

# ALONE TOGETHER: EXPERIENCES OF SOLO LIBRARIANS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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## Abstract

*This qualitative study describes the experiences of some solo librarians in the Philippines. With the existence of many libraries managed by librarians working alone or solo, there is still a lack of local literature on this. Therefore, this study aims to provide a better understanding of how solo librarians cope with their work and responsibilities as they manage their respective libraries. A preliminary survey was conducted to determine the respondents who would later voluntarily participate in the study. Through semi-structured interviews, four (4) librarians shared their challenges motivations and views working as a solo librarian, as well as the challenges they have and have been encountering. While many of them experience stress and burn out, administration-related difficulties, and professional isolation, they remain to be motivated by their freedom and independence as professional librarians, familiarity, and altruism.*

**Keywords:** solo librarian, one-person libraries, library management

## Introduction

Managing a library is not an easy task, and managing it alone entails a more significant challenge. In the foreword of the book *How to Thrive as a Solo Librarian*, Valerie Nye said that a librarian working alone is the primary advocate of all the library services and collection (Smallwood & Clapp, 2012). Solo librarians are responsible for all aspects of management from collection development, cataloging, reader's services and reference services, and may also perform menial tasks like arranging books and dusting shelves. Being the primary advocate and sole professional in the library, the term for this position has many names: solo librarian, one-person library (OPL), only professional librarian, sole-charge librarian, and one-man band library (Siess, 2004). However,

these terms or names and even their importance were actually not given substantial recognition forty-seven years ago. It was only when Guy St. Clair first used the term One-Person Library in the 1972 annual conference of the Special Library Association (SLA) in Boston, Massachusetts, and published the first article about one-person library when attention was given to these one-person libraries and solo librarians. In the later years, St. Clair, together with other librarians, published newsletters and other materials related to one-person libraries, and conducted trainings for solo librarians (Siess, 2003). In the 1988 annual conference of SLA, under the initiative of Martha Rose Rhine, the Solo Librarian Caucus of the SLA, presently known as Solo Librarians Division was formed. They used the term solo to

avoid confusion because “One-Person Library” during that time was already a commercial application (St. Clair & Williamson, 1992). Furthermore, Rhine reiterated that the word solo was like implying artists with talents. The members of the caucus then defined themselves as “isolated librarian or information collector/collector or provider who had no professional peers within the immediate organization” (St. Clair & Williamson, 1992, p. 3). The latter definition was deemed to be more encompassing since this category included either a professional librarian or an information provider working as a manager in the library.

Aside from the evolution of names or how solo librarians were called, St. Clair and Williamson (1992), stated four typical situations that led to the emergence of solo librarians: incorporated need, discovered need, negative need, and minimal need. Incorporated need pertains to the institution’s requirement to provide information centers since they are essential to the nature of their work. Discovered need is realized when overtime, institutions need to organize their information materials, thus the need for a librarian arises. The negative need, on the other hand, is when institutions decide not to have more than one librarian because they cannot afford to hire more. Lastly, the minimal need emerges when a library is small and one person can practically manage it alone. Having these situations, there has been a steady increase in the number of solo librarians. In 1986, the estimated number of solo librarians was 4000 and an increase was noted in 2004 by more than 12,000 in SLA alone (St. Clair & Williamson, 1992; Siess, 2004). These figures show that solo librarians are continuously growing in quantity. Aside from Solo Librarian Divisions of SLA, there were other interest groups for the OPL such as One-Person Library Group, Chicago Area Solo Librarians in the US, OMB (One-Man Band) Group in United Kingdom, Australia’s One-Person Australian Libraries (OPAL), and OPL-Kommission-fur One-Person Librarians in Germany (Powdwal, 2007; Siess, 2003). Solo librarians are present in all types of

libraries—public, school, academic, or special—but more common in special libraries. Some libraries where solo librarians work at are prison or jail libraries, hospital libraries, museum or zoo libraries, church or synagogue libraries, public libraries, public or private school libraries (Siess, 2003).

