

COVID-19: In the Eyes of a Filipino Child

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To explore the thoughts and feelings of children on COVID-19, to find out how they were coping in the midst of the pandemic, and what they were doing during lockdown. It was the first month of total lockdown in the Philippines (April 2020) when recruitment for children-participants, through their parents or guardian, was undertaken. A pre-tested open-end questionnaire was administered to children who answered either by paper and pen, or through the social media, with parents' or guardians' cooperation. It generated 200 male and female participants, ages 6-12 years old, and studying in public (including the State University) and private schools (prep, co-ed and exclusive colleges and universities) in the National Capital Region (NCR), in nearby towns and cities.

Results: Participants heard the issues: COVID-19, pandemic and lock down/ quarantine from different media and from their family. Participants described the issues as deadly, dangerous, contagious, world-wide and cause-death virus. About 90% of participants expressed sadness, fear, boredom, anger, disappointments and difficult times. They missed their friends, classmates and school, cousins and relatives, going with siblings, parents and grandparents to the mall, grocery and dining out after church, and outdoor plays and sports. Those who planned for summer out-of-town or country trips were deeply frustrated. To assuage their thoughts and feelings, participants employed self-enhanced coping mechanisms by themselves or with family, such as activities for fun, enjoyment or amusement, like playing video games, watching movies and news, and indoor sports; in hobbies and interests; in praying and watching virtual church ceremonies. Despite the negative expressions they articulated being happy and thankful that family was there, they have longer time to bond, and learning household chores from them thus, the family appeared as participants' saving grace. There were participants who articulated being hopeful, and that through their prayers the pandemic will end soon.

Recommendations: To develop strategies to assist children during (almost) similar events; to revisit the participants after a year or two to find out their reminiscence of their experience; to conduct a follow-up study to find out the long-term effect of the pandemic on the participants' mental health and wellbeing.

Keywords: Pandemic, Mental health, Lockdown, National capital region

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