



Lessons From The Past: Rural Philippines Various Sectors' Difficulty, Coping Mechanisms And Strategies For Survival During Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This explanatory-sequential research aimed to determine the various sectors' difficulties and coping mechanisms during pandemic. Quantitative (Survey) and Qualitative (Narrative Inquiry) Research Designs were used in the study. The respondents of the study were the 105 randomly and conveniently selected individuals from health, agricultural, business, private, government, and local residents. The quantitative data were gathered through a researcher-made survey questionnaire and the qualitative data were gathered through interviews with the use of semi-structured interview guide. Mean and standard deviations were used in quantitative data analysis, while narrative analysis was used in qualitative data analysis. The difficulties encountered by various sectors were challenge in travelling due to restrictions, limited mobility outside the house, limitations in meeting with friends, living with seniors and infants inside the house, prohibition in celebrating special occasions and economic adversities. The coping mechanisms of the various sectors included cultivating hobbies such as meditation, playing online games, exercising, and doing recreational activities; praying, worshipping, and studying the bible; following strict personal protective measures; and avoiding public places. The qualitative results revealed lessons from the experiences of these various sectors which included: creating budgetary plan to surpass unfavorable situations; believing and strengthening trust towards government protocols; complying to health safety protocols; accepting the necessity of vaccination; and being resilient and adaptable to the sudden change in times of adversities.

Keywords: Various sectors, difficulty, coping mechanisms, rural Philippines

Introduction

The World Health Organization (2020) emphasized that the pandemic had presented unparalleled adversities to every community's health, employment, food chains, and even human life. The social and economic disruption of this adversity was unprecedented and devastating. Among various groups, the minority communities were more affected in terms of financial devastations, illness, and even death when the pandemic struck the world Neel (2020, in Lusardi & Haroldson, 2021). Thus, the various sectors in rural Philippines had also experience these scenarios and adversities. According to Alviar (2021) the experiences of most Filipinos were much harder especially for those less fortunate people, including the entrepreneurial and micro-business. In this lense, it was not elucidated how these groups of people were effected and how did they cope with these challenges.

At the outset of the pandemic, Forman, Atun, McKee & Mossialos (2020) believed that in general, the possible lessons that can be learned from this circumstance included clarity, coordination, transparency, accountability, solidarity, and decisiveness. As the world is slowly recovering from the effect of the pandemic, it is as well notable to record significant lessons from the experiences of the various sectors of rural areas to help cope for future recurrence.

The various sectors that are common in the world may include but not limited to health, agriculture, business, Private and Non-governmental Organizations, government, and local residents. Like the urban areas which were identified as the most affected, the rural Philippines were not spared during this time of difficulties. These existing significant sectors in rural Philippines were put into the forefront of this research study as they are also considered as the economic backbone of the province and of the country. Their difficulty, coping mechanisms and lessons learned will be instrumental for future preparations for possible recurrence of the pandemic in the community.

Literature Review

Various Sectors Difficulties and Coping Mechanisms

Year 2019 when COVID-19 exists in Wuhan, China and it will spread around the world when 2020 starts. The Department of Health considered the virus as pandemic because it spread globally which affected many countries. In that case, many people encountered difficulties about their health, income, family and mental health. Moreover, every person has their own way to overcome the difficulties they encounter. According to Enfermeria Global in the study of Nasution, Pradana, and Casman (2021) their study shows how the government's attention to the quality of specific health services can improve the welfare and health status of the vulnerable populations living in a community or society. By this study, they address the various coping mechanisms and analyze the obstacles that are experienced by the vulnerable populations which some efforts can remove the barriers as a form of coping with it. Through their findings, it can help to be an input for the vulnerable people in adapting to obstacles during the pandemic that occurs over a long period of time increasing vulnerability especially in the health of each sector which also affects the populations in the society including children, older, adults and pregnant. In addition, based on this study, the presence and absence of social support from the family, community and the government has a great impact on the society as a whole (Nasution et al., 2021).