In the Philippines, there is still no definite number of Filipino solo librarians and no specific interest group is dedicated to them. The organizations that professional solo librarians may join are the Association of Special Libraries in the Philippines (ASLP), Medical and Health Librarians Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP), Philippine Association of School Librarians, Inc. (PASLI), and the Philippine Librarians Association, Inc. (PLAI), which is the Accredited Professional Organization (APO) of librarians in the Philippines. Aside from not having given so much focus on solo librarians in terms of membership to a specific interest group just like the ones in other countries, the distinction of the status, needs, challenges, and various motivations of Filipino solo librarians is likewise unclear.

Thus, being a solo librarian for five years, I recognize the importance of studies about Filipino solo librarians. On a personal note, I find it interesting to know how fellow solo librarians manage and run their libraries. Having experienced challenges in my own responsibilities as a solo librarian, the purpose of this study is to determine how Filipino solo librarians thrive and survive their lone positions in their libraries. Some might think that this study does not offer anything new, because solo librarians do the same tasks that other librarians do. But, what has been overlooked by many is that doing library work alone can also be a different story. Hence, this paper aims to give voice to those librarians working alone, so that their stories can be heard, and their needs can hopefully be addressed. This study focuses on the experiences of selected solo librarians in different types of libraries in the Philippines. Although the SLA defines solo librarians as professional librarians and other information professionals, this study only includes registered librarians according to Republic

Act No. 9246 or The Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003.

### Related Literature

A review of related literature was conducted about the solo librarians using both print and electronic resources found in the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies Library and Miguel de Benavides Library of the University of Santo Tomas. Few books were found in the two libraries discussing solo librarians. Due to limited demands for research on solo librarians, only few books and resources were available in these two libraries. Although the term "solo librarians," yielded a thousand results in online searches. Most of the publications were handbook and manual in nature and were written by solo librarians themselves based on their experiences — these served as guide to librarians on how they would manage their libraries well. However, there are only a few empirical research (Powdwal, 2007). In the Philippines, Cruz (2014) conducted a research on the current state of one-person libraries in foreign language and cultural centers in Metro Manila, especially their best practices and the technology they used as aid in providing information services. This study is just a tip of the iceberg of what lies in the Philippine solo librarianship since it only focused on a single type of library. With that said, this paper provides a general overview of Philippine solo librarians working in different library settings.

In 2018, Mc Laughlin et al. conducted a census of solo health librarians, and this uncovered the needs and challenges faced by solo librarians in the health care setting. Three hundred eighty-three (383) solo medical librarians from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, United Kingdom, Africa, Argentina, and South Africa participated in the said study. As earlier mentioned, in the Philippines, Cruz (2014) conducted a pioneer study by studying technologies used by one-person libraries in some foreign language and cultural centers in Metro Manila. His output was a manual about the best practices regarding the technologies used in those libraries. These studies are focused only on one kind of library. These proved that there were still

many possibilities for future research. One can broaden solo librarianship in different types of libraries.

Using the literature available, the following were identified as the everyday challenges of solo librarians: professional isolation, lack of clerical support, lack of management support and dealing with non-librarian supervisors, budget, and anxiety and burn out (Keogh, 2006; Siess, 1999; Siess, 2004; Moniz & Slutzky, 2016; Bryant, 1995; McLaughlin et al., 2018) Since institutions were only manned by single professional librarian, librarians might feel alone because of lack of feedback and interaction. But this challenge could be solved through networking (Siess, 2004). Moreover, it was for the purpose that several interest groups were formed to create interaction among solo librarians. According to Church (2011), the advancement of "technological interconnectedness" proved that a solo librarian was "definitely not alone." Nickel (2011) also added said that it was through sharing and collaboration that a librarian may conquer isolation. Lack of management and clerical support because of reporting to a non-supervisor also posed a significant challenge. It was because some managers might not recognize the need and the importance of the library. This could also lead to budget cuts and lack of funding. In the article by Anderson (2011), she suggested that one of the tips to get grants and funding for school libraries, was to share the vision of library to the administrators, or to collaborate through social media and other local funding. Another obstacle for solo librarians was anxiety and burnout. Doing all task alone could be tiresome overtime. To overcome this, Moniz and Slutzky (2016) suggested using mindfulness and meditation. It could be said that despite issues and challenges solo librarianship faced, what was certain was that there was available literature that could help them overcome these setbacks.

