

Distance to Care: Navigating Lived Experiences of Residents in Selected Rural Barangays of Rizal Province in Public Health Care Access

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This study explored the experiences of residents in selected rural barangays of Rizal, regarding accessibility to local health services, focusing on how healthcare availability, economic factors, and perceptions of government programs affect well-being. The study was motivated by persistent inequalities in rural healthcare, where residents often struggle to receive reliable and compassionate medical support. Despite active government programs, such as the Universal Health Care Law (Republic Act 11223, 2019) and PhilHealth Konsulta, little is known about how people perceive and cope with these gaps. Most prior research focuses on structural or numerical access, leaving a substantial gap in understanding the human experience—the feelings, meanings, and coping strategies involved. Guided by a qualitative descriptive research design with reflexive thematic analysis, fourteen participants were purposefully selected to share their stories through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) accessibility of healthcare services, (2) socioeconomic challenges and financial burdens, and (3) perceived effectiveness and limitations of local health programs. Findings indicate that accessibility is constrained by poverty, transportation barriers, and inconsistent service delivery. Residents reported anxiety, frustration, and emotional exhaustion, showing that limited accessibility impacts both physical and mental health. The study highlights the need for inclusive, community-focused healthcare strategies that address structural and psychological barriers, strengthen trust, and enhance overall well-being in rural populations.

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