Some examples of various sectors' difficulties include how they access social and health services which may help them to overcome it. On the other hand, they cope up with the difficulties they encounter with the help of the government, which strengthens the quality of health services. By improving the health services, the government ensures the safety and protection of the people from different sectors. Moreover, providing good health services lessen the worries of an individual on how to fight the pandemic if they will be positive on it. Also, the government implements some countermeasures or protocols to stop or slow the spread of Coronavirus.

Pandemic Response

Every country which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and has a lot of positive cases, provided good services among its people. They have responses about it in order to combat the virus which causes problems to the world. According to the study of Talabis, Babierra, Buhat, Lutero, Quindala III and Rabajante (2021) many countries around the globe face the ongoing threats of the COVID-19 pandemic. The national governments and health ministries formulate, implement and revise health policies and standards based on the recommendations by World Health Organizations (WHO). Additionally, to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, the national government outlined different quarantine measures wherein each level has a corresponding degree of rigidity from keeping only the essential business open to allowing all establishments to operate at a certain capacity through its Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases. The local government units (LGU)-municipalities and provinces adopt these measures depending on the extent of the pandemic of the said locality.

It is very necessary to follow those safety protocols and guidelines for the safety and for the betterment of the people and the community. People must be responsible with their actions and always know their limitations in order to keep themselves safe from any harm caused by the pandemic. Even the government responses on the pandemic, it is still important the participation of an individual to make it successful.

Theoretical Framework

The epistemology of this study is associated with Pragmatism Philosophy. According to Cordeiro & Kelly (2019), pragmatism is a research approach for interrogating and evaluating ideas and beliefs in terms of their practical functioning. Early investigations are critical to carry out early in an outbreak of a new virus to address key unknowns. The data collected from such studies are used to refine recommendations for surveillance and case definitions, to characterize the key factors transmission features of COVID-19, help understand spread, severity, spectrum of disease, impact on the community, and to inform operational models for implementation of countermeasures.

Objectives/ Research Gap

This study aimed to determine the various sectors' top difficulties and coping mechanisms during the pandemic. Additionally, this study also dealt with unveiling the lessons learned by these various sectors from the adversities they had encountered.

Specifically, this research aimed to determine the top difficulties encountered by various sectors in Himamaylan City during the pandemic; determine the top coping mechanisms employed by various sectors

in Himamaylan City in the of pandemic; and unveil the lessons that were learned by these various sectors during adversities.

Methodology

An explanatory-sequential mixed method research design was used in the study. Specifically, the quantitative research design was utilized to determine the various sectors' difficulty and coping mechanisms, while the qualitative part through narrative inquiry was also done to determine their lessons learned and to support the findings in the quantitative phase. The survey questionnaire and interviews were done on the premises of the respondent's house or workplace, located at the proximity of Himamaylan City, one of the rural communities in the Philippines. The quantitative part of the study involved 105 respondents coming from the various sectors in Himamaylan City and the 17 participants for interview were selected through "purposive" sampling. Those who volunteered to participate were interviewed.

The table below illustrates the various sectors and the total number of populations who were the respondents of the study for quantitative phase.

Table 1

| Various Sectors | No. of Respondents |
|--|--------------------|
| Health Sector | 15 |
| Agricultural Sector | 15 |
| Business Sector (small and medium enterprises) | 15 |
| Private and Non-governmental Organizations | 15 |
| Government Sector (LGU officials/workers) | 15 |
| Regular Residents | 15 |
| Education Sector | 15 |

The research instruments were the validated researcher-made 5-point rating scale on level of difficulties and coping mechanisms and a validated semi-structured interview guide to determine the lessons from the experiences of the participants. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Mean and Standard Deviation, while the qualitative data were analyzed using the model of Braun & Clarke (2006) which has six steps: Data Familiarization, Generate Initial Codes, Search for Themes or Generating (initial) Themes, Theme Review, Theme Defining and Naming and Write-up/Report Production. In considering the ethical standards in the conduct of this study, the researchers made considerations to promote the protection that safeguards the identity, integrity, confidentiality, and welfare of the people who were involved as participants.