Despite the many cons in solo librarianship, there were also pros in being sole professional in the organization. Some of the reasons why people worked in a one-person library were independence, variety and satisfaction, and power. Some would

value independence, where they may plan on their own and manage their own time and resources (Siess, 2004; Keogh, 2006). St. Clair (1997) discussed how solo librarians achieved freedom through power and influence pyramid using three factors: political awareness, shared vision, and partnership with the management. He also said that power was necessary to provide excellent service, and quality service was the priority of solo librarians. This was evident in Powdwall's (2007) dissertation, wherein she measured the perceived role of solo librarians and their locus of control. Although the solo librarians in Mumbai maintained a high locus of control, other non-solo librarians showed a higher locus of control compared to solo librarians. Solo librarians were indeed independent, but this did not mean that they were alone. Collaboration was still vital for active management libraries. It was also assumed that the emergence of many blogs of librarians working solo and their positive feedbacks on how they were surviving as a sole library professional was an excellent indicator of how their job could be rewarding. These challenges and motivations collected in the review were a good starting point whether the same issue applies to Filipino librarians.

Another aspect of the general study about solo librarianship was their professional development. Bryant (1995) noted that the development of solo librarians was both professional and personal since not all learnings came from formal training and courses. There were also some which were learned informally like searching the web and reading self-help books. Hornung (2015) conducted a study about the views of continuing professional development (CPD) of solo librarians in Ireland. She categorized their views on five orientations of librarians regarding the CPDs. These were service orientation for the sake of organization/library service; library and information science profession orientation in order to develop as a professional librarian; OPL orientation because it helped them in the nature of their work; the personal orientation where they wanted to improve and applied what they learned; and lastly, the life-learning orientation that believed

that CPD was for development as human being. This did not only lead to her findings that there were different types of CPDs needed by solo librarians, but also enhanced the profile of solo librarians in Ireland.

Unquestionably, these studies showed the importance of researches about solo librarians; these could bring more solo librarians into collaboration and interconnectedness; to see themselves as part of larger groups, to voice their concerns, and to envision their possibilities. But almost all the prior studies mentioned above were conducted in other countries except for the bachelor's thesis of Cruz. These reasons also encouraged me to pursue this topic where Philippine solo librarianship is still unexplored.

### Methodology

This qualitative study aims to understand the experiences, including the motivations and challenges faced by solo librarians in the Philippines through phenomenological lens. Phenomenology focuses on understanding people's lived experiences (Creswell, 2003), and in this study, I investigated the experiences of solo librarians. In order to identify possible participants, I conducted a preliminary survey using Google Forms that were disseminated through four (4) Facebook groups of Philippine librarians namely: PLAI Officers and Members, Librarian Ako, Association of Special Libraries of the Philippines, and MAHLAP Members. This preliminary survey was open for responses for one week in order to determine the basic profile of solo librarians/information providers who would voluntarily want to be part of the study and be interviewed later. Participants were interviewed based on their mode of preference (asynchronous online interview via Google Form or e-mail, phone interview, and personal interview). I used a semi-structured type of interview, wherein even though there was a set of questions, I could still include follow-up questions in response to the participant's answers and comments (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). For those who opted to do asynchronous online interview, follow-up questions were sent through their e-mails for clarifications and further

information. For personal interviews, observation was also used as an accompanying method to collect significant data.

### Results and Analysis

After a week of collecting data in the preliminary survey, I received 29 responses from solo librarians/information professions in different types of libraries. Twelve librarians expressed their willingness to participate in a brief interview to share their experiences as a solo librarian/information professional. Eight persons worked in an academic library, one school librarian, one librarian in the public sector, and two librarians in special libraries. I communicated with the eight librarians through the information they provided in the pre-survey. But only four voluntarily participated in the interview. Three librarians were from academic libraries and one from special sector. Two librarians answered through Google Forms, one through phone call, and one librarian through personal interview. For confidentiality and ethical reasons, three of them chose not to reveal their real names hence, they chose their own alias except for Thelma who preferred to use her own name.

### Profiles of Solo Librarians and their Libraries

The following were the profiles of the solo librarians who voluntarily participated in the study, and were interviewed:

“Thomas,” a solo academic/special librarian for about 4-6 years. He manages a theological academic library with at least 140 clients. At the same time, he supervises a library for K-10 about 250 students. The academic library has an estimate of 40,000 collection of monographs and 5,000 bound journals and additional collection of 2,000 monographs for K-10 students. He works together with one non-licensed librarian and a teacher/paraprofessional with 15 years of library experience.

