



Is This The End?: Lived Experiences of Selected Veterinarians on Euthanasia In Stray Animals Within Animal Shelter

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the personal experiences of veterinarians involved in performing euthanasia on stray animals in selected shelters across District II of Laguna, Philippines. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the researchers identified recurring emotional, ethical, and professional challenges these individuals face. The study highlights the heavy psychological burden, moral conflict, and limited institutional support encountered by shelter veterinarians. Findings underscore the need for stronger mental health programs, peer support mechanisms, and broader public education. The study offers valuable insights into improving working conditions and emotional resilience among veterinarians, while also advocating for policies that reduce shelter euthanasia through preventive programs.

Keywords: Euthanasia, Animal Shelters, Veterinarians, Emotional Burden, Ethics, Coping, Mental Health

1. Introduction

Euthanasia in animals is a complex and emotionally challenging issue that requires deeper exploration, particularly in shelter environments. Veterinarians working in such facilities are often forced to make difficult decisions when caring for stray animals, especially under constraints like overcrowding, limited funding, and a low chance of adoption. While their primary role is to promote animal welfare and prolong life, these professionals must sometimes perform euthanasia as a last resort—balancing their ethical responsibilities, emotional well-being, and the realities of shelter operations.

Veterinarians experience significant emotional and moral stress when deciding to euthanize an animal. These decisions often involve a deep internal conflict, where feelings of guilt, sadness, and professional responsibility collide. Public scrutiny and societal expectations further complicate their role, especially when the decision is misunderstood or judged negatively by others. According to Pittman *et al.* (2023) ^[2], euthanasia is not only a clinical procedure but also an emotionally taxing experience that influences the mental well-being of veterinary professionals. Similarly, Persson *et al.* (2020) ^[3] emphasized the ethical weight veterinarians carry as they make end-of-life decisions for animals, revealing the multifaceted challenges in interpreting and applying humane care principles. The emotional burden brought about by repeated euthanasia procedures may lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Moreover, the lack of adequate mental health resources and training for veterinarians in the Philippines contributes to the difficulty of coping with such experiences. Despite the emotional intensity of euthanasia, there remains a limited understanding of how Filipino veterinarians navigate these experiences in real-world shelter settings.

Grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) ^[1], this study explores how veterinarians assess, respond to, and cope with the emotional and ethical stress associated with euthanizing stray animals. This model is well-suited for examining how professionals adapt psychologically to situations perceived as overwhelming, particularly in environments where personal values, societal pressures, and occupational duties intersect.

This qualitative research aims to explore the lived experiences of veterinarians performing euthanasia on stray animals in District II of Laguna, Philippines. Through this study, the researchers aim to uncover the emotional, moral, and professional dilemmas faced by veterinarians, contributing to a deeper understanding of their psychological well-being and advocating for better support systems within shelter practices.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

In this qualitative research endeavor, the researchers are committed to employing a phenomenological approach to thoroughly investigate the lived experiences of veterinarians concerning their exposure to euthanasia. Central to this exploration will be using in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. Through these interviews, the researchers aim to extract rich and detailed narratives, providing an immersive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of participating veterinarians.

The researchers acknowledge that investigating veterinarians' lived experiences goes beyond simple explanation; it necessitates thoroughly examining their interpretations, emotions, behaviors, and actions related to euthanasia. Through the phenomenological perspective, this study aims not to provide explanations but to offer comprehensive descriptions, enhancing our comprehension of the human experience. Umanailo (2019) ^[4] stated that to study phenomena in the human lived experience is to study actions and human behavior while understanding that these actions and behaviors are a product of how people have learned to interpret the world. Therefore, in phenomenology, the goal is not to explain the phenomena but to describe the phenomena and any surrounding emotions, behaviors, and actions that arise.

B. Research Locale

The study will take place on selected District II veterinarians, encompassing Cabuyao, Calamba, Los Baños, and Bay, situated in Laguna, Philippines. This area will serve as the research site for investigating the Lived Experiences of Veterinarians on Euthanasia in Stray Animals within Animal Shelters. This location was selected due to its importance as a setting where veterinarians frequently encounter euthanasia scenarios, especially in animal shelters and related facilities. District II, located in the Calabarzon region, is characterized by a blend of urban and rural environments and has seen a steady increase in its diverse population over time.