Results

The top difficulties encountered by various sectors during the pandemic in rural Philippines

| Sector | Difficulties encountered | Mean | Interpretation | SD |
|---------------------|--|------|----------------|------|
| Health Sector | Living with senior citizen or infant because they are easily to acquire the virus | 4.60 | Very Difficult | 0.63 |
| Agricultural Sector | Enhanced community quarantine because only one person can go outside to buy necessities for the farm | 5.00 | Very Difficult | 0.00 |
| Business sectors | Traveling, processing documents for the business, and doing daily routines due to restrictions. | 4.07 | Difficult | 0.70 |
| Private sectors | Conducting meeting with the organization due to COVID-19 restrictions. | 4.67 | Very Difficult | 0.72 |
| Government Sector | Conducting sessions for meetings and ordinances | 4.47 | Difficult | 0.83 |
| Regular residents | Celebrating special occasions due to social distancing. | 4.80 | Very Difficult | 0.77 |
| Education Sector | Maintaining social distancing at work | 4.07 | Difficult | 1.03 |

Note: 4.51-5.00 Very Difficult; 3.51-4.50 "Difficult"; 2.51-3.50 "Moderately Difficult"; 1.51-2.50 "Slightly Difficult"; 1.00-1.50 "Least Difficult"

In a 5-point rating scale, the respondents from various sectors rated the difficulty level of their experiences during the time of pandemic. It could be noted that the health sector respondents' are having more difficulty living with their at risk family. Agricultural group has difficulty dealing with the enhanced community quarantine because of their necessities for the farm. As most of the business sector is comprised by small business enterprises, renewal of their documents and doing their usual routines in the store were their greatest challenge. Private sectors such as the Non-Government organizations have difficulty in gathering their members for meetings. Those comprised the individuals working in the government were having difficulty conducting sessions in times of decision making. Regular residents on the other hand, are more concerned with gathering during special occasions. Lastly, those who are working under the education sector are having difficulty in social distancing at work, specifically at school, while preparing instructional materials and delivery to remote students.

The Top Coping Mechanisms Employed by Various Sectors in Rural Philippines.

| Sector | Difficulties encountered | Mean | Interpretation | SD |
|---------------------|---|------|----------------|------|
| Health Sector | Following strict personal protective measures at work (e.g., wearing of mask, handwashing, etc.). | 4.73 | Always | 0.46 |
| Agricultural Sector | Following strict personal protective measures when going outside (e.g., wearing of mask, handwashing, etc.). | 5.00 | Always | 0.00 |
| Business sectors | Motivating self to face the outbreak with a positive attitude. | 4.40 | Often | 0.63 |
| Private sectors | Using social media and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, etc. for communications | 4.80 | Always | 0.41 |
| Government Sector | Following strict personal protective measures when conduction government transactions (e.g., wearing of mask, handwashing, etc.). | 4.80 | Always | 0.41 |
| Regular residents | Praying, worshipping, and studying the bible. | 5.00 | Always | 0.00 |
| Education Sector | Following strict personal protective measures (e.g., wearing of mask, handwashing, etc.). | 4.80 | Always | 0.56 |

Note: 4.51-5.00 Always; 3.51-4.50 "Often"; 2.51-3.50 "Sometimes"; 1.51-2.50 "Rarely"; 1.00-1.50 "Never"

When faced with difficulties, these individuals belonging to various sectors employed various coping mechanisms. It could be gleaned from the table that the health sector, agricultural sector, government sector, education sector, are following the strict personal protective measures while doing their tasks in their own specific area. The business sector people are motivating themselves with positive attitude. Lastly, regular residents are continuing to pray, worship, and study the bible.

