

Filipino Families in Slum Communities and their Tales of Survival in Times of Pandemic: An Exploration of Wellness Dimensions

Jem Cloyd M. Tanucan* and Marlon T. Bojos

College of Teacher Education, Cebu Normal University, Osmeña Boulevard, Cebu City, 6000, Philippines

ABSTRACT

In this time of pandemic where the balance of wellness dimensions is disrupted, neglecting any dimension can impact adversely on the people's life most especially those who are deprived including their coping strategies and ultimately their survival. A key factor is to ensure that services and policies are in synched with the state of wellness dimensions. This study examined the state of wellness of the thirty purposively selected families in five slum communities in Cebu, Philippines in times of pandemic. One-on-one semi-structured interview was used in order to gather significant data. Discourse analysis was applied which brought about their tales of survival in synched with their eight wellness dimensions. The findings elaborated that the pandemic and the different mitigation measures to curb it, had taken a heavy toll on the wellness of Filipino families in slum communities. However, this did not topple their resiliency and survivability as the social services and other crisis mitigation policies and strategies afforded by the national government and private sectors, albeit insufficient, including the peculiar Filipino attributes and individual initiatives they manifested and done were instrumental. Furthermore, noting that the essential support and services provided for the families in the slum communities were not holistic enough to address the multi-faceted issues hounding their different wellness dimensions, hence, stemming some non-conforming behaviors despite strict quarantine measures. This study recommends that pandemic mitigation measures including essential support and services be reviewed and enhanced in high consideration of human wellness dimensions for them to be more inclusive and holistic.

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E-mail addresses:

tanucanj@cnu.edu.ph (Jem Cloyd M. Tanucan)

bojosm@cnu.edu.ph (Marlon Bojos)

* Corresponding author

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INTRODUCTION

As the world grapples to survive with the economic and health impacts of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, developing countries experience greater burden, given their frail economic capacities and wanting public health infrastructures (Bruckner & Mollerus, 2020; El-Erian, 2020; United Nations Development Programme, 2020; Wolf, 2020). If developed countries are struggling to respond to the pandemic despite their advanced technologies, research breakthroughs, and solid economies, for developing countries, such struggle can be excruciating. Like any other country whose health system is being challenged, the Philippines with its relatively debilitated health infrastructure, is expected to be overwhelmed by the surge of cases.

In the Southeast Asia COVID-19 tracker of the Center for Strategic & International Studies (2020), the country ranked second in terms of the total number of confirmed cases as of June 29, 2020, and ranked first in terms of mortality rate as of July 06, 2020. It also has the lowest recovery rate in the region (Co, 2020). The country's state of coronavirus impact can be aggravated given that its youth are the second most inactive globally (Yee, 2019) alongside the reported poor diet and inadequate nutrition and food system of its citizens in general (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] Philippines, 2019). In addition, due to the limited social connectedness and people engagement after the implementation of strict quarantine protocols, surge of cases on depressions

and anxiety is anticipated. This is on top of the existing social conditions, such as poor urban planning and congestion in some cities and impeding access to healthcare facilities that may exacerbate the country's dreadful situation, leaving the families at the marginal on an impasse.

Having cogitated that COVID-19 would devastate the poor the hardest (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2020), the Philippine government was responsive to roll out cash assistance programs through the Social Amelioration Program for affected workers and poor families under Expanded Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Department of Budget and Management, 2020). It also established the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases led by the Department of Health (DOH) to mount a full-scale, whole-of-government response concerning the COVID-19 and other emerging infectious diseases (Department of Health, 2020). The country's biggest private firms have also come together to support the government in response to mitigating the pandemic impacts including socio-economic needs of the people (de Guzman, 2020). While all sectors of the country are working together to contain the virus outbreak and its impacts, families who are living in marginal area were hardly reached (Abad & Magsambol, 2020; Romero, 2020) and oftentimes invisible in many research investigations, resulting to their less understood situations and actions during the pandemic.