Laguna's 2nd congressional district is a significant component of Philippine legislative history, tracing its origins back to the Philippine Assembly from 1907 to 1916 and subsequently in the House of Representatives from 1916 onwards. Located in Laguna province, the district currently includes the lively city of Cabuyao and the active municipalities of Bay and Los Baños. Its historical evolution shows a shift in geographical boundaries: initially covering eastern municipalities like Santa Cruz and Pagsanjan until 1972, and later redefined in 1987 to encompass southwestern areas. In 2019, Calamba became an independent district. Presently, under the representation of Ruth Mariano-Hernandez of Lakas-CMD in the 19th Congress, Laguna's 2nd congressional district remains a crucial component in the province's political aspects (Wikipedia contributors, 2024).

C. Population and Sampling

The researchers used Snowball sampling technique to select participants for the study, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of veterinarians' lived experiences regarding euthanasia in stray animals. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling. According to Parker, Scott, & Geddes (2019) ^[6], Snowball sampling is a widely used method in qualitative research characterized by networking and referrals. Researchers start with a few initial contacts who

meet the study criteria and agree to participate. These participants then recommend others who also meet the criteria and might be willing to participate, creating a chain of referrals. This process continues until a target sample size or saturation point is reached.

D. Participants of the Study

The participants in the study fall in the criteria of a total of five (5) veterinarians with work experience for at least two (2) years. The participants who participated in the study using semi structured interviews were all legal age of 26-65, regardless of gender. Participants will be recruited by the researcher via phone or email or enlisted in person to complete the interview question, which will take approximately 15-20 minutes. Interview questions will avoid delving into details about the organization that might make participants reluctant or uncomfortable to participate.

E. Research Instrumentation

For this study, a semi-structured research method will be employed, allowing for a flexible yet systematic approach to data collection. The research instrument will include a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit detailed responses while permitting exploration of unanticipated themes. The researchers utilized semi-structured research as the most appropriate research strategy for the study mainly because the researchers wanted to learn about the emotional and psychological challenges and lived experiences of Veterinarians on Euthanasia within District II of Laguna, Philippines. The interview guide will consist of open-ended questions about the participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding the topic under investigation. Additionally, probes and follow-up questions will be incorporated to delve deeper into specific interest areas or clarify participant responses. This approach aims to balance the structured nature of predetermined questions and the flexibility to adapt the interview process based on participants' responses, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic. The semi structured research method is chosen for its ability to capture rich qualitative data while allowing for participant-driven insights and interpretations. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), this approach enables researchers to gather unrestricted data, investigating participant perspectives, emotions, and opinions on specific subjects, including personal and potentially delicate matters. Semi-structured interviewing combines relational focus with facilitation skills, involving various steps such as defining the study's purpose, selecting participants, organizing logistics, creating an interview guide, building trust, conducting interviews, documenting reflections, analyzing data, ensuring research trustworthiness, and presenting findings effectively.

F. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered relevant information through online news, articles, past studies, and journals. This information was collected subject to the phenomenological analysis that identified recurring themes and patterns of the collected data. However, in formulating the research interview questionnaires, they are based on the theoretical framework of this study that will allow the researchers to analyze and interpret the data in an articulate method.

In conducting their study on the lived experiences of veterinarians, the researchers initially obtained the required

approvals from relevant authorities, including the validators of their interview guide questionnaires. After the research study was reviewed in accordance with the guidelines set by the University's Research Ethics Review Committee and found to align with the ethical principles for research involving human subjects, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and data privacy, the researchers proceeded with their study. Subsequently, they reached out to the selected participants residing in District II, Laguna, either by email or phone call, to confirm their availability.

The participants went through a semi-structured interview in which the researchers gained a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of veterinarians exposed to euthanasia. The preceding participation gives the participants informed consent with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, potential benefits and risks, and procedures. Approvals of the participants were presented through a signed consent form. The researchers ensure the security of the collected data and the confidentiality and privacy of the interviews.

Furthermore, the researchers carefully review information collected from interviews, observations, and written responses. They identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant details relevant to the research question. Each piece of data is examined in its context to ensure its meaning and relevance are accurately understood. The researchers compare different responses to highlight similarities and differences, maintaining a balanced and unbiased perspective.

Lastly, the findings of this study could potentially benefit veterinary professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders by offering insights into the lived experiences of veterinarians exposed to euthanasia, thus informing support systems, policies, and interventions aimed at addressing their needs and promoting their well-being. The data collected for this study will be published in academic papers.

