heard the sirens.)

These narratives reflect the distress experienced both by individuals in the conflict zone and their families abroad, emphasizing the psychological burden of uncertainty and fear. Social media is a source of information and misinformation. Social media plays a dual role, keeping people informed while also spreading panic due to unverified reports. Platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook are widely used for real-time updates and emergency alerts.

“Active ka sa social media... anong nangyayare sa WhatsApp kase nagpapasahan sila ng mga monitor ng mga videos sabi-sabi may papasok daw na mga terrorist yung Tel Aviv. Sa Facebook may balita rin sa Facebook ng news dito sa Israel so updated ako dahil dyan sa internet.” (You’re active on social media...what’s happening on WhatsApp, because they were sharing videos, saying that terrorists were entering Tel Aviv. On Facebook, there’s also news from Facebook pages here in Israel, so I stayed updated through the internet.)

While social media allows for quick information dissemination, it also contributes to heightened anxiety due to misinformation and exaggerated reports.

Community and government support systems. Filipino communities and local government agencies provide essential support during crises. Leaders within the Filipino diaspora have created online groups for communication, ensuring that everyone is informed and guided on what to do.

“Sa NGOs, hindi sila nagkukulang ng paalala lalo na si Sir Winston... kahit hindi na siya president, siya ‘yung sasabihin mong nag-oorganize. Pati gobyerno naka-flash ‘yan sa television, sa Facebook, lahat so lahat naman updated kasi may sirena naman pati siya, so walang kapag nagsirena yan automatic ‘yan.” (With the NGOs, they never lacked reminders, especially Sir Winston... even though he’s no longer the president, he’s the one you could say was organizing everything. Even the government flashes it on television, on Facebook, everything, so everyone stays updated because there’s also a siren. So, whenever it sounds, it’s automatic.)

The combination of community-led initiatives and government emergency alerts provides a sense of structure and preparedness amid chaos.

The psychological toll of war. Prolonged exposure to conflict situations takes a toll on individuals’ mental health. The constant stress, coupled with the responsibility of keeping families informed, exacerbates anxiety.

“Basta merong cellphone na may hawak akong cellphone, nalilimutan ko na na may gyera. Nakakastres pero alam mo sa sarili mo hindi lalapag kase may sasalo, uh hmmm nakontrol naman naming.” (As long as I have a cellphone, when I’m holding it, I forget that there’s a war. It’s stressful, but you know deep down that nothing will happen because someone will protect you... hmm, we’re able to manage it.)

These statements highlight the coping mechanisms employed by individuals, such as seeking reassurance through technology and community support, yet underlying stress remains.

5. Reflective Resonance

Theme 1: Navigating the Psychological Turmoil of War

The findings show that war causes deep psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and symptoms of PTSD that may continue even after the conflict ends. Experiences such as exposure to violence, loss, and displacement disrupt individuals’ sense of safety and identity, leading to long-term emotional suffering. This is supported by Aldabbour et al. (2024), who found high levels of stress, anxiety, and trauma among individuals exposed to conflict. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences reflect how war reshapes one’s sense of being-in-the-world, where fear and uncertainty become part of everyday life.

Coping responses vary, with some individuals relying on social support and resilience, while others may experience more harmful outcomes, highlighting the need for trauma-informed mental health interventions.

Theme 2: Anchoring Safety and Psychological Resilience in the Shelter Experience

Seeking shelter during attacks is not only about physical protection but also about maintaining psychological stability. Participants' experiences show that safety involves both structural protection and emotional strength. Coping strategies such as routines, social support, and positive thinking help individuals manage fear and uncertainty. This aligns with research suggesting that resilience is shaped not only by external safety but also by internal meaning-making and a sense of control (Hamama et al., 2024). From a phenomenological lens, shelters become spaces where individuals attempt to restore a sense of security while continuing to live with underlying fear.