The Lessons Learned by Various Sectors during Adversities.

The participants' common experiences, learning, and realizations were summarized on the following themes. Strategies on how to combat the difficult situations brought about by the pandemic were also elucidated. Actual narratives of the participants are presented for more vivid discussions.

1. Creating Budgetary Plan to Surpass Unfavorable Situations

In the context of budgetary plan to surpass unfavorable situations, limiting budget appears as a mechanism to cope and survive with the current situation. Along with their basic needs, they retrenched their necessities which always appears how they limit their food intake – where other commodities are lessen. The pandemic lockdown caused a widespread unemployment for regular residents and private sectors. Meanwhile, the customers for business sectors were scarce which made them unable to operate during the lockdown. As a result, most of the sectors forced to seek aid and secure the basic needs from the government. The thriftiness of various sectors was a great help to survive living. Thus, the urgent needs of various sectors provided by the government must be extended for all and not only limit to government employees, as each sector has the same difficulties especially with financial assistance given by the government programs.

“Even if it is hard, we strive to accommodate our basic needs to survive the family. Lessen the amount of rice to cook, our viand often a vegetable, lessen the used of ingredients. We used a little amount of soap in washing our clothes, crumpled clothes to make it clean. We tend to walk instead to ride in a tricycle. We avoid snacks and soft drinks, instead we drink water only. During dinner instead of eating rice, we ate boiled banana or any food that can be found in the backyard to have something in the stomach.

2. Believing and Strengthening Trust Towards Government Protocols

The various sectors stood firm with their belief and they abide with the strict health protocols imposed since it was a tool in withstanding difficulties and issues in the height of pandemic. The subjection of the support to adhesion and belief are coping with the difficulties and issues testified by the participants. When asked by the researchers as how they cope up with the difficulties and issues they encountered during the height of pandemic, the participants shared common views.

We did nothing but to abide to the Inter-Agency Task Force protocols. We are not saying that it is very difficult, only when you know how to follow. We only think that this situation is more difficult for us in the province.

3. Accepting the Necessity of Vaccination

As each sectors want to end the pandemic, they consider the vaccination supremacy. These participants admitted that they were uncivilized when it comes to vaccination. However, during those times, vaccination was also seen as a necessity not just to become protected from the virus but for them to be able to move freely. They could do their usual transactions when they were vaccinated because it was inspected in any agency. The compliance for vaccination was seen greatly to those who belonged to the health and government sectors.

Hmm in my own understanding, vaccine can't be that a hundred percent (100%) to take it back to the normal situation because it happened always, but the vaccine is a big help because of course in us, way back in our

childhood, we had the anti-tetanus, other than that the anti-polio, so we had this vaccine that's why you have no polio. So, we need those vaccines as it has been a big help for all of us.

Those experiences stretched and challenge the participants to be more observant, and wise to their actions. The participants think practically of surviving life amid insufficiency. The participants take over the challenge and merely seek expedient to support the needs of family. Mostly of the participants was looking forward of having a normal life again as compliance to the health protocols and avail the vaccines are ways of taking it back to the normal situation. In addition, the Inter-Agency Tasked Forced of Himamaylan City plays a vital role to the residents of the city to be observant and vigilant in abiding the health protocols and pandemic restrictions, specifically the vaccination.

4. Bolstering the faith as Christians in times of Crisis

As a Christian community, people in rural Philippines were hanging on to their faith to the Creator for survival in times of crisis. It is very common to Filipinos for being prayerful and faithful no matter what the situation is. The participants in particular felt that they were the most affected especially the mobility for their livelihood was restricted. Most of these group of people believed that everything happens for a reason, including the pandemic. One of their great realizations was that the Creator made them survived through prayer.

