

Investigating the Mental Health Issues among Teenagers and their Coping Mechanisms during Community Quarantines in the Philippines

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Abstract: *The main objective of the research was to investigate the mental health Issues faced by teenagers and their coping mechanisms during community quarantines in the Philippines. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used which focuses on the experiences of people. Qualitative research is an approach which relies on data observed by researchers, mainly through interviews, observations, and questionnaires. The researchers explicated the data gathered instead of analyzing it. The explication process referred to has five phases or steps: (1) bracketing the phenomenological reduction. (2) delineating units of meaning. (3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes. (4) summarizing each interview, and (5) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making their agreement with the interview and making a composite summary in the form of a grounded theoretical framework. The researchers found out that all the participants encountered issues regarding their mental health such as restlessness, fatigue, poor concentration, and sleep disturbances during the quarantine period. In the early stages, student two accepted isolation in a positive outlook because it gives them more time to rest but, the result of the said isolation only made them more prone to stress and pressure. When you look at the pandemic objectively, you will also notice the numerous benefits this pandemic brings to us like having enough rest and having more time to spend with our families but these benefits are being outnumbered by the bad effects such as ruined businesses, death rates going up and the negative impact it brings to our mental health*

Keywords— mental health issues, coping mechanisms, COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative research design

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world struggles with the biological and economic crisis brought to us by the pandemic, more and more Filipinos are grappling with second thoughts on how they're going to survive each day. During the peak of COVID-19, The Philippines has issued a national lock down in order to protect its citizens. Already a severe public health emergency, mental health issues also rose as one of the main public health concerns this year, with teenagers and children the most affected. Anxiety, depression, and stress became more prominent, ranging from moderate-to-severe [1]. Challenges in meeting even the most basic health needs have become more prominent and visible, thus physical health takes priority over mental health needs [2]. Lowdown and quarantine have proven to be effective in terms of stemming the spread of the virus, however, long periods of isolation, a global crisis, can cause uncertainty, stress, and fear.

Policies like "stay at home", "social distancing", and "no minors allowed outside" are necessary to decrease the risk of COVID-19 infection. However, these policies remain challenging, as people who are unable to stay at home, like people who need to earn money daily in order to meet the needs of their families, and people who have traits related to extraversion, now have to wait frustratingly at home. Yes, a long-time quarantine and lock down in an enclosed space all by yourself can lead to a long-term improvement in our community, but it can also be a prevalent risk factor to

experiencing depression and anxiety [3]. The fear of illness, death, and other stress factors while being isolated during lock down can result in psychological distress. In some cases, these problems can lead to serious disorders like adjustment disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [4].

The main objective of this study was to educate others about mental health issues and how much impact they could be on teenagers and children, especially during a time of seclusion and isolation like the lock down. The researchers sought to establish how an unprecedented disruption to the normal way of life can impact the lives of teenagers who were taught to live their lives to the fullest.

Specifically, this study identified the experiences of the people from a selected private school in Bulacan, Philippines who were affected by the underlying issues, related to mental health, brought by the COVID-19 lock down. This research tries to spread awareness about how long periods of confinement away from the rest of human civilization mixed with uncertainty about the future, brought about by a global pandemic, can lead to the development of anxiety, depression, and more mental health issues.

2. RELATED WORKS

The pandemic of coronavirus disease, COVID-19, pandemic presents a danger to the mental health of populations. This research investigated the prevalence of

psychiatric symptoms in the Philippines and identified the factors leading to the psychological effect [1]. As when the world struggles with the 2019 coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) public health emergency and economic crisis, developing countries are the most vulnerable to its profound negative effect.

Despite their wealth of resources, strong sectors of the economy, and established healthcare infrastructures, the current struggles of developed countries in responding to the epidemic are increasing and intensifying for developing countries. In the context of a pandemic, the challenges of meeting even the most basic health needs in developing countries are becoming far more acute, and physical health takes precedence over mental health needs.

