

The Paradox of Being Emotionally Strained: Tales of Joy and Sorrow amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic



Arlene M. Leron

Emilio Aguinaldo College, Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT: This study entitled: The Paradox of Being Emotionally Strained: Tales of Joy and Sorrow Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic investigated the lived experiences of individuals facing emotional strain during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to uncover their emotional states, daily coping mechanisms, and interpretations of the pandemic's impact. Using a Qualitative Research Design, the study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to thoroughly analyze and interpret participants experiences during the unprecedented period.

Participants reported significant social isolation, financial instability, and emotional discomfort throughout the pandemic. They described their coping strategies as focusing on strengthening family relationships, participating in collective activities such as leisure and religious practices, and fostering emotional self-awareness. The study highlighted a duality in their experiences: the "tales of joy" aspects included enhanced family bonds and a sense of gratitude for surviving the pandemic, while the "tales of sorrow" aspects encompassed family disconnection and pervasive uncertainty about the future.

Through a nuanced exploration of these contrasting experiences, the study underscored the complex emotional landscape navigated by the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Strain, COVID-19 Pandemic, Lived Experiences, Emotional States, Coping Mechanisms, Interpretations

I. INTRODUCTION

Strain arises from emotional responses such as anxiety, fear, and despair, playing a significant role in contemporary life. While it can drive motivation, strain can also be detrimental. According to Watson (2020), strain is an inescapable part of life that can sometimes serve a purpose. However, if not managed properly, strain can adversely impact one's career, family life, and overall well-being. Cassell (2020) describes emotional strain as emotional discomfort, manifesting in symptoms like anxiety and despair, which can arise unexpectedly.

Emotional strain's symptoms, often resulting from mental health disorders, can persist or recur cyclically. These include feelings of overwhelm, helplessness, and hopelessness; unwarranted guilt; excessive worry; cognitive difficulties; changes in sleep and appetite; increased reliance on mood-altering substances; social withdrawal; unusual anger or irritability; fatigue; challenges in daily tasks; and new unexplained pain. These symptoms can be severe and potentially lead to mental health disorders. Emotional distress and psychological distress, while related, differ. Douthit (2020) defines psychological distress as encompassing a wide range of internal symptoms like worry and confusion, whereas emotional distress involves unpleasant emotional reactions caused by others' behavior.

The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2020) describes psychological strain as a collection of unpleasant mental and physical symptoms often associated with mood swings. It can indicate the onset of serious psychiatric conditions like major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, or somatization disorder. Psychological suffering is more closely linked to mental health, while emotional distress pertains more to a person's feelings. Emotional experiences can cause fear, disturbance, or depression, while psychological effects can predispose individuals to mental illnesses like depression, paranoia, or phobias.

Various interconnected factors can cause emotional strain. According to Douthit (2021), traumatic experiences or events can trigger distress, often linked to underlying mental health issues. Changes in relationships, relocation, or job loss can also cause stress. Physical stress from serious injury or illness can unexpectedly lead to emotional and psychological symptoms. Major life changes and feelings of loneliness or isolation are additional causes of emotional distress.

The Department of Health reported in late December 2019 that COVID-19, originating in Wuhan, China, spread globally, including to the Philippines. The pandemic has caused widespread panic, affecting economies, social values, and psychological stress worldwide. Mofijur et al. noted that COVID-19 has exacerbated global poverty and misery, disrupted billions of lives, and

The Paradox of Being Emotionally Strained: Tales of Joy and Sorrow amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

significantly impacted health, economic, environmental, and social domains.

Shanahan (2020) argues that the pandemic's uncertainty, ambiguity, and lack of control heighten stress and emotional distress, manifesting as sadness or anxiety. Concerns about personal and loved ones' health, economic losses, lifestyle disruptions, social isolation, and loneliness create a "perfect storm" for emotional anguish. Emotional distress during the pandemic can overwhelm individuals, affecting their daily lives and interactions.

The COVID-19 crisis has worsened ageism and negatively impacted Filipino senior citizens. Akinola (2020) states that the pandemic has disproportionately harmed senior citizens worldwide, affecting their physical, mental, and financial well-being. Recent studies highlight the social, economic, emotional, and physical disadvantages older people face, with isolation, loneliness, and anxiety being prominent issues during the crisis.

Research Questions:

1. What are the experiences of those grappling with emotional strain amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. What daily methods do participants employ to manage their challenges?
3. How do participants interpret the significance of their encounters?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher selected a qualitative research design to delve deeper into the participants' experiences. This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its methodological approach within this psychological qualitative framework. Alase (2017) asserts that IPA offers researchers an optimal means of understanding and interpreting the profound aspects of participants' life experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Participants recounted their emotional strain during the pandemic, elaborating on their coping mechanisms and personal interpretations. The proponent amassed nearly nine hundred lines of data, encompassing In Vivo statements, which were subsequently organized into themes and sub-themes. Specifically, three clusters addressed the first research question, five pertained to the second, and two related to the third.