H. Ethical Consideration

Throughout the study, it was imperative for the researchers to actively participate in ethical practices and preemptively address potential ethical concerns. Ensuring the study's

credibility and adherence to ethical standards was prioritized by the researchers, both prior to data collection and during the subsequent analysis phase.

In accordance with the Privacy Act of 2012, the researchers guaranteed that any information shared by participants was anonymized and securely stored to protect their identities and personal experiences. As is typical in research practices, they sought informed consent from the selected respondents before the study began. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the researchers clearly explained the nature of the study so that participants could make an informed decision about their involvement. They also discussed the purpose of the study and how the information would be used. Recognizing that the topic of euthanasia can be emotionally charged, the researchers provided support resources, such as counseling services or debriefing sessions, to help mitigate any potential psychological impacts on the veterinarians involved in the study. They refrained from disclosing any information that could harm the participants and informed them that they could take breaks or postpone the interview if they found it stressful.

3. Results and Discussions

This chapter provides the results of the data analysis and interpretation carried out as part of the phenomenological study that examined the lived experiences of veterinarians in relation to euthanizing stray animals. In order to assess the information gathered from interviews conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, the techniques of inquiry included applying phenomenological reflection. As such, this research is guided by the following central question:

What is the essence of veterinarians' lived experiences in performing euthanasia in animal shelters from District II of Laguna, Philippines?

Meanwhile, the corollary questions have been answered in the tables provided.

Number 1: How do veterinarians in District II of Laguna, Philippines, describe their experience in euthanizing stray animals?

Table 1: Annotated Exemplars on the Impact of Euthanasia on Personal Values and Emotions

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 1	"As a Christian, it's hard because you don't want to end a life, whether it's human or animal... but as a veterinarian, you understand the reasons."	Participant 1 appeared reflective and slightly uneasy when asked about how euthanasia affects personal values.
Participant 4	"Emotionally, of course, it's sad for us too. Ah... we worked hard to take care of them here, and eventually, they stayed with us for a long time."	Participant 4 showed emotional difficulty but maintains confidence as he explains that euthanasia.

When asked about the effect of conducting euthanasia on personal values and emotional response, Participant 1 appeared reflective and slightly uneasy. During the interview, there was a noticeable pause before answering, suggesting the internal conflict that the participant experienced. It can be recognized that the voice carried a tone of emotional heaviness when discussing the personal Christian beliefs, and

it was clear that there is a faith that deeply influences the feelings about ending a life, even when it is to alleviate suffering. Meanwhile, Participant 4 has expressed emotional difficulty when asked the same question during the interview, but the participant maintains confidence as he explains that euthanasia is sometimes the compassionate choice when an animal is suffering or unable to survive. Despite the

melancholy and detachment feeling, there is still hope in his eyes that conducting euthanasia helps the animal.

Interview Question 2: How do you handle criticism from other individuals when you are conducting euthanasia procedures?

Table 2: Annotated Exemplars on the Handling Criticism during Euthanasia Procedures

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 1	"If it's posted on social media, people have different perspectives... because some believe as long as there's life, there's hope."	participant 1 seemed calm and confident while explaining their experiences with criticism
Participant 5	"I explain the procedure well to the client... so they understand why it's necessary."	Participant 5 appeared to be determined to answer the question.

When asked about how they handle criticism from other individuals when they are conducting euthanasia procedures, Participant 1 seemed calm and confident while explaining their experiences with criticism—or lack thereof. There was an air of pride in their proactive communication with clients and colleagues, which appeared to be a source of reassurance. However, when the topic shifted to potential social media backlash, a slight shift in tone indicated discomfort and an underlying anxiety about being misunderstood by those outside the veterinary field. On the other hand, Participant 5 appeared to be determined to answer the question. Adding a statement of how clear communication with clients helps in order to understand why the process had and needed to be done.

Interview Question 3: How do you handle your emotional responses during euthanasia procedures?

Table 3: Annotated Exemplars on the Emotional Responses during Euthanasia

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 2	"You have to disconnect from your feelings... its part of your job."	Participant 2 expressed a sense of detachment, emphasizing the need to disconnect emotions from work.
Participant 1	"Afterward, I pray for the animal and for forgiveness... it helps me cope."	Participant 1 seemed deeply affected by the weight of the procedure, particularly the sense of "failure" to heal the animal.