“Muslim,” a librarian for more than 15 years and a solo librarian for 6 months. She works in a community college in an urban area and has less than 1000 clients with 7,000 print collection alone. She has one support staff.

“Maria,” an academic librarian in a medical school. She has been working for about 10 to 15 years. She has one library assistant and one library clerk. Her library has about 4,800 collection of print books with additional online resources and subscriptions, and caters around 1000 clients. Her organization is part of a larger institution but has a separate and independent management.

Thelma is the librarian of Armed Forces of the Philippines Health Service Command (AFPHSC) Library. This is a special medical library exclusive for hospital staff, including consultants, officers, nurses, resident interns, and on-the-job trainees. It also caters to its civilian employees and students with around four thousand collections of print resources. She is a professional librarian working solo for fifteen years.

All four solo librarians became solo because of the minimal need of the institution they serve, as defined earlier by St. Clair and Williamson (1992). These libraries follow the the minimum requirements of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for the required number of librarians. Their libraries are considered small in terms of the clients they served. Although three of them are considered academic librarians, each of them serves specialized clients: religious, college and high school students, and medical students. Their number of years of service is also diverse.

### Nature of Work

Solo librarians do not only perform traditional library work such as cataloging, acquisition, collection development, reference and information service, circulation, but also other tasks such as maintaining the cleanliness of the library. All participants have demanding workloads as solo librarians. Thelma shared that she also maintains the cleanliness of her library since she has no support staff/ library clerk. Maria described her typical day of work as extremely busy, and this also happens to Muslim where she always has to be in a hurry if there is something needed to be submitted or students need to check out some materials in the library counter. Being alone in the library also means lesser time to do all things at the same time. Thomas said that they have a

**Table 1**

*Some of the Responses Describing the Nature of Solo Librarians' Everyday Work*

Name of Respondent	Response
Thelma	"I also have to maintain the hygiene of the library. So I'm a housekeeper as well as a librarian"
Thomas	"In the academic library, we have a very sizable backlog, not to mention mis-catalogued items. I haven't started on the classification of the school library. I just shelved them under hundreds classification"
Maria	<p>"well <i>busyng</i> busy <i>kasi</i> aside from traditional work like cataloging, acquisition, <i>sa</i> service, staggered breaks... <i>so may mga</i> times <i>na kelangan ko din magservice</i>"</p> <p>(Translation: "Well, we're very busy because aside from traditional work like cataloging, acquisition, in [library] service [we have] staggered breaks, so there are times we also need to render services.")</p>
Muslim	<p>"<i>Windang talaga ako</i> from Monday to Friday. <i>Tumatakbo ako kapag kelangan may isubmit akong</i> communication or correspondence, and I have to ask students to <i>pakitingnan ang counter kasi kelangan ako sa office ng ganitong boss</i>"</p> <p>(Translation: "I feel so torn between tasks from Monday to Friday. I am running in a hurry if I need to submit a communication or correspondence, and [then] I have to ask students to kindly look after the [library] counter because I need to go first to our boss' office.")</p>

significant backlog of uncatalogued books. Table 1 presents some of the quotations from the interviews describing the nature of the solo librarians' everyday work.

### **Overcoming Challenges/ Difficulties as Solo Librarians**

All the participants mentioned that one of the challenges of being solo is the amount of workload that they have. The workload is overwhelming and they only have little time to do them. "We [solo librarians] have broad responsibilities that may lead to stress and burnout," Thomas shared, "to avoid stress, I make it a point to leave the work to my workplace and try to become realistic about what I could do and should do." On the other hand, Thelma and Maria demonstrated their optimism by taking everything as a challenge to handle multitasking and having a sense of fulfillment in doing the work alone.

Helping hands are also important in balancing their work. Maria said that she is blessed to have good and reliable staff. On the other hand, Muslim asked for five hours of library duty from those students who had late library registration. Table 2 presents some quoted responses from the librarians.