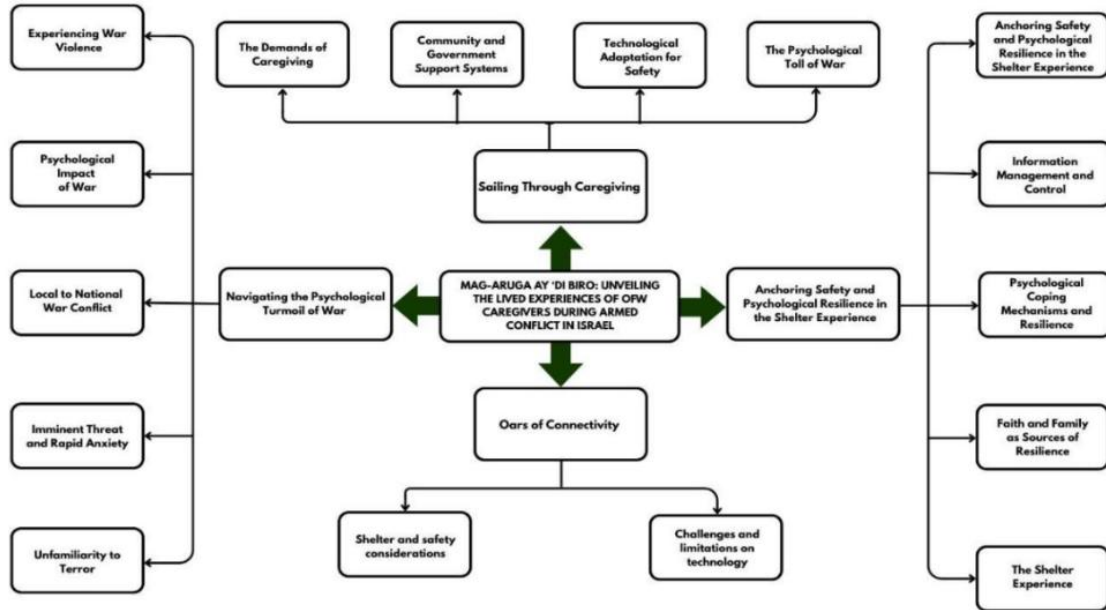
Theme 3: Oars of Connectivity

Connectivity plays a dual role in the lives of participants during war. While communication with family and access to information provide comfort and reassurance, constant exposure to news and shared experiences of fear can also increase anxiety. This reflects the paradox of connection, where relationships both support and burden individuals emotionally. As supported by Ast et al. (2021), social connections can strengthen coping but may also intensify shared distress. In this sense, connectivity becomes part of how individuals experience and make sense of crisis, shaping both their resilience and vulnerability.

Theme 4: Sailing Through Caregiving

Caregiving in a war setting is both physically and emotionally demanding, as caregivers must manage their own fears while continuing to support others. The pressure to stay informed, maintain communication, and ensure safety increases stress, especially with the spread of misinformation through social media. Although community and government support systems provide some structure, caregivers remain vulnerable to long-term psychological strain. Studies (Abolfathi Momtaz et al., 2024) show that while caregivers develop coping strategies such as reliance on community and technology, they still face significant emotional challenges.

Figure 2

Thematic scheme

The thematic scheme in Figure 2 illustrates how OFW caregivers navigate armed conflict in Israel by centring their lived experiences amid war-related stressors and support systems. It shows how exposure to war violence, imminent threats, and psychological impacts creates fear and anxiety that caregivers must manage while fulfilling demanding caregiving roles. The framework highlights the interplay of community and government support, technological adaptation for safety, and information management as vital tools in coping with crisis. At the core are themes of “sailing through caregiving” and “oars of connectivity,” emphasizing resilience built through shelter experiences, faith, family, and psychological coping mechanisms, despite challenges and limitations of technology.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a profound exploration of the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) caregivers in Israel as they navigate the realities of armed conflict. The findings reveal the significant psychological, emotional, and social burdens faced by migrant caregivers in crisis settings, aligning with migration-in-crisis literature that highlights how displacement, insecurity, and limited access to support systems intensify vulnerability. At the same time, the study underscores the role of cultural values, such as Filipino resilience,

strong familial ties, faith, and the concept of *Mag-Aruga*, in shaping how caregivers endure, cope, and make meaning of their experiences despite uncertainty and fear.

Despite exposure to trauma and instability, participants demonstrated adaptability by drawing on both internal and external resources, consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. However, their experiences also expose critical gaps, including emotional distress, threats to safety, disrupted caregiving roles, and limited access to culturally responsive mental health services. These findings emphasize the urgent need for stronger institutional protections, accessible psychosocial support, and reliable communication systems. Importantly, this study advances practice and policy by highlighting the need for migrant worker protection frameworks during armed conflict, as well as trauma-informed and culturally sensitive nursing interventions that address the unique realities of migrant caregivers.

Caregiving in conflict zones extends beyond occupational responsibility and becomes an act of resilience, sacrifice, and relational commitment. This study contributes to migration and crisis-response literature by offering context-specific insights into the intersection of caregiving, culture, and survival in high-risk environments. It calls for the development of policies and interventions that are both protective and culturally grounded, including strengthened community networks and government-supported crisis response mechanisms. By amplifying the voices of OFW caregivers, this study advocates systemic changes that recognize, support, and sustain their invaluable contributions, particularly in times of global crisis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was not supported by any funding. The study was self-funded.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the Calayan Educational Foundation, Inc. (CEFI). The conduct of this study has been approved and given relevant clearances by the CEFI Research and Publication Office.

AI Declaration

The authors declare the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the preparation of this manuscript. In particular, ChatGPT was utilized for grammar checking. The authors take full responsibility for the content and ensure that all outputs generated with the assistance of AI were carefully reviewed and validated.

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