During the interview regarding how to handle the emotional responses during euthanasia procedures, Participant 2 expressed a sense of detachment, emphasizing the need to disconnect emotions from the task at hand, as euthanasia is part of the job. The topic relates to emotional coping mechanisms in professional duties. When discussing their emotional response during euthanasia, participant 1's voice softened, and their tone grew somber. They seemed deeply affected by the weight of the procedure, particularly the sense of "failure" to heal the animal. They conveyed a strong sense of empathy for the suffering of the animals and the owners,

revealing how much this process weighs on their emotions

Interview Question 4: How do you use different coping strategies to handle the stress of performing euthanasia on animals?

Table 4: Annotated Exemplars on the Coping Strategies for Euthanasia Stress

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 1	"I take a moment alone, go to the restroom, drink water, and calm myself."	Participant 1 appeared thoughtful when describing their coping mechanisms.
Participant 3	"I focus on the other patients... there are always others that need care."	Participant 3 expressed a sense of distraction in relates to handling stress in performing euthanasia.

During the interview, Participant 1 appeared thoughtful when describing their coping mechanisms. Mentioning prayer seemed to bring them a sense of peace, and they smiled faintly when talking about seeking solitude to collect themselves. However, there was a moment of vulnerability when they acknowledged the challenge of transitioning from euthanasia to lighter duties, such as vaccinations. They seemed relieved when discussing how small breaks and self-care help them regain emotional balance. Meanwhile, Participant 3 expressed a sense of distraction, mentioning that they sometimes shift their focus to other confined patients.

Interview Question 5: How does the availability of social support influence your coping efficacy when experiencing emotional distress?

Table 5: Annotated Exemplars on the Influence of Social Support on Coping

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 1	"Sharing with colleagues who understand... they empathize, and it eases the weight."	Participant 1 showed a sense of gratitude of the social support.
Participant 2	"Having friends who support you... it's easier to handle the stress."	Participant 2 expressed relief and appreciation for support.

When asked about the availability of social support influence in coping efficacy when experiencing emotional distress, Participant 1 showed a sense of gratitude. The voice of the participants spoke about the support from friends and colleagues. They seemed comforted by the understanding and empathy they receive from others, which allows them to process their emotions more easily. Their expression brightened slightly when they mentioned how sharing their struggles helps reduce their emotional burden. Further, Participant 2 expressed relief and appreciation for support, highlighting that having friends and others around makes it easier to overcome stress. The topic relates to the importance of social support in coping with stress in professional settings.

Interview Question 6: What part of the euthanasia procedure is the most difficult for you?

Table 6: Annotated Exemplars on the Most Difficult Part of Euthanasia

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 3	"The hardest part is when you inject the medication and the heartbeat stops... it's knowing they're truly gone."	Participant 3 expressed feelings of sadness and sorrow when asked the question.
Participant 1	"It's hard to watch the rescuer cry... knowing the animal won't be there anymore. It will leave behind those who made the effort to take care of the animal."	Participant 1 described the moment as a heavy feeling.

During the interview of asking the part where the euthanasia procedure is the most, Participant 3 expressed feelings of sadness and sorrow, describing the emotional difficulty of witnessing the animal's heartbeat stop, as it signifies the loss of life. On the other hand, Participant 1 described the moment of administering the final injection as a heavy feeling as the tone of the voice lowered and their words slowed down. It was clear that this part of the process is deeply emotional for them. Their voice quivered slightly when talking about the grief of the owners, reflecting their profound empathy and shared sorrow during this difficult moment.

Interview Question 7: What support systems from colleagues do you value most in coping with the ethical dilemmas and emotional challenges associated with euthanasia?

Table 7: Annotated Exemplars on the Value of Colleague Support Systems

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 4	"They tell me it's okay... that it's part of the job, which helps me feel supported."	Participant 5 exudes a noticeable sense of happiness and contentment when reflecting on the support they receive.
Participant 5	"We ask each other for advice, especially if it's a complex case... it helps to know I'm not alone."	Participant 5 shared her perspective with a subtle smile appeared on her face.

Participant 4's happiness and fulfillment are palpable as she discusses the support system that uplifts her. Her radiant aura, described as a subtle glow, reflects the positive energy she exudes. The smile she wears not only enhances her demeanour but also invites others to share in her happiness. This expression of gratitude and warmth reveals the depth of her appreciation for the encouragement and love that surrounds her, creating a sense of connection and positivity that resonates with those around her. Her ability to articulate these feelings further highlights the importance of community and support in fostering emotional well-being. Similarly, when Participant 5 shared her perspective, a subtle smile appeared on her face, adding warmth to her expression.