Individuals who are classified as poor or low-income earner are commonly being labeled as "*pasaway*" or stubborn,

irresponsible, undisciplined, and hard-headed in various social media posts and news articles, illustrating how they can potentially cause the rise of the country's COVID-19 cases (Contreras, 2020; Nonato et al., 2020; Stinus-Cabugon, 2020). No less than the president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, remarked the residents of Cebu City, the country's second largest city in terms of population and the new epicenter of COVID-19, as hard-headed for violating quarantine protocols and guidelines (ABS-CBN News, 2020; Mendez & Crisostomo, 2020; Punzalan, 2020) While certain deliberate pandemic mitigation policies are already implemented in order for the people to adhere to social distancing and home quarantine guidelines, what is disregarded is the current state of wellness during the pandemic of the poor families in slum communities who are suspected and sometimes out-rightly tagged as the "quarantine violators".

It is important to recognize that the quality of an individual's wellness determines his or her behavior. The state of human wellness defines how an individual thrives in life, looks, feels, thinks, and interacts with others, including the formation of his or her life meaning and purpose. That is why people's actions during the pandemic can be rooted upon the state of their wellness dimensions including the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Social, Spiritual, Environmental, Financial and Occupational as suggested in many studies (e.g. Childs, 2014; Foster & Keller, 2007; Joo, 2008; Kayastha, 2018; Naz et al.,

2013; Rehman et al., 2013; van Rensburg et al., 2011). Each dimension contributes to a person's overall quality of life, and each dimension can affect and overlap one another. In this time of pandemic where the balance of wellness dimensions is disrupted, neglecting any dimension for any length of time can impact adversely on individual's life most especially those who are deprived including their coping strategies and ultimately their survival. A key factor is to ensure that services and policies are able to reach down to the grassroots level, and are appropriate to their specific situation and state of wellness dimensions.

Against this backdrop, the starting point of this study assumes that the nation's preventive policies and humanitarian services to mitigate the impacts of a pandemic should be in synch with the state of wellness of its citizens. To date, little evidence can be found that documents the well-being of the Filipino families living in slum communities during the pandemic including their wellness management activities in order to survive. Hence, this study would like to respond to this gap by answering the following questions:

1. What is the state of wellness of Filipino families in slum communities in times of pandemic in terms of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental, occupational and financial dimensions?
2. How do they manage each of their wellness dimensions in order to survive?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a qualitative study that utilized a collective or multiple case design where cases were analyzed to produce a synthesis of information. Multiple case design can enhance the generalizability of the qualitative results when investigating complex situations, making it more applicable to a wider environment. There were 30 purposively selected families, composing of ten (10) mothers, fifteen (15) fathers and five (5) sons and daughters of legal age. All of them are living in five (5) slum communities in Cebu, Philippines. A little over half of them (53.33%) are dependent on fishing as the main source of income while the rest (46.67%) are dependent on contractual wage labor. The average family size is five persons per household.

Social Distancing Protocol and Wearing of Personal Protective Equipment were strictly adhered to ensure optimum safety for both the researchers and the family being interviewed. Confidentiality and Anonymity guidelines were explained carefully in their language and were stipulated in the Informed Consent Form (ICF) which was signed to confirm their participation. As underscored in the ICF, all personal information that were gathered during the interview would only be used for the purpose of this study. An average of an hour and 30 minutes (90 minutes) semi-structured, one-on-one interview per family was used to gather essential information based on the eight (8) dimensions of wellness. The gathered information were then subjected to discourse analysis involving the process

of analyzing the connections of informants' discourses, actions, and context which according to Gee (2011a; 2011b) is the very essence of analyzing discourses. More specifically, he stated that a discourse was a characteristic way of "saying", "doing", and "being", whereby saying referred to oral or written utterances of individuals which commonly being social practiced and observed through their doing in context with their being, culture or background. In other words, the qualitative data of this study are analyzed by stating the study's informants' utterances (saying) and describing their actions (doing) categorized in the eight wellness dimensions of the human person. Then, they are expounded using related studies and works of literatures and Filipino cultural identity and contextual events (being). Taking everything into account, this unveils the tales of the survival of Filipino families in slum communities in the time of COVID-19 pandemic in synched with their eight wellness dimensions.