The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of older Filipinos, who are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, is discussed in the commentary and describes ways in which health workers can help alleviate the negative impact on their mental health within the limited resources available in the Philippines to the extent possible [2]. Loades et al. reported in their latest systematic analysis on the impact that social isolation and depression can have on children and adolescents during the current global 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic, with their results

indicating connections between social anxiety and loneliness/social isolation. Although this is certainly relevant for many children and adolescents, it is also worth reflecting on the group of socially phobic children and adolescents for whom a transient reduction in depression can be found while schools are closed due to a lack of sensitivity to anxiety

provoking conditions in the school setting [3].

The COVID-19 epidemic is causing extensive morbidity and mortality worldwide and is fueling population-wide psychological trauma. Early research has indicated a rise in the general population's fear, depression and sleep problems.^{1,2} While the functioning of societies and households worldwide is shattered by pandemics, there is a lack of study targeting the impact of pandemics on teenagers' mental health [4].

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan, China, drastic lockdown measures were implied by the government. With these measures implied, issues that are not related to COVID particularly the issues related to the mental and physical well-being of people set off as a concern [5]. We cannot deny the fact that quarantines and isolation measures are necessary to control the spread of COVID-19. But we cannot also deny that it became a challenge for us to adapt to this lifestyle and that it possibly has negative psychological and social effects on others, especially on the youth. A study in China conducted a cross sectional, nationwide study to discover the psychological effect of quarantine and recognize the factors related to mental health outcomes among the population quarantined. And the results are suggesting that quarantine measures during COVID-19 pandemic are associated with an increased risk of encountering mental health burden, particularly for vulnerable groups [6].

Limited resources of rapid testing, swab testing, and treatment, protecting front liners from infection of Covid 19, violating human rights, financial problems, losing connection from authorities are the major problems that will surely contribute to spread mental problems easily and increase the risk of emotional distress. Health care providers should address teens who are facing emotional distress even with a pandemic to decrease the risk of suicidal. Covid 19 may affect the attitude of one person because of the emotional isolation. This effect could end up in mental problems.

Our main objective for this is to learn what is the effect of pandemic to those teenagers who are being isolated for almost 3 months and how Covid 19 affects almost half of the population because of this stressful generation. Teenagers who are known to be outside and having time with their friends have been changed and turned to be isolated in their house which can have a huge impact on their behavior. The reason why this is happening is because of their habits that suddenly changed due to a pandemic that resulted in a mental problem [7].

The study conducted by Yashwant Kumar Nagle and Usha Sharma (2018) said that to avoid the students in a vulnerable state of mind exposed to the after-effects of the environment such as competition between students or family expectations. We must create productive activities that could fully unleash their potentials even in this pandemic [9]. According to New York Times columnist Dr. Lisa Damour in UNICEF 2020, "Anxiety is completely normal when you are in a situation that you cannot control. It allows us to be on guard from possible threats and help us perform accurate judgments. Such as not attending rendezvous with many people, cleaning your hands, and avoiding unnecessary contact on your face." [10].

Many individuals are quarantined or isolated as COVID-19 spreads all over the world, resulting in detrimental effects on teenagers' mental health. This brief analysis takes into account the mental health influence of quarantine on children and adolescents and suggests steps to strengthen the psychological effects of isolation. The title and abstract screening accompanied by full-text screening was carried out by two independent reviewers. Isolation, social isolation and apprehension among children have been identified in the seven studies prior to the onset of COVID 19 on the psychological impact of quarantine in children. Acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder were the most common diagnosis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, three studies reported restlessness, irritability, anxiety, clinginess and inattention in children during quarantine, with increased screen time [11].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the long-term closure of schools and home quarantine caused detrimental effects on young people's physical and mental well-being. In the literature, research assessing the mental health of adolescents during the pandemic are limited. The goal of our study was

to evaluate the effects of home quarantine measures taken during the pandemic and the factors affecting adolescents.