The findings indicated that participants perceived themselves as emotionally strained due to factors such as isolation, financial instability, and inadequate government support. They encountered considerable difficulties in adapting to the isolation imposed by the pandemic. Although predominantly marked by sorrowful experiences, some participants highlighted narratives of the tales of joy outcomes, including a reinforced sense of belonging and unconditional affection, especially within resilient families that demonstrated strength in the face of adversity.

Participants coped with the pandemic primarily through family connectedness, religious activities, and close familial bonds, which emerged as their most effective coping strategies. They detailed their efforts to navigate the pandemic, regaining optimism and well-being with the aid of their surroundings, communities, and families.

IV. TABLE THE SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES OF THE STUDY

Themes	Sub-themes	Tales of Joy	Tales of Sorrow
Emotional Strain	Isolation		Financial instability
	Financial instability		Insufficient Government Support
	Government support		
Coping Mechanisms	Family Connectedness	Connectedness	
	Religious Activities	Religious Activities	
	Familial Bonds	Familial Bonds	
Outcomes of the Pandemic	Strengthened the Sense of Belonging	Strengthened Sense of Belonging	
	Unconditional Affection	Unconditional affection within strong families	

V. CONCLUSIONS

The lived experiences of participants during the pandemic, meticulously documented through nearly nine hundred lines of data and organized into coherent themes and clusters, reveal profound insights into the emotional toll and adaptive mechanisms employed in response to this unprecedented global crisis.

Emotional Strain and Its Drivers. The narratives poignantly illustrate that emotional strain was a pervasive experience among participants, primarily driven by factors such as isolation, financial instability, and perceived inadequate government support. The isolation imposed by the pandemic was particularly challenging, disrupting social connections and exacerbating feelings of loneliness and vulnerability. Financial instability further compounded this strain, creating a sense of insecurity and stress. Participants' perceptions of insufficient government support highlighted a gap between public needs and institutional responses, intensifying their emotional distress.

Challenges in Adaptation. Adapting to the restrictive conditions of the pandemic emerged as a significant hurdle. Participants struggled to adjust to a more confined and solitary lifestyle, which starkly contrasted with their pre-pandemic routines. This adjustment difficulty underscores the critical role of social interaction in emotional well-being and the adverse effects of its sudden withdrawal.

Mixed Emotional Outcomes. Despite the overwhelming narrative of sorrow, a subset of participants recounted positive experiences, emphasizing the complexity of human resilience. These individuals found joy and a reinforced sense of belonging within their families. The accounts of unconditional affection and strengthened familial bonds amidst adversity serve as testament to the human capacity for resilience and adaptation, highlighting that even in the darkest times, positive relational dynamics can emerge.

Effective Coping Mechanisms. The study identified family connectedness, religious activities, and close familial bonds as the primary coping mechanisms for participants. These strategies were instrumental in helping them manage their emotional strain, suggesting that the support provided by close relationships and spiritual practices can offer significant solace and stability. Participants actively engaged in efforts to regain optimism and well-being, drawing strength from their surroundings, communities, and families. This finding underscores the importance of social and spiritual support systems in fostering resilience during crises.

Thematic Clusters and Research Questions. The data analysis revealed distinct thematic clusters that addressed the research questions. Three clusters elucidated the nature and extent of emotional strain experienced by participants. Five clusters detailed the coping mechanisms and personal interpretations of the pandemic experience, while two clusters highlighted the positive outcomes and narratives of resilience. These thematic insights provide a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences, offering a comprehensive view of the emotional landscape during the pandemic.

Implications for Policy and Future Research. The findings underscore the necessity for robust support systems, both familial and community-based, to mitigate the emotional impacts of crises. There is a clear need for effective government interventions that address financial instability and provide adequate mental health resources. Future research should delve deeper into the specific coping strategies that proved most effective and explore the long-term impacts of pandemic-induced emotional strain across different demographics. This study lays a foundational understanding of the emotional dynamics during the pandemic, paving the way for more targeted and informed support mechanisms in future crises.

REFERENCES.

- 1) Abdi, S., et al. (2019). Understanding the care and support needs of older people: A scoping review and categorization using the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health Framework (ICF). *BMC Geriatrics*. Retrieved from <https://bmcgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12877-019-1189-9>
- 2) Akinola, S. (2020). COVID-19 worsened ageism. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/covid-19-has-worsened-ageism-here-s-how-to-help-older-adults-thrive/>
- 3) Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJELS/article/view/3400/0>
- 4) Cassell, C. (2020). What are the causes and symptoms of emotional distress? Retrieved from <https://medicalnewstoday.com/articles/emotional-distress>



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.