RESULTS

After a thorough analysis of the informants' responses, this study revealed the utterances (saying) and actions (doing) of Filipino families in slum communities during the pandemic in synch with the human wellness dimensions. The different wellness management activities they employed were also highlighted in this section.

Physical Wellness

The worsening gravity of the different issues on physical health due to poor sanitation and hygiene supplies, existing

diseases and illnesses, limited access to food and healthcare supplies were the things particularly identified by the majority of the informants (23 out of 30 families) as they shared their situation in times of pandemic. Fifteen (15) families said that their concern were the quality access and purchase of clean water, sufficient food supply and sanitation facilities, resulting to compounding health conditions during the pandemic. For instance, the father of Family 3 responded:

“My job has been compromised because of the pandemic causing my family to have limited supply on our basic needs such as water and food and sanitation supplies like soap, clean water, and other toiletries. This resulted to not just incomplete and poor meals a day, but also to my kids and wife suffering from skin rashes and diarrhea.”

The father of Family 17 also said:

“After the strict implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine and social distancing, I was not able to provide my family the food that we need every day because my company’s operation has been stopped temporarily and I do not have the money to give my family right now...Moreover, I worry for my wife’s kidney failure condition given that it is difficult to go to the pharmacy without public utility vehicles...We also do not have our own family vehicle.”

Additionally, there were eight (8) families who expressed that the pre-existing diseases and illnesses of their family members were what burdened them the more because not only that they did not have the financial capacity to buy the necessary medications, their vulnerability to get infected was also high. The daughter of Family 9 shared:

“My mother who is under our care already has diabetes even before COVID-19. This has been giving us a lot of stress and burden because we do not have the financial capacity to treat her illness. More so, we worry about our vulnerability of getting infected.”

When asked about how they managed to balance their physical wellness despite their situation, majority of them (13 out of 23 families) said that they were hinging on the financial support of the government and the food and supply rations of private groups. The mother of Family 16 said:

“Despite the meager financial support from the government, we are still thankful that we are being considered in times like this. It helped us buy our food and other daily supplies. Also, the different help coming from other private organizations have complemented the things that the government did not provide us such as food, medicines, and clothing...It is wonderful to see how Filipinos unite to help those who are in need.”

Others shared that they did on-call labors from the neighborhood such as washing of clothes (4 out of 22 families), machine repairs (2 out of 22 families), and establishment of temporary small-business called “sari-sari” or mixed merchandise (5 out of 22 families) in order to sustain their basic physical and health needs. They expressed:

“In order for my family to eat three meals daily, I asked my neighborhood if I can wash their clothes for a certain fee.” – Mother of Family 2

“I used the financial support of the government to establish a small mixed merchandise in our house. It is a great help because I was able to buy clean water and enough food for my family.” – Mother of Family 30

On the other hand, the remaining seven (7) families said that they were coping with the pandemic and they did not have problems in terms of having clean water and food for their family because of the financial support afforded by the government. Although there were two (2) families who said that they had family members who experienced fever and cough, they had savings from the government’s financial support which were enough to buy medicine. As for the mother of Family 4, she said:

“Since the implementation of home quarantine, we do not have problems in terms of food and water

so far. It is because the support given by the government is enough for our everyday consumption. We are just four in the family and one of my children has her own small “sari-sari” store (mixed merchandise) that is why we are not really affected. Although my son has fever right now, we can still buy medicine for him using the government’s social amelioration fund.”

Intellectual Wellness

Because of the extended period of time being home quarantined, all of the families said that idleness and boredom oftentimes got into the picture atop their anxiousness and fear because of COVID-19. That is why they did some mentally-stimulating activities in order to manage their situation such as: *Household Arts and Crafts; Board Games; Work; and Gambling.*

There were (18) families who indicated that they managed to get their minds stimulated by doing different household arts and crafts. Some of them said that they did “*food art*” whenever they cooked their “*merienda*” or snacks or different staples which they sold for their business. For instance, the daughter of Family 5 said:

“What I like about this quarantine is that I was able to bond more with my parents through cooking and doing some “food art”...By putting some designs and creating new recipes for our “merienda”, or

the one we sell to the neighborhood, I, my mother, and my siblings were able to keep our minds stimulated. That is why there were less idle days during the quarantine period.”