Aside from being overwhelmed with work, another challenge for Thomas, Muslim and Maria is dealing with administrative matters such as having non-librarian supervisors and lack of strong support from the administration. One example of this, is that Thomas faces difficulty because of the adjustment that he needs to due to the change of management styles. But despite this, he feels somewhat valued in the institution. While he feels that his opinion about the library is being respected and the library clients are always grateful to him, the management is not allocating enough budget for additional library staff

and the salary he receives is low. The same is true with Muslim, in which she sometimes feels that she is not being valued because the people in the administration do not visit the library and do not ask her how the library is. She also shared that the administration removed one of her support staff. She then emphasized the importance of good communication skills so that the administration to understand and support the library. In Maria's case, she used to have difficulty in earning the trust of the administration since she was young and new. She had to seek approval to head librarians of their parent institution before they (administration) would adopt her decision. But through years, she has earned their trust and has proven her worth as a solo librarian.

Table 3 presents some of the thoughts of the librarians on the challenges they face with regard to their administration, and how they cope with and overcome them.

Lack of mentorship is also a struggle for Thomas because being the only licensed professional librarian in their institution means that there is no one to ask for advice whenever he is in doubt. This may also be considered as professional isolation. He manages to overcome this by communicating with professional colleagues outside of his library, reading relevant materials, and pursuing further studies. On a personal note, I share the same sentiments with Thomas, as I also started being a solo librarian without any

**Table 2**

*Some of the Responses Describing the Difficulties of Solo Librarians*

Name of Respondent	Response
Muslim	<p>“One thing <i>na</i> manifest <i>kapag</i> solo <i>ka</i> is there is too much to handle with your two hands, two feet, one head, and how complex library services, how complex information needs and wants... <i>Minsan isang buong klase ang pupunta dito habanapin isang libro</i>”</p> <p>(Translation: “One thing that manifests when you are working solo is that there is too much to handle with your two hands, two feet, one head and how complex library services, how complex information needs and wants... Sometimes the entire class would come here and look for one book.”)</p>
Thomas	<p>“The stress of the job, you worry about the needs of the library, the communities served, and the expectations that you have for what you want yourself or the library to be. This I mitigate by leaving work to the workplace and being realistic about what I can do/ should do.”</p>
Thelma	<p>“Some of my difficulties are: Lack of personnel, and broad responsibilities. However, it challenges me to handle multitasking duties.”</p>
Maria	<p>“Difficulty, <i>syempre pag mag-isa ka lang ikaw lahat ang trabaho... Matrabaho nga lang kasi ikaw lahat, cataloging, ikaw din magseservice, acquisitions... so yun challenge siya difficult siya kasi overwhelming siya most of the time. Pero yun parang rewarding din kasi nakaya ko yun mag-isa</i>”</p> <p>(Translation: “Difficulty, of course if you are the only one [in the library], you do the job alone. It takes a lot of work, because you do everything, you also do [reference] service, acquisitions... so it is a difficult challenge because it’s overwhelming most of the time. But I think it is rewarding also because I could do all of it by myself.”)</p>

**Table 3**  
*Some of the Responses Describing the Challenges of Solo Librarians Regarding Administration*

Name of Respondent	Response
Thomas	<p>“The previous administration took no stock with written strategic plans, so I have got to the habit of merely having them in my head (one of the primary reasons for one is coordination with the wider institution). However, with the change in administration, I need to get back to having a formal planning process. (An aside is the sheer amount of time you "waste" by going through the bureaucracy because there's no one else who you can pass that task off to)”</p>
Muslim	<p>“Competencies, communication skill as professional, <i>kasi minsan ang hirap nai-communicate yung value, importance the bawat phase sa library process... articulation ng professional kailangan kasi minsan you have to translate it to their language kasi may cultural differences. Yung mga factors nakaka-affect sa success, or di ko alam tawag dun pero that's what I find kasi kung di mo to matranslate ng maayos at i-communicate mo lang na ito ang kailangan sa library mahirap silang mapersuade kasi iba ang level of perception nila 'pag dating sa library compliance...”</i></p> <p>(Translation: “Competencies, communication skill as professional, because sometimes it is hard to communicate the value, importance of each phase of the library process... this needs articulation from a professional, because there are times that you need to translate it to their language as there are cultural differences. About the factors that affect success, or I am not sure how it is called, but that's what I find, because if you cannot appropriately translate and communicate that you need something for the library, it is hard to persuade them due to their different perception in terms of library compliance.”)</p>
Maria	<p>“At first, <i>'yun nga dahil bata pa ako</i> that time <i>tapos wala kang immediate boss tapos andito na ako agad parang</i> considered <i>kasi na medical institution kami so kaunti lang 'yung may experience sa academe... so parang hindi sila ganun ka-confident sa'kin</i> as a decision maker for I was young and <i>parang walang mag-dedefend sa'kin ng decisions. Pero as I go along I think I have proven myself of their confidence and their trust, so parang fulfillment sa'kin na parang kabiti bata ako sa tingin nila mayroong time na hindi ko na kailangang hingin 'yung approval ng dalawang libraries.</i>  <i>Now they [administration] said I am equivalent to five librarians dan”</i></p> <p>(Translation: “At first, because I was still younger then, and I had no immediate boss, and I was already here which is considered as a medical institution so there were only a few who had experience in the academe...so they were not confident with me as a decision-maker for I was young and it seemed like there was no one who could defend my decisions.”)</p>