Interview Question 8: What are the potential impacts on your overall well-being and job satisfaction resulting from your repeated exposure to euthanasia cases?

Table 8: Annotated Exemplars on the Impact of Euthanasia on Well-being and Job Satisfaction

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 3	"Repeated exposure to euthanasia can weigh on your mental health... sometimes you just feel numb."	Participant 3 expressed that nothing has changed in her work.
Participant 5	"I still love my job despite the challenges... it's part of caring for animals."	Participant 5 shows proper composure and confidence while answering the question.

During the interview, participants react to the potential impacts on their overall well-being and job satisfaction resulting from veterinarians repeated exposure to euthanasia cases. Participant 3 expressed emotional moments but noted that nothing has changed in their work, indicating a sense of acceptance despite occasional emotional challenges. The topic relates to emotional responses and the consistency of work in animal care. On the other hand, participant 5 displayed composure and confidence while responding to the question. However, there was a noticeable trace of sadness in her tone, adding depth to her answer.

Interview Question 9: What coping strategies do you typically employ when dealing with the emotional toll of euthanasia?

Table 9: Annotated Exemplars on the Coping Strategies for Euthanasia Emotional Toll

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 5	"I go out with friends or watch a movie to take my mind off things."	Participant 3 maintain a relaxed posture while answering the questions
Participant 1	"I take time alone after each case to process what happened and let myself feel."	Participant 1 spoke more openly, narrating the experience in details.

Asking the participants about the coping strategies they typically employ when dealing with the emotional toll of euthanasia shows Participant 5 appeared to maintain a relaxed posture while sharing her perspective on the question. Meanwhile, participant 1 spoke more openly and casually when discussing coping strategies like stress eating or sharing their feelings with friends. There was a sense of self-awareness and acceptance as they listed simple ways to cope with stress. They seemed more at ease while talking about these lighter aspects, even laughing briefly when mentioning stress eating.

Interview Question 10: What environmental factors, both within and outside the veterinary practice, contribute to the stress experienced by you during euthanasia procedures?

Table 10: Annotated Exemplars on the Environmental Factors Contributing to Stress

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSES	RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATIONS
Participant 5	"Sometimes clients think we're only in it for money... they don't understand the emotional weight."	Participant 5 was observed to be serious.
Participant 4	"Others don't understand why we need to do this because they're not aware; all they think is that we're just killing the animals."	Participant 4 spoke with confidence and clarity as he shared his experiences regarding the stress factors associated with euthanasia.
Participant 1	"They criticize you on social media, things like that. They don't know the reasons behind it, or what's really going on. They don't witness the struggle first-hand."	Participant 1 appeared slightly defensive when discussing the possibility of external criticism from people
Participant 3	"The environment here is busy... we don't have much time to process after each case."	Participant 3 expressed neutrality.

During the interview, in relation to the environmental factors that contribute to the stress experienced by the veterinarian's euthanasia procedures, it was observed that Participant 5 was serious as she answered the question. On the other hand, participant 4 spoke with confidence and clarity as he shared his experiences regarding the stress factors associated with euthanasia. Further, another participant 1 appeared slightly defensive when discussing the possibility of external criticism from people who do not understand the purpose of euthanasia. Their tone reflected frustration with the lack of awareness from others and the judgment that might come from those uninvolved in the process. However, they seemed calm and composed when discussing their clinic environment, indicating satisfaction with how their team manages euthanasia cases. Lastly, Participant 3 expressed neutrality, stating that the situation does not have an impact on them.

Corollary Question Number 2: What recurring themes and patterns emerge from veterinarians' lived experiences as related to animal euthanasia?