Some also said that they enjoyed doing household craft like making baskets, fish-nets and garden materials, giving them the means to keep their minds active despite being stuck at home. The son of Family 15 said:

“I, my brothers, and father are keeping our minds working by making different crafts for our house like baskets, fishing nets, garden tools, and pots.”

On the other hand, four (4) families expressed that they played different board games to keep themselves busy. For instance, the father of Family 6 said:

“We usually play “Sungka” (traditional Filipino Mancala game), chess, and scrabble with my kids. I think these board games are what keep our mind working in this time of pandemic.”

Moreover, five (5) families expressed that their work in their respective companies was what kept them working and thinking every day. For the father of Family 14, he said:

“Because we need money to buy the food that we need, we have no choice but to go out and work... Although working in my company

is risky, I think that’s what kept me working and thinking. I forgot my worry and I do not get bored as what other families are experiencing by staying in their homes.”

Lastly, three (3) families expressed that they ventured on gambling through playing of cards or participating in “Sabong” (Cockfight). The father of Family 24 said:

“Our situation now is already bad and I do not want to get this worsened by keeping myself stuck in the house. That is why I play cards with my friends or participate in “Sabong” in order to keep myself busy...It also helps my mind stimulated.”

Emotional Wellness

The increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety and their general feelings of uncertainty and fear due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases were the evocative response of the majority of the families (21 out of 30 families) when asked about their state of mind during the pandemic. Twelve (12) of these families said that their inability to go out freely had caused feelings of loneliness and isolation which affected their daily activities and the way they dealt with others. The son of Family 12 said:

“Before the pandemic, I used to go to the market to sell our products. It is important to me because I was able to help my parents and see my

friends who are also vendors. Now, that we are stuck in the house, it feels as if I am a prisoner and going outside is a crime...Thinking about it makes me sad because we do not deserve to be like this – to be stuck in the house waiting for rations of the government.”

Moreover, nine (9) families expressed that they felt more anxious and stressed out because of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases and the susceptibility of their place. The father of Family 26 expressed:

“I am terrified, worried, and stressed about our situation here in the squatters’ area because I have with me my wife and mother who both have heart conditions. I cannot think of ways how I can help them in terms of medication, knowing that I do not have income right now and our place is susceptible to COVID-19 outbreak.”

When asked about how they managed to balance their emotional wellness despite their situation, majority of them (14 out of 21 families) said that they kept themselves busy at home like doing regular household chores, growing plants and establishing a “sari-sari” store in order to relieve themselves from anxieties and stress. The mother of Family 11 said:

“The things I do at home like cooking meals, cleaning the house,

growing plants and managing my small sari-sari store are the things that help me stay calm despite the many problems and stress we are experiencing because of the pandemic.”

The father of Family 25 said:

“What my family does in order not to get really affected with the pandemic is by keeping ourselves busy at home. In fact, we grow more resilient as a family because we are able to do things together unlike before that we had our different tasks.”

Other families indicated that they hung out with their friends and do gambling (3 out of 24 families) and/or drink alcoholic beverages (2 out of 24 families) or just plain “Chika” or “gossip” talking (2 out of 24 families) in order to forget about their problems, anxieties, and stress. They shared:

“I do not want to die insane, that’s why if there is an opportunity to go out and hang out with my friends, I do it...We just do some little gambling like cards.” – Father of Family 13

“According to the news, alcohol can kill virus. That is why, I hang out with my friends and drink “Red Horse” (a local brand of alcoholic beverage) together. That is why, we can say that we are killing the virus inside our body if there is and we

are relieving our stress at the same time.” – Father of Family 21

“For me to forget my stress, I just go to the neighborhood and just “Chika” (gossip) about random things with my friends.” – Mother of Family 23

On the other hand, the remaining four (4) families said that they were coping with the pandemic and they did not have problems in terms of being stressed-out or burdened. They said they were already used to facing different problems and dealing with the pandemic was not an issue for them at all. For instance, the mother of Family 7, said:

“We have been through a lot of struggles and problems in the family. In fact, we have surpassed many struggles worse than this like our house got burnt and nothing, not even our clothing, were saved... That is why, the virus that we are having right now does not really affect us very much. Although my husband was not able to report to work, the subsidy of the government is enough.”