previous experience. At first, I wanted to quit but I accepted it as a challenge with the help of the previous librarian, and other librarians. I also decided to pursue further studies, and it helped me cope with this difficulty. On the other hand, Maria received some trainings from the parent larger

organization of the library before she eventually started to manage the library. Receiving mentorship, education and training, and professional development are recognized by the respondents to be important in overcoming the challenges as solo librarians.

## Motivations

Thomas and Maria consider freedom and independence as rewards of being solo librarians. Solo librarians have the freedom to run his/her library. According to Thomas, the library is the reflection of the librarian. Maria also said that doing things alone makes her more independent. She also pointed out the fulfillment of doing something alone is different from doing it with others. The librarians shared some of their experiences on how they get motivated:

*"I find it rewarding the fact that when you talk about "your" library, you mean it in a more literal way than usual as "the" librarian of the library. You get freer reign on how the library is to be run (depending on the administration/resources) There is responsibility commensurate of course, as the short comings of the library must necessarily reflect on you as well."*

-Thomas

*"Kabit ikaw labat gumawa, ikaw labat 'yung nagtrabaho, 'pag tinanong nila ikaw,dahil ikaw 'yung gumawa alam mo agad 'yung sagot wala ka na dapat i-consult wala ka na iche-check sa system, 'pag kasi ikaw 'yung nag-encode naalaala mo na. Tapos 'yung sense of fulfillment, mahirap siya, 'yung sense na nagawa ko kabit ako lang mag-isa, iba 'yun compared sa may kasama ka."*

-Maria

(Translation: "Even though you're the one who does all the work, when they ask you, you already know the answer and you don't need to ask anyone or check the system since you did the encoding and you can remember it. Then the sense of fulfillment, the work is difficult but I have this sense of accomplishment that I did these things, and this is different compared to others who have others assisting them. – Maria)

Familiarity is another motivation being a solo librarian. Since the library is small, it is easier to get acquainted with its collection and clients. The librarians would know every patron from their library and that would make it easier for them to provide service because they already know what they would need. This is also true for Thomas who

said that he could provide library service for everyone. Moreover, Thelma appreciates how helping her medical clients makes them return kindness in their own way.

*"Libraries such as these also mean that you have more of a relationship with your users/patrons; the community is small in number and you transact with everyone at some point or another."*

-Thomas

*"In some cases there is advantage, like you are well-known to your clients. When you need help in the hospital your clients prioritize you in the ward."*

-Thelma

Muslim and Thomas are also inspired to serve as solo librarians knowing that they would be of help to their community, as they shared:

*"I really did not apply for big libraries, mindset ko, ung big schools they can afford to have more while 'yung community college kailangan din nila ng librarian at nahibirapan silang maghanap so I am more in the advocacy of information dissemination, 'yung mga ganong advocacy 'yung...ganun tayo di ba? So sabi ko kung ito 'yung makakatulong sa community, I might consider"*

-Muslim

(Translation: I really did not apply for big libraries, my mindset was the big schools could afford to have more [librarians], but the community college also needed a librarian and it would be difficult for them to find one, so I am more in the advocacy of information dissemination, this advocacy, we're like this, right? So, I said if this is what could help the community, I might consider [to stay as a solo librarian]" – Muslim)

*"I am motivated by knowing that in some small way, I contribute to the community that I serve, to the profession, to the needs of the country. That in serving them, I hope to serve in a way pleasing God. And I am sometimes amazed that by being surrounded by books and helping others to find out what they want to know, I get paid and even help my family"*

-Thomas

Their experiences above prove that working alone also has advantages. As stated in literature, freedom, and independence are common motivations of solo librarians. Moreover, Filipino solo librarians also value service orientation and community advocacy by choosing to stay in the institution where they could be of great help.