Table 11: E merged Themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1. Conflicting Values and Emotional Strain in Conducting Euthanasia	1.1 Moral and Ethical Dilemmas 1.2 Emotional Attachment and Sadness
2. Managing External Criticism and Maintaining Professionalism	2.1 Public Misunderstanding and Social Media Concerns 2.2 Communicating Purpose and Process to Clients
3. Coping Mechanisms to Manage Emotional Impact of Euthanasia	3.1 Emotional Detachment as a Coping Strategy 3.2 Processing Emotions Privately
4. Practical Coping Techniques for Stress Relief	4.1 Seeking Solitude and Self-Care 4.2 Redirecting Focus to Other Patients
5. Importance of Social Support in Easing Emotional Distress	5.1 Validation and Empathy from Colleagues 5.2 Reassurance and Comfort from Friends
6. Emotional Difficulty in the Finality of Euthanasia	6.1 Administering the Final Injection 6.2 Seeing the Rescuer's Grief
7. Collegial Support in Facing Ethical and Emotional Burdens	7.1 Moral Support and Encouragement 7.2 Professional Advice and Insight Sharing
8. Emotional Toll and Resilience Amidst Euthanasia's Impact on Well-Being	8.1 Emotional Exhaustion and Mental Health Strain 8.2 Job Satisfaction and Passion for Animal Care
9. Personal Coping Mechanisms to Manage Euthanasia Stress	9.1 Socializing and Distraction Techniques 9.2 Reflection and Emotional Release
10. Environmental Stressors in Veterinary Euthanasia	10.1 External Judgements and Misunderstanding from Public 10.2 Workplace Pressures and Emotional Fatigue

The table shows the themes identified in the study. As shown in Table 11, subordinate themes are clustered into ten (10) superordinate themes that aim to understand the lived experiences of participating veterinarians. These themes were created based on their statements of their experiences with inclusivity and guided by relevant theories. The identified themes are as follows: Conflicting Values and Emotional Strain in Conducting Euthanasia, Managing External Criticism and Maintaining Professionalism, Coping Mechanisms to Manage Emotional Impact of Euthanasia, Practical Coping Techniques for Stress Relief, Importance of Social Support in Easing Emotional Distress, Emotional

Difficulty in the Finality of Euthanasia, Collegial Support in Facing Ethical and Emotional Burdens, Emotional Toll and Resilience Amidst Euthanasia's Impact on Well-Being, Personal Coping Mechanisms to Manage Euthanasia Stress, Environmental Stressors in Veterinary Euthanasia.

I. DISCUSSION

As an output of this study, a Program Title: "Project PAWS: Promoting Awareness, Well-being, and Support" is a proposed initiative designed to support veterinarians who regularly face the emotional and ethical challenges associated with performing euthanasia on stray animals within animal shelters. This program aims to improve the well-being of

veterinary professionals while fostering a compassionate, structured approach to euthanasia practices. The following are the general objectives and components of the program:

General Objectives

- Address the mental and emotional impact of euthanasia decisions: Project PAWS aims to provide veterinarians with the necessary tools and support to manage the emotional stress related to euthanasia, ensuring their mental health is prioritized.
- Create a safe and supportive community for veterinary professionals: The program will foster an environment of peer support, where veterinarians can share their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies with one another in a safe, non-judgmental space.
- Implement standardized euthanasia protocols: The program will ensure that all veterinarians have access to clear, compassionate, and ethical guidelines for euthanasia decisions, with an emphasis on both animal welfare and professional well-being.

Table 12: Project PAWS: Promoting Awareness, Well-being, and Support

Goals and Objective	Activities	Person Responsible	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
To provide Mental Health Support and Counseling	"Paws in the Park": Building Bonds and Gathering	Team Leader	Every Weekend	Reduced stress, anxiety, and burnout; Improved emotional well-being
To implement Structured Euthanasia Protocols and Compassionate Handling	"Paws and Peace": Educational Program and Peaceful Communication	Team Leader	Once a Month	Improved euthanasia practices; Ethical decisions; Increased confidence in handling euthanasia
To cultivate a Supportive Veterinary Community	"Pawsitive Community": Mental Health Workshop and Animal Interactions	Team Leader	Quarterly (4 times per year)	Stronger peer support network; Enhanced job satisfaction; Reduced professional isolation

1. **"Paws in the Park": Building Bonds and Gathering** – This weekly gathering is designed to provide mental health support and counseling for veterinary professionals. The name emphasizes the importance of connection and support, much like the way a community comes together in a park. The program will meet every weekend at a designated location. During these sessions, participants will engage in sharing a "binalot" while having a "kamustahan" in the gathering. Most Filipinos enjoy food while having a conversation about their happenings in life. This activity would promote emotional well-being and provide a space to discuss mental health challenges. The gatherings will focus on stress reduction, anxiety relief, and burnout prevention, offering an opportunity for veterinary professionals to bond, share experiences, and receive counseling from trained experts. This initiative aims to create a supportive environment that helps participants navigate the emotional demands of their profession. Regular attendance is encouraged to build a consistent support system within the veterinary community.
2. **"Paws and Peace": Educational Program and Peaceful Communication** – This program is designed to implement structured euthanasia protocols and promote compassionate handling in veterinary practice. The program will be held at least once a month, offering