And, the other five (5) families said their faith in God was the reason why they were coping with the pandemic. For instance, the mother of Family 2 said:

“We have been through a lot of challenges as a family and I know we can survive this pandemic because

God will help us get through this. We remain strong and hopeful because we know that God will not abandon us in times like this.”

Social Wellness

Because of the implementation of the home quarantine and social distancing, all of the families said that their mobility and socialization were curtailed. However, they have varied responses to the situation, resulting to the three (3) different socialization activities that are commonly observed in the slum communities. These are: *Staying at home and be productive with the family members; Going out and be with friends; and Going out for work and survive.*

There were (18) families that indicated that they opted to abide to the home quarantine guidelines mandated by their local government in order to be safe, and while doing so, they made themselves productive by doing different household arts and crafts in the family including doing business. For the mother of Family 19, she said:

“The good thing about staying is that you get to enjoy being with your family while keeping yourselves protected from the virus. It is an opportunity for us to bond with each other – like my son is doing some business with his wife. Meanwhile, I enjoy creating different arts and crafts with my son.”

On the other hand, seven (7) families did not care much about the home quarantine

guidelines that they decided to be with their friends to hang out or do “Chika”, as if there was no existing virus. For the father of Family 8, he said:

“Life is beautiful to keep ourselves stressed-out. That is why I and my family just go out and be with our friends... We already have many problems and we do not want to add to it by keeping ourselves locked at home.”

Lastly, there were five (5) families who decided to continue working in their companies during the quarantine period because the support given by the government and other private organizations was not enough for their daily needs including medication and sanitation supplies. As explained by the father of Family 14:

“The support we have received from the government and different organizations are not enough for us to have a complete meal in a day while addressing, at the same time, our other problems like medicine and sanitation supplies. That is why, as the head of the family, I am left with no choice but to take risk by going out to work so that my family will not die from hunger.”

Spiritual Wellness

When asked about the meaning and purpose of their lives this pandemic, the evocative response emerged was *Survival of the Fittest*. It means doing all means whether

safe or unsafe or legal or illegal in order to sustain their basic needs and survive. As for the father of Family 12, he said:

“We cannot let the pandemic win over our lives. We cannot just sit down and wait for help to come. We need to be wise and find ways in order for us to survive. That is why, out from the financial support of the government, we make our own small business so that we can save enough to buy the food and medicine we need.”

The father of Family 1 also said:

“Surviving is what life is about during the pandemic. Being the breadwinner of the family, I do everything to provide my wife and my children the food and things they need for them to live... Whether legal or illegal, safe or unsafe, all the means that I think can provide my family with basic needs, I already did them all... I will continue doing them until I get a stable job.”

Having the responses considered, it can be said that COVID-19 not only brought struggle, distress, and insecurity to people, it also puts them in a desperate situation in order to survive.

Environmental Wellness

When asked about the state of their lives in terms of taking care of the environment during the pandemic, most of the families

(24 out of 30 families) said that thinking about the environment was not their main concern as saving their lives was what matters during the pandemic. As for the father of Family 1:

“Although taking care of the environment is important, with our current situation, I think what matters the most in this time is our survival and not on those things.”

The father of Family 22 also expressed:

“We need to take care of ourselves first before taking care of other else. If only we do not have problems right now, I think we can be more mindful with the situation of our environment. Besides, our place is already filthy, we are already used to this kind of situation.”

The remaining six (6) families said that they are still taking care of the nature despite the crisis they are facing. As for the mother of Family 2, she said:

“During the quarantine period, one of the things we do in our house is to grow ornamental plants in order to protect the nature and help them flourish so that our community will become clean and beautiful again.”