### The Future

Participants were asked about if they would want to stay as solo librarians. Muslim and Maria both replied that they hope that they would not stay and

work solo because their institutions are growing in population. While Thelma would stay solo until the date of her retirement. On the other hand, Thomas would look for another library to serve but might consider staying if the work load and salary would be better. Being employed as a solo librarian could be a coincidence, but staying solo would also be another choice. While the librarians are motivated and are able to overcome some of the challenges in their work, their perceptions of their current place and plans for the future vary, as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Some of the Responses Describing the Perceptions of Solo Librarians About their Current Situation and Future Plans*

Name of Respondent	Response
Muslim	<p>“I would rather say in the meantime <i>tyatyagain ko na to habang ito muna ‘yung capacity ng institution where I belong. But come to time na mag-mature sila they’ll be able to find way para madagdagan. No one siguro would want na gusto ko ‘yan kasi solo lang ako I would say walang ganun. Ang meron na sa sabihin na wala akong magagawa kasi solo item lang talaga ‘yung available for now, pero here is another professional librarian to be teamed... much better kasi two heads are better than one of our own”</i></p> <p>(Translation: “I would rather say in the meantime, I will stick to this job since this is my institution’s capacity. But, if the time comes that they will mature, they will be able to find a way to add [more librarians]. Maybe no one would say they want to work solo, I would say there is no such thing. They would say, I can do nothing about it because there is only solo item available, but there will be another professional librarian, it would be much better because two heads are better than one of our own.”)</p>
Maria	<p>“<i>Sino ba ang ayaw ng kasama? Parang di ko bet na maging solo forever, kung papalarin mabigyan ako kasama kasi hindi naman paliit ang aming institution, palaki sya...”</i></p> <p>(Translation: “Who doesn’t want to have some company? I think I don’t like to be solo forever, if I will be lucky to be given company because our institution is not getting smaller, it gets bigger...”)</p>
Thelma	<p>“Yes, I am happy and contented in my position and want to retire in this center with my service reputation intact, source of family pride.”</p>
Thomas	<p>“Beyond that, I might go looking for another library to serve. This mostly because of the pay and the workload. Should the pay be raised (to support the family) and they get a librarian for the grade school library (I originally applied for the academic library), then I would likely stay specially since I like where I am now and feel fulfilled doing the work that I do.”</p>

## Conclusion

This study presents the lived experiences of Filipino solo librarians. The participating librarians in this study may be limited, but the experiences they shared show the challenges and motivations of librarians working alone that are often not getting attention in the professional practice and library administration. However, their positive outlook in facing these encounters are quite notable. Indeed, working solo has its cons and pros and may not be a job for everyone.

This paper is just an initial and humble attempt to provide an overview of the experiences of solo librarians in the Philippines. For further research, this study hopes to gather and get to know more solo librarians in the Philippines, including the factors that make them stay or leave, their work transition and knowledge transfer within their libraries, their ways to overcome their perceived professional isolation, and their goal to have continuing professional development. As a solo librarian myself, I hope that someday there would be specific interest groups for Philippine solo librarians, where we can share our stories, struggles, and experiences. These will serve as avenues for us to encourage and to learn from one another. Finally, even though solo librarians are the only professional information providers in their respective institutions, they/we are not alone because studies like this bring us together.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

1. How do you describe your library?  
(In terms of the size of collection,

number of your clients)

2. How do you describe your typical day at work as a solo librarian / information provider?
3. How did you become a solo librarian? Did you become a solo librarian because of your own choice or by coincidence?
4. What are your challenges/difficulties as a solo librarian / information provider? How do you overcome them?
5. What aspects of solo librarians do you find rewarding? What are your motivations as a solo librarian?
6. Do you think you are valued in your institution? Why or why not?
7. What are your plans for your career? Do you want to stay in your position as solo librarian? Why or why not?

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