This study found that anxiety and depression were closely related to daily life under domestic restrictions among adolescents during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular some factors that could easily be ignored, such as perceived discrimination and ability to study. Multi - sectoral collaboration has been called upon to pay attention to these associations and to take the necessary counter-measures [12].

The outbreak of coronavirus disease, COVID-19, poses a threat to society's people's mental health. This study examined the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms and identified factors that contributed to the psychological impact in the Philippines [13]. It has been shown that experiencing a pandemic and being quarantined has mental health effects. Some current studies mentioned in this study were carried out to evaluate the presence of potential mental health issues caused by the pandemic, but most of these studies focused on the earlier phase of the pandemic. The study focuses on the reported distress of respondents who have been through a strict quarantine since March 2020 and are currently facing a lockdown that is more relaxed [14].

The World Health Organization, Geneva 2004 stated that companionship is fundamental for youngsters' typical mental turn of events and prosperity. In this situation, lockdown because of COVID-19 could cause serious deteriorating in one's child social development if prolonged [15].

Another reason why this lockdown could give drastic effects to a child's mental health is when a teen needs special attention, separation from the custodian could lead to increased risk of psychiatric disorders based on a nation

wide study titled *Eur Child Adoles Psy.* 2018[16]. Also, Craig Polizzi, Steven Jay Lynn, Andrew Perry (2020) have several findings that can identify strategies that can reduce stress and anxiety during this critical period. The coping strategies that were found may help the affected such as building a peace of mind, providing social support, understanding the human mind and body, and becoming motivated even in the presence of the viral infection [17].

Another study also showed evidence of this claim, In an evaluation of mental health on SARS survivors who also underwent isolation, a disease which is similar to COVID-19, it said that 1,394 survivors of the said virus in Hong Kong between the year of 2005 and 2006, 47.8% experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the aftermath of the virus, and 25.6% remained PTSD within 30 months of completion of SARS treatment[18].

A study by Ginny Sprang, PhD, and Miriam Silman, MSW also stated that children who were isolated or quarantined during pandemic diseases were more likely to experience acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and grief. The clinical requirements for post-traumatic stress disorder were met by 30% of the children who were isolated or quarantined [19]. For children and youth, mental health care is very critical. In youth, most mental health conditions

begin, making it important for mental health needs to be detected early and addressed in child development during this critical time. If untreated, mental health concerns can contribute to many negative health and social outcomes.

Because of a combination of public health crisis, social isolation, and economic recession, the COVID-19 pandemic could create major mental health issues and lead to more cases among children and teens. Economic downturns are related to increased youth mental health issues that could be caused by the effects of economic downturns on adult jobs and adult mentality [20].

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the outbreak of the novel coronavirus on January 30,2020 and raised a PHEIC (public health emergency of international concern). WHO named the novel coronavirus as coronavirus disease 2019(covid19) on Feb 11,2020. The pandemic not only increased the cases of mortality rate but also the psychological and mental concern all over the world. The sudden outbreak of Covid 19 cases have a huge impact on the community and economy [21]. ECQ increases the chances of hysteria, fear, anxiety of frontliners especially those who are working in the hospitals. Mostly, people are experiencing these mental problems about having infection or being infected by this deadly virus. In the study of anxiety levels, they identified that it was high anxiety is the common effect of stressful situations [22]. Moreover, literature suggests that mental health disorders, despite it differing from each person when it comes to how much it can affect them, can create a significant burden for their victims [23].

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main goal of this study was to investigate the mental health issues faced by teenagers and their coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Philippines. Specifically, the answers to the following questions:

1. What problems and issues related to mental health did teenagers encounter as the lockdown occurred and kept getting extended?
2. What coping mechanisms did the respondents' use during the long-term quarantine?
3. What recommendations or programs can be drawn from the responses given in order to improve the respondents' mental health status?

4. METHODOLOGY

During quarantine, the people concerned went through the painful process of confinement, their mental health deteriorating because of these unexpected changes.