Occupational Wellness

When asked about the state of their occupation during this time of pandemic, all of them indicated that they were all affected adversely and that was regardless if their

job was contractual, regular, or personal business. Majority (21 of 30 families) said that they lost their jobs and other main sources of income due to business shutdowns and mandated lockdown orders, causing them to depend on the government and private organizations’ financial support and did temporary means of living such as on-call jobs and “sari-sari” store selling. They shared:

“Our life in the family this pandemic is dark because both of us, my wife and I, lost our jobs because of the company shutdown. Now, we are depending on the financial support of the government and to the aids coming from private companies.”
– Father of Family 27

“We used to sell “Balut” (fertilized developing egg embryo of ducks) as our family’s main source of income but because of the pandemic, we temporarily shut it down because we do not sell as much as we used to before. This affected us because our income from it is used to buy medicines for the illness of my grandmother.” – Daughter of Family 9

The remaining (5) families continued working as usual as some of them were “Tanod” or barangay peace and order officer and others were sales clerks in the department store. However, despite the continued salary, they were still getting stressed as they understood that they had

higher exposure to the virus. The mother of Family 20 said:

“I need to continue my work because my family is dependent on me. I have to take risk because it is one of the convenient ways to save my family in this kind of situation.”

All the five (5) families that opted to work try to manage their occupational stress due to their susceptibility to virus infection by avoiding socialization with their workmates and by keeping themselves protected with the use of facemasks and alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

Financial Wellness

When asked about the state of their finances during this time of pandemic, all of them indicated that they were all affected adversely, giving them additional burden with their pre-existing financial problems. All of them were worried about their everyday expenses given that majority of them had lost their main sources of living and had realized that the financial support of the government was insufficient. As for the father of Family 10, she said that:

“Even before Covid-19, we are already struggling financially. That is why our financial status now is all the more worrisome because I and my wife do not have jobs this pandemic.”

The mother of Family 2 also said:

“Just because we are coping with the pandemic does not mean we do

not have any worries financially. We are worried our financial situation in this pandemic because even though we are supported by the government, we are still uncertain as to how long it will last and how certain we are able to get our jobs back after the pandemic... Our company announced that its operations are suspended indefinitely because of great financial losses.”

The families in the slum communities are going through considerable worry and uncertainty due to unstable and inadequate finances. In order for them to continue surviving despite the situation, all of them said that setting priorities and taking advantage of the available and given resources were the key. As explained by the father of Family 14:

“If money is tight and surviving at this time is the main concern, it is vital that we should be able to distinguish what is essential and what is not.”

The father of Family 25 expressed:

“It is important to be wise during this pandemic. By making use of the available things we have in the house and the things given by others, we are able to establish our little business and cope with the financial problems that we are experiencing right now.”

DISCUSSION

As suggested in the results of the study, the growing crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has dire implications in all the dimensions of wellness among the families in the slum communities. More specifically, many of them are beginning to realize that their physical health conditions are worsened, intellectually-stimulating activities are more delimited, emotions are more troubled, life's meaning and purpose are disturbed, socialization is curtailed, responsibility to protect the nature is undermined, occupations are halted and financial stability is more frail. This provides an explanation as to why many deprived families and individuals hardly afford to isolate themselves in their respective homes (Santos, 2020; Saokaew, 2020; Sur & Mitra, 2020) as they are in "lockdown dilemma" – to die from hunger or the virus? Many of them live hand-to-mouth using their meager earnings for survival. If they are to abide to stay at home and depend only to the government's or private sectors' subsidy, they will not be able to address their pressing problems like the frailing health of their family members and other needs. Hence, while it is true that everyone is affected due to the virus' adverse impacts (Connolly, 2020), this study agrees to the contention of Mahler et al., (2020) and Sánchez-Páramo (2020) that those in the vulnerable section of the society, especially those living in extreme poverty, are being hit the hardest.