"Hmm the lessons I learned from the pandemic, always pray. Pray because of course, it is a way different when you have a trust to the Lord that he will take you from disgrace for the unprecedented pandemic, we experienced difficult situation but God will make us through."

They had strong faith that the adversities will be overcome by those who believe in God. They also believed that God permit things to happen for certain reasons. These group of individuals emphasized that their personal connection with the creator will helped them survive difficult situation in the present and in the future.

Of course, it is God who I am running to, and there is no one else. Even though doctors or any intelligent one, none of them can help except God. He was the only source of strength that we had overcome the Corona Virus Disease.

The acknowledged the fact that there is one divine Creator that they can run into in times of adversities. They as well believe that medical doctors can help them, but there is still higher entity than these experts. As the ultimate source of strength, they believe that they can survive these difficult times.

"Strong belief in God, not all the time, not all the season we are abandoned by God. Just pray always. I surpass with that, the first thing is to pray to God that He may guide you in everyday you do, spare you from sickness, and not to infect your family members. And the last thing maybe, to see your family safe that makes you inspired to continue to work in the office.

Discussions

The results of the study revealed some difficulties of individuals from various sectors in rural Philippines which are also apparent in other rural communities around the world. The individuals belonging to various sectors had their own struggles relevant to their particular jobs, tasks, and roles being performed in the community. Each of these sectors is the core contributory factors in the development of the community both in urban and rural areas of the country.

Taking into account the health sector's difficulty, Couper, Walters, Williams, Campbell, White, Stewart, & Konkin, (2022) emphasized that health care services in rural areas had difficulty dealing with the situation, experiencing uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. In addition, some of the difficulties encountered by these individuals included being stigmatized, heavy workloads, shortage of quality personal protective equipment, having no incentives, lack of coordination and even psychological stress (Razu, Yasmin, Islam, Islam, & Ward, 2021). As frontline service provider, the health sector in rural areas had varied difficulties, including their own safety and the safety of their family members.

The agricultural sector on the other hand, faced difficulty on their necessities for the farm works. Belonging to an area with limited supply, this sector, relies on finding means to meet the current needs of the farm. Therefore, they need to mobilize around the town to find ways and means to secure fertilizers, seedlings, pesticides and even loans from private lending to sustain their livelihood. In South Asia, this sector was greatly disrupted including all agricultural activities and supply chains (Rasul, 2021). It could not be denied that global crisis such as the pandemic and climate change had serious unwanted effect to farmers, specifically for the supply chains and agricultural products. This global effect is magnified in developing areas and countries which strongly rely on farming for their economy (Kumar, Singh, Pandey, Singh, Srivastava, Kumar, & Drews, 2021). They further argued the lessons learned from the crisis could a basis for a more sustainable policies and responses for agricultural sector.

The Business sector in this area are mostly small enterprises that rely on their profit on a day to day transactions. Necessary documents needed to be processed like for loans and renewal of permits. Micro-enterprises were really affected badly during this adversity compared to their bigger counterparts. They even have closure, reduced or no income at, and business cancellation (Fabeil, Pazim, & Langgat, 2020). Due to

the reason of survival these business enterprises had to combat and utilize strategies to be flexible and continue thriving. In fact, according to Alves, Lok, Luo, & Hao (2020), this sector has higher flexibility because of low level of bureaucracy and less compliance to social responsibility. Strategies like increasing learning on business, new marketing strategies, flexible human resource management, and diversification of products enabled them to survive and cope with the situation.