For this study, a qualitative phenomenological approach will be used which focuses on the experiences of people. Qualitative research is an approach which relies on data observed by researchers, mainly through interviews, observations, and questionnaires. As cited by a study, it is taking account not only the actual text but also actions involved [24].

The researchers explicated the data gathered instead of analyzing it. The explication process referred to has five phases or steps: (1) bracketing the phenomenological reduction. (2) delineating units of meaning. (3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes. (4) summarizing each interview, and (5) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making their agreement with the interview and making a composite summary in the form of a grounded theoretical framework.

The researchers used google forms in data gathering. This is to get the appropriate information for this study. The researchers interviewed the respondents. The investigators also gave the participant an email. This email signifies their agreement with the interview.

Participants

The main data gathering tool to be used for this study were online self-report surveys which included students aged between 15 and 18 years of age from a private school in Bulacan, Philippines. The researchers will first provide a permission letter to conduct a survey for the chosen group of respondents and shall be submitted to the school admin or grade level head and officials.

The respondents of the study comprised students from a selected private school in the municipality of Marilao, Bulacan, Philippines. In this study, we made sure the participants met three important criterias:

1. The person's age should range between 15-18 years old.
2. The person should be attending school at Barcelona Academy.
3. The person should be consensual with the question given to them.

Instrument

The online survey was done by the researchers by using a survey maker app, more specifically google forms, and will be distributed to students through their personal social media accounts. The aim of the researchers is to gather the data needed and conduct interviews with people who are greatly affected by this psychological distress. With this, the information gathered will uncover new findings; measures to cope and adapt to sudden change in the society.

The guide questions were:

1. What problems and issues related to mental health did you encounter as the lockdown occurred and kept getting extended?
2. What coping mechanisms did you use during the long term quarantine?
3. What programs can you recommend in order to improve other people's mental health status?

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to find out how teens that face mental health issues cope with the isolation caused by the sudden lockdown in the Philippines.

I. Problems and Issues Teenagers Encountered During Lockdown.

"All of us may experience the feeling of loneliness, I too, felt like no one believed in me and also felt like giving up. It's so empty that I couldn't feel anything at all." - Student 1

"The problems and issues that I encountered are laziness, stress, and pressure. During the lockdown, my former self who is a very active person, fell from being energetic to being a couch potato. After starting online classes, stress and pressure came. There were so many MAs and Quizzes that kept on piling up making me feel stressed out and pressured even after finishing all of it." - Student 2

"I am experiencing frequent panic attacks, from overthinking and stressing too much, which led to me being tired." - Student 3

"I experienced anxiety from time to time, like feelings of worriedness, tension, trouble concentrating, as well as stress due to online learning." - Student 4

"When the lockdown started, I was okay with it, because I thought that I could rest longer than in face to face classes, but it turns out that I felt more exhausted. Not only mentally tired, but I've also become emotionally unhealthy. I stress more often and I started having breakdowns and developed anxiety." - Student 5

This only shows that the majority of teens that are participating in online classes, developed anxiety and depression, because of stress, pressure and the feeling of isolation, since they cannot go outside and talk to their friends. They are constantly worrying about their studies and other responsibilities at home that they cannot take care of their own mental health.

II. Coping Mechanisms of Teenagers

A. Finding Comfort in Hobbies and Interests:

According to Student one, one of the things that helped them stay positive was reading, watching their favorite shows, and working out, because those activities felt like 'second nature' to them. Student two stated that their hobbies helped them keep their mind busy and distracted from all the negative emotions they were experiencing. Finding a little bit of solace and joy in even the smallest things for the respondents is one common coping mechanism the researchers have gathered from their answers.

B. Focusing on Relationships

Student two has also said that surrounding themselves with people who have positive mindsets is one of their coping mechanisms. According to Student five, who considers the most important people to them as their 'strength', it helps them keep motivated and fixed on their goals. These statements show that Students one and two are individuals who surround themselves with people they have connections to as a way to cope with the isolation that comes with the COVID-19 lockdown.