Furthermore, the findings elucidate a glaring gap of the government's disaster or crisis mitigation and response strategies as

they are not holistic enough to address the multi-faceted issues hounding the different human wellness dimensions. For instance, during the super typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda), the fourth strongest typhoon in recorded history with wind speeds of more than 300 kilometers per hour and storm surged of over four meters, it was reported that the government response was seen to be slow and grossly inadequate (IBON Foundation, 2014). It was also specified in the report that even after the typhoon, social services and livelihoods had yet to be delivered for the surviving families, resulting for their distress due to an extended displacement, schooling disruptions for school children, fragmentary health services, and uncertain and erratic dole-outs for basic sources of livelihoods. The report of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA; 2016) also indicated that even after a year of typhoon devastation, hundreds of thousands who were yet to receive the emergency shelter assistance (ESA) – provision of P10,000 and P30,000 cash assistance to families whose houses were partially and totally damaged by the typhoon Yolanda. Moreover, it was noted that governmental support for persons with disabilities was still insufficient with no survey carried out to confirm the safety or condition after the devastation of the typhoon (United Nations OCHA, 2014). This kind of disaster or crisis response with less emphasis on the threatened dimensions of human wellness is also apparent in this time of COVID-19 pandemic. If this continues to be practiced, Filipinos including those who

are in the slum communities will continue to be confronted with even graver challenges that no amount of material support nor iron-fisted measures can intervene.

However, despite all the challenges that hounded the Filipinos including the COVID19 pandemic, resiliency and survivability are still their best assets shared both by the government and its people. Small and insufficient as it may seem, the Social Amelioration Program of the national government came as a quick rescue for poor families. The laws implemented by the government for COVID-19 management, response and recovery such as the Republic Act No. 11469 or “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act” and Republic Act No. 11494 or “Bayanihan to Recover as One Act” are concrete affirmations on the resiliency of the government. As no government can provide everything all the families’ needs, the devastated families in the slum communities had their fair share by activating their initiatives and manifesting the peculiar Filipino attributes (e.g. “bayanihan” - the Philippine culture of mutual assistance, religiosity, and optimism) in order to survive. Not surprisingly, the poorest section of the society have proven their ability to cover from the pandemic be it in the form of socialization to avoid boredom and loneliness, small entrepreneurial ventures for additional income, on-call services and risk taking for work and “bayanihan” among others.

For centuries, the world has witnessed how every Filipino withstand adversities. In furtherance, it is worth re-emphasizing that

the Philippines despite being classified as a developing country, a myriad of challenges in various aspects are survived by its people be it political turmoil, economic recession, natural and man-made calamities. This can be attributed to their well-built psychological, sociological, and spiritual make up. The United Nations’ World Happiness Report 2019 attested on this, citing that Filipinos are one of the top Southeast Asian countries who are happy (Helliwell et al., 2019) which implies that they have the optimism and fighting spirit to overcome whatever situation. This complements the survey of Social Weather Stations, a well-established social research institution in the Philippines, which showed that 88 percent of Filipinos above 18 years old are optimistic to overcome the crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic (Geducos, 2020). The newly released 2020 Global Entrepreneurship Survey reported that Filipino entrepreneurs are fast adopters, resilient and hardworking with a data that one in three Filipinos decided to establish new microbusinesses despite the uncertainty of the times (GoDaddy, 2020). The Philippines being one of the most religious countries – the only Christian-dominated country in Asia, contributes to the resilience and active coping of Filipinos as they take crises as a test of faith (Rilveria, 2018). In other words, Filipinos including those from the outskirts of the community have the attributes to stand pat and move forward amidst challenges and pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the different mitigation and response strategies to curb its impact have taken a heavy toll on the wellness of Filipino families in slum communities. However, this did not topple their resiliency and survivability as the social services and other crisis-mitigation policies and strategies afforded by the national government and private sectors, albeit insufficient, including the peculiar Filipino attributes and individual initiatives they manifested and done were instrumental. In other words, overcoming COVID19 pandemic and other crisis is neither the sole responsibility of the government nor the individuals or family. It is through individual and communal effort, working hand in hand through and through.

Recommendation

Noting that the essential support and services afforded by the government and private sectors were not holistic enough to address the multi-faceted issues hounding the different human wellness dimensions, hence, stem the non-conforming behaviors of many individuals despite strict quarantine measures, this study recommends that pandemic mitigation measures including essential support and services be reviewed and enhanced in high consideration of human wellness dimensions for them to be more inclusive and holistic.

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