The private sector, specifically the Non-government Organizations had difficulty in their gatherings but managed to strategies their activities through online modes. As the impact of this pandemic went beyond health scenarios, others sectors responded and adopt inclusive plans to combat the challenges during this time. The non-governmental group in Bangladesh responded on the pandemic defining the main challenge of COVID-19, identifying the needed resources and expertise; ensuring the members' social well-being, adjusting the current organizational processes, ensuring active linkage with other organizations for task sharing, and safeguarding the health of their employees

The impact of COVID-19 has been beyond health emergencies and posed multidimensional challenges. SF took a two-pronged approach – aid the government to respond to the emergency and adopt an all-inclusive plan to address diverse challenges related to overall well-being of the population. The underlying strategy of their response has been to: define the challenge of COVID-19 and identify required expertise and resources, ensure people's health and social wellbeing, adjust existing organisational processes, ensure functional partnership with other organisations for effective resource and task sharing, and safeguard health and wellbeing of the organisation's own employees.

When it comes to the education sector, while other communities experienced difficulty in delivering online education, this particular group of individuals struggled in maintaining social distancing at school. In the study of Pradana & Syarifuddin (2021), they found out that the struggles of the teachers are delivering online education to Indonesian students, resorting for them to conduct home visitations and inspection just to deliver education.

Though these sectors encountered difficulties, their being Filipinos which showed resiliency and strength enabled them to survived the said difficulty. Like any other rural sectors around the globe, these group of individuals found ways and means to continue their roles in the community even in times of the pandemic.

Conclusions

First, the level of COVID-19 responses of Himamaylan City during the COVID-19 pandemic was highly responsive. This may mean that the Himamaylan City government responded quickly to the needs of various sectors during the pandemic. The Himamaylan City government may have provided excellent assistance to all areas throughout the pandemic crisis. They might as well very organized in disseminating information and addressing the needs of the people. As a government sector, they are also the policy makers and implementers for public wellness, that was why, they were also vigilant in performing their mandate which is to serve the public.

Second, the various sectors encountered lots of difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic wherein it affects them on how they lived. According to the researchers' findings, various sectors frequently encountered difficulties during the pandemic in a variety of ways. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic literally had a devastating impact on everyone's lives. It causes many problems that have an impact on their quality of life.

Third, the various sectors had different ways of dealing with the difficulties they faced throughout the pandemic. Therefore, the researchers assumed that the coping mechanisms helps them in a way specifically during the pandemic in terms of minimize and deals with stressful situations in life.

Fourth, the various sectors' coping mechanisms helps them during the pandemic in many aspects. There are themes which shows how it affects the way individuals live in the new normal. Therefore, the researchers came to the conclusion that despite the virus's risks, people still need to take a variety of actions to survive, including setting up financial budgets. Also, the researchers came to the conclusion that the government's response to the pandemic was effective because it increased their trust in the government and caused them to adhere to its policies. They also learn how to accept the importance and significance of immunization.

Fifth, based on the findings of this study, the researchers developed a pandemic action plan that can be use when a similar crisis occurs in the future. It means that the researchers' designed and suggested pandemic response plan will be helpful in the future, particularly to assist people live comfortably despite the pandemic.

Recommendations

1. Since the City of Himamaylan responded well to the community's needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways, they should step up their assistance to various sectors and ensure that everyone gets it. The researchers strongly suggest that government should keep helping those in need and be ready to give attention to their concerns without complaints.
2. Depending on how we handle them, difficulties can make us either weak or strong. As to the researchers, various sectors should abide by laws and seek assistance. Government always keeps an eye on the needs of its citizens and offers good support whether a pandemic is there or not.

3. There is always a solution to every problem. As a result, even though the virus may have caused us to go through more difficulties in life, we are still capable of overcoming them if we take the necessary steps. Therefore, regardless of socioeconomic status, the researchers advise that everyone may help one another.
4. There is always a positive effect on our life when we work through the difficulties we faced. For everyone's protection in the event of a crisis, various sectors should follow government prescriptions. Additionally, it is advised that the government perform its duties properly.
5. Since this study suggested a pandemic response plan, the government will need to be better equipped to deal with disaster in the future. It is advised that the government give this approach an opportunity to implement and attempt to diffuse with others, as a result, everyone will be informed and knowledgeable on what to do if there is a possibility of another pandemic attack.

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