B. Taking a Break

According to Student three, "As much as possible, I try to relax and give myself a break from everything that's causing my mental health to worsen." The respondents' ways of taking breaks differ from person-to-person, with most of them focusing on their own personal interests.

D. Alternative Coping Strategies

Self-injury is sometimes used as a way to make oneself feel better and as a way to handle negativity. Student four has said, "I used to self-harm, but now I just pinch myself if it's too much to handle." Studies have suggested that one way to increase the chances of a distraction to help calm the urge of self-injure is to match what one used to do during it, but with another alternate option. [25]

III. Programs that the Participants Recommend in Order to Improve Others' Mental Health Status.

There are plenty of ways to treat anxiety and depression. Our participants said that by doing what you love everyday will lessen the burden and relieve the pain that you are feeling even if it is just a bit. People usually find peace of mind by doing their favorite hobbies or just something that they could focus on. And if ever that they do not have something that they enjoy doing, they could try something new to add to their skills. It would also help to recognize our own emotions, for them to concentrate on fixing themselves through meditation. It is also recommended to open up yourself to people that you know you will listen, do not lock yourself in a room, instead breathe some fresh air, exercise and if you have the courage, ask a professional that could help you through the healing process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The researchers have reached the conclusion that all the participants encountered issues regarding their mental health such as restlessness, fatigue, poor concentration, and sleep disturbances during the quarantine period. In the early stages, student two accepted isolation in a positive outlook because it gives them more time to rest but, the result of the said isolation only made them more prone to stress and pressure. When you look at the pandemic objectively, you will also notice the numerous benefits this pandemic brings to us like having enough rest and having more time to spend with our families but these benefits are being outnumbered by the bad effects such as ruined businesses, death rates going up and the negative impact it brings to our mental health.

We learned how teens find various solutions to somehow ease and cope up with their mental health issues whilst being isolated. First, learners who focused on their hobbies and likes had proven to positively help them cope with the solitude; second, having social interaction with other people who have a positive mindset helps them find comfort, hope and faith amid the COVID-19 lockdown; third, decompression to certain activities causing their mental

health to deteriorate proves to be a remedy and instead focuses on their personal interest.

To conclude things, lockdown made many teenagers experience anxiety and depression and, in most cases, this resulted in self-harming. As the pandemic kept getting extended, the Government banned face-to-face classes but decided to continue the school year through online classes, this made some students feel pressured because of homeworks and quizzes that kept on piling up and giving them short allotted time to finish these classworks thus resulting to sudden changes on their behavior. All of the events made significant impact to each and every one, no matter what age, gender, race the person belongs to but this pandemic made people stronger than ever. The research also proved that even if people are battling silent battles, they are not giving up.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's results, the researchers made the following recommendations for future references: Social life and connection to other people are important in a person's life. But because of the lockdown, some became distant and lost their connection to the world. And that leads to loneliness and isolation. Teens who face such issues are encouraged to keep in touch with others and should not isolate themselves. Because interacting and opening up to someone may help reduce the burdens and feelings of one's self. With today's advanced technology, it would be easier to stay connected to others. Through the use of messenger applications and social media, connecting to others would not be difficult.

Thinking can build a dim view because of what the lockdown has done, nevertheless, thinking can often be the one that can unfold mental health issues. Moreover, picturing an event and goals in the future can make someone busy thinking about what they will do to achieve that certain event. In that case, motivation and a positive outlook in life would boost one's self to be productive and lessen the anxiety because of the lockdown.

Hobbies are more often on the daily basis of a human being and discovering new recreational activities may reduce anxiety and distress. That is why teens who were finding themselves being troubled because of the pandemic should find new healthy hobbies and find time to do the things they want. Because not only this would make their day productive, they could also lessen the stress and overthinking that may lead to serious problems like mental issues.

Seek professional help if needed. The majority of people who seek assistance feel better. Medication and psychotherapy can be used to treat mental health problems. In certain cases, the two complement each other well. Professional support will make a significant difference if issues in life prevent someone from working or feeling well.

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