training and educational sessions led by veterinary experts and team leaders. Participants will engage in discussions and workshops focused on ethical decision-making in euthanasia, compassionate communication with pet owners, and proper handling techniques for animals during their final moments. These sessions are aimed at improving euthanasia practices, ensuring veterinary professionals make informed, ethical decisions with confidence. The program will create a space where professionals can learn and practice these sensitive skills, helping to navigate these difficult decisions with compassion and care. Regular participation is recommended to ensure veterinary professionals stay updated on best practices and gain the confidence needed to handle these challenging situations.

3. **"Pawsitive Community: Mental Health Workshop and Animal Interactions"** – This initiative aims to cultivate a supportive veterinary community by providing workshops focused on mental health and well-being, as well as opportunities for positive animal interactions. The program will be held quarterly (4 times per year) and is designed to create a space for veterinary professionals to connect, share experiences, and foster a sense of community. Each session will include mental health workshops that focus on stress management, coping

strategies, and reducing professional isolation. Participants will also engage in therapeutic animal interactions that promote relaxation and emotional healing. This program is intended to build a stronger peer support network, improve job satisfaction, and reduce feelings of isolation within the veterinary profession. Regular participation is encouraged to help strengthen the sense of community and enhance overall well-being.

4. Conclusion

This study delved into the emotional, ethical, and professional challenges veterinarians face when euthanizing stray animals, addressing three pivotal research questions. It aimed to understand how veterinarians articulate their experiences with euthanasia, uncover recurring themes in these experiences, and recommend interventions to alleviate the emotional and professional burden associated with this process. The research was conducted among veterinarians in District II of Laguna, Philippines, who encounter these challenges in their daily practice. Their responses provided a detailed account of the complexities of euthanasia, including its emotional weight and the ethical conflicts it entails.

The study's findings revealed that veterinarians experience significant ethical dilemmas when making euthanasia decisions, often torn between compassion for the animals and the necessity to relieve their suffering. Participants described how their professional obligations frequently clash with personal emotions, particularly when euthanizing animals, they have grown attached to. These ethical conflicts are compounded by a lack of understanding from the public, which adds to their emotional strain. The study identified these challenges as central to the recurring themes shared by the veterinarians, offering insight into the unique pressures of their roles.

Recurring themes such as emotional attachment, sadness, and coping mechanisms emerged from the veterinarians' narratives. Emotional attachment was particularly highlighted, as many participants shared the difficulty of maintaining professional detachment while developing bonds with animals in their care. This emotional connection, while humanizing, heightened the sadness and ethical struggles during euthanasia. Coping strategies, such as seeking peer support, engaging in self-care, and finding solace in prayer or mindfulness, were also emphasized as critical for managing the mental and emotional toll of euthanasia.

The study further examined the external factors contributing to veterinarians' challenges, such as workplace pressures and public misunderstandings. Many participants described how the high demands of their work environment, coupled with grief-stricken pet owners, intensified the stress of performing euthanasia. Public misconceptions about the necessity and ethics of euthanasia added another layer of complexity, often forcing veterinarians to justify their actions. These external factors not only exacerbated the emotional toll but also underscored the need for better communication and public awareness about the realities of veterinary euthanasia.

Based on the findings, the study underscores the importance of implementing interventions to support veterinarians in managing the emotional and ethical weight of euthanasia. Suggested interventions include providing mental health resources, creating peer support networks, and fostering a more understanding public through education and awareness campaigns. Additionally, improving workplace conditions and offering targeted training on stress management were

identified as vital steps to alleviate the burden veterinarians face. These measures could help professionals maintain their emotional resilience and enhance their ability to perform their duties effectively.

In conclusion, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional, ethical, and professional challenges veterinarians face during euthanasia and highlights their coping strategies. By addressing the research questions, the study emphasizes the multifaceted pressures of their work and the necessity for targeted interventions. It advocates for systemic changes that prioritize the well-being of veterinarians while fostering empathy and understanding from the public. Ultimately, the study serves as a foundation for further research and practical measures to support veterinarians in navigating the complex realities of their profession.

5. References

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