



# Life During a Crisis: Narratives of Teachers as COVID-19 Survivors

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## Abstract

This study described the narratives and experiences of teachers as COVID-19 survivors in Ibijay East District, Division of Aklan, Philippines. A phenomenological research design was employed to document the shared stories of five (5) teacher-participants. An in-depth interview with the participants described the lived experiences of teachers exposed to different difficulties varying on their level of COVID-19 infections. Anxiety, fear and worries worsened the speed of recovery of their health. They encountered challenges and difficulties especially on the degree of support and understanding from the family and the education community on how they cope with their personal and teaching responsibilities which greatly affected their mental and emotional health. Similarly, discrimination in the workplace triggered the sickness that resulted to anxiety. While the challenges can be overwhelming, all of them developed positive attitude like stronger faith in God and to value the quality time with family and self. As an output of the study, a proposed policy action plan was prepared to help address the results of the study.

**Keywords:** *phenomenology, narratives, challenges, coping mechanisms, Covid-19, COVID-19 Survivors*

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## **Introduction**

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused a dramatic disruption in the delivery of education in the Philippines. With school closures and challenges in the delivery of distance learning, students learning losses are expected to be massive. The Department of Education recognizes the need for a holistic approach and balance that is why safety and health protocols are strictly observed. Regardless, Teaching and Non-Teaching personnel of the Department of Education (DepEd) are not exempted nor safe from getting infected with this virus. Amidst all the challenges, the learners' rights to inclusive and quality education, and to safety from the health risks of COVID- 19 were still given priority.

DepEd remains to be committed to the continued delivery of basic education services to learners and their communities amidst the threat to everyone's health. Teaching and Non-teaching personnel who are delivering services while performing their jobs were on risk of getting infected. Given that our employees, our peers, our colleagues are supported with benefits and financial assistance by the government, that does not gratify all their needs. Infected with COVID-19, teachers are now exposed to the great risk of losing their life and sanity, while battling with the virus. The unique struggle of experiencing getting infected and coping with the responsibilities as a teacher is something that is interesting to describe and learn from it.

With this scenario, COVID-19 teacher-survivors' stories were seldom heard and documented and given importance. Thus, being in the academe, it encouraged the researcher to conduct a study on the lived experiences of COVID-19 survivors in the District of Ibajay East to better understand the experiences and how teachers cope during a crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher believes that it is worthy of academic consideration and thorough study to understand how COVID-19 infected teachers were affected and the brunt it caused on their teaching experiences.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

In this study, phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized in order for the researcher to comprehensively capture the research questions appropriately and adequately. Phenomenological approaches “focus on the ways we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world, and in so doing, develop a worldview”, Patton (2002).

The researcher opted to use this design for its relevance and appropriateness to the research problem being undertaken most especially in drawing out the participants' first-hand experiences on being infected with the virus and how their teaching experiences were affected.

### ***Participants of the Study***

The participants of this study are 5 COVID 19 survivors from the District of Ibaday, East. They are regular permanent employee, three of them are classroom teachers, while 2 are school heads.

### ***Data Gathering Instrument***

In this qualitative study, the primary data-gathering method involves primarily in-depth interviews with participants, Creswell (2007). Researcher-made interview guide that was based on the statement of the problem is used to collect the necessary information from the teacher-participants. Questions included in the interview guide are open-ended or unstructured in nature so that it would enable the researcher to insert follow up questions to extract the most comprehensive and substantial information.

Part I gathers information on the profile of teachers.

Part II provides answers on the lived experiences, problems, challenges encountered by the teacher who experienced COVID19, elicits information on the coping mechanisms of the teacher-participants to counter the negative and devastating effects of COVID 19 and what best works for them.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

Prior to data gathering, permission was obtained from Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Aklan and District Supervisor of Ibaday East. Letter of informed consent explaining the purpose of the study and the extent of participation were given to the five teacher-participants for signature.

The research instrument used in gathering the data is a semi-structured interview guide consisting of two parts. In this type of interview, the interviewer or the researcher prepared list of questions but did not necessarily ask them all, or touch on them in any particular order, using them instead to guide the conversation. A semi-structured interview was a meeting in which the interviewer did not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. Instead, the interviewer asked more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format.

All the gathered data were carefully recorded, transcribed, interpreted and individually categorized according to themes.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

Colaizzi's method of data analysis was used in interpreting the qualitative research data gathered to identify meaningful information and organize it into themes or categories.

Each transcript was read and re-read to obtain a general sense of the whole content of the study. For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the case under study were extracted. These statements were recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and line numbers.

Meaning was formulated from the significant statements. The formulated meanings were sort into categories and cluster of themes. The finding of the study was integrated into a description under a phenomenological research design. The fundamental structure of the phenomenological design is described.

Finally, validation of the findings was sought from the research participations to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

### ***Ethical Consideration***

In the conduct of this study, the researcher ensured all the necessary letters of consent were secured and proper coordination with people who have direct involvement in this study were properly conducted.

In addition, letter of informed consent was given to the participants to orient them on the purpose of the study and for them to know their extent of participation in the study being undertaken. Interview took place on the time and place of convenience to the participants.

The researcher ensured the anonymity of the teacher-participants by using pseudonyms to conceal their real identity. All the information disclosed by the participants were treated with utmost confidentiality by strictly adhering to the provisions of Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

## **Findings**

Based on the results, the major findings of the study revealed that teachers who were infected of COVID-19 had different lived experiences based on the level of infection and the spread of the virus among their family.

Among the challenges met by the respondents of this study are the effect on their emotional and mental health because they were discriminated despite the existing friendship and relationships. All of them had tough times while on quarantine, traumatized of the experience. Their health situations were worsened with stresses, worries and overthinking as to their situations, for all other family members infected and with the people they had contact with. On top of their difficulties was their financial status and capacity that affects their daily struggles too.

The tasks required from them of their work was limited due to contact constraints to other people and limit on movements due to isolation and quarantine. As teachers and school administrators, their work asks for more on hands on and face to face interaction with learners, parents, colleagues and others. They all had different means as to comply with works, wherein all of them did their work submission, monitoring, planning and others through online and distant communication. Online submissions of reports, online attendance to meetings and seminars and having others cover for them for works expected of them are their way to cope with work.

They managed their situation through prayers, stronger faith, care, love and support of their family, friends and loved ones. Prayer was their ultimate coping mechanism. They have stronger faith than ever most especially during the time they were infected with COVID-19 and up to present. It helped them to stabilize their emotions and mental health. The emotional support of loved ones lessened their fear and worries. Results of this study reveals that quality time with family and self were helpful in order to manage their time and mental health during the quarantine. The pandemic strengthened the bond and closeness among the family inside the household.

## **Conclusion**

The following conclusions are met based on the study's findings:

- The lived experiences of teachers exposed different difficulties varying on their level of COVID-19 infections. Anxiety, fear and worries worsened the speed of recovery of their health. Stable mental health among teachers is vital in able to handle the stress brought by being infected with COVID-19.

- Capability to adjust to work situations through learning other ways to cope with tasks is necessary. Learning new skills to cope with the work even in distant situation is essential. Making use of online applications and exploring new ways how to make use of technology to adjust with the situation is significant.
- Stronger Faith to God, stronger bond with family and loved ones makes the battle with COVID-19 easier. Spending quality time with family and self, valuing relationship with people helps a lot during COVID-19 infection. Teachers being resilient to challenges and problems, benefits not only herself but also the people around him.

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