

Lived Experiences of Fishermen in the Midst of Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic

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ABSTRACT— Coronavirus ruins the families globally especially people who earn below-average income that includes the fishermen sector. This study aimed to determine the lived experiences of fishermen amid coronavirus Pandemic. It employed a qualitative design using the collaizzi approach through face to face interviews. During the lockdown fishermen were not allowed to go out of their respective homes and prohibited them to go out to sea, it had affected them economically and had to depend from government subsidy and food aids from non-government organizations. Fishermen families have planted vegetables, work as house helper, do firewood gathering and reduced their food intake to cope with the crisis. The participants were in a state of fear and worries during the pandemic, family help each other to find livelihood options to earn money for food and other family needs. The culture of Filipino of being hospitable and accommodating to relatives was naturally denied just to prevent contamination of the virus. Fishermen were emotionally affected since they were worried about how to support their families while afraid of being infected by Covid-19. Findings have implications for government and non- government organizations that assist marginalized sectors especially the fishermen during the time of the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: community quarantine, coping mechanism, fisherfolks, income, livelihood

1. INTRODUCTION

Fisherfolks are one of the sectors that are vulnerable to any type of poverty situation especially coronavirus pandemic. Subsistence fisherfolks are prone to uncertainty and often characterized as the occupation of settlers in the coastal villages and they belong to the poorest of the poor sector in the society. In most cases, fishermen do not appear in social media on the awful effect of the pandemic. This sector has a small voice in the community for they are not heard and most of the time their sad experiences were not being given priorities [15]. In this study the experiences of fishermen will be documented and how they cope in times of crisis like coronavirus pandemic. Fishermen will voice out their life story, their actual fishing activities, their involvement in the community, and their family. The pandemic has caused the lockdown of many parts of the world since March 2020. This caused people to stay home, observe the physical distance, and to always wear face masks. The activities of people have halted. For fishermen, the marine fishing operation has stopped. The further imposition of the fishing ban is tremendously affecting the sector. The government should consider some alternative means to reduce the ban period, particularly for this year or special financial assistance may be provided to the fishing communities. If this sector is affected, other sectors are affected as well because fishery products are needed by farmers and as well as all sectors in the society [12], [3] showed that the majority believe that they were taking precautionary measures but not to the extent following all the guidelines given by the World Health Organization (WHO), because of some limitations due to lack of facilities. WHO has declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern [19]. Currently, other seasonal infections cause more global disease than COVID-19. However, there are concerning elements to this emerging infectious agent, initial greater estimated mortality, and no inherent immunity in global populations. Emergency clinicians must understand the dynamics of this emerging epidemic at both the individual- and

population-based levels, learn how to recognize those patients at risk or suffering from COVID-19, and prepare to treat these patients in their clinical practice. Government efforts must not only direct to infected individuals but to all sectors who were affected by the shutdown of industries, no work-no pay scheme and stay-at-home protocols. After the pandemic, all sectors who were greatly affected must prepare again in adjusting economically, which would take time, for all entities are going to adapt by prioritizing and optimizing spending or they may postpone tasks that will not bring value in the current environment [5].

Negative consequences to date have included complete shut-downs of some fisheries, knock-on economic effects from market disruptions, increased health risks for fishers, processors and communities, additional implications for marginalized groups, exacerbated vulnerabilities to other social and environmental stressors. Globally, the Small Scale Fisheries Sector (SSF) sector plays a vital role in food and livelihood security. Thus, we emphasize the need for rapid mobilization by all parties in support of the SSF sector. Short-term responses must be swift and targeted to the most vulnerable. While the crisis is still unfolding, there is an urgent need to coordinate, plan, and implement effective short- and long-term responses. In the longer-term, there is a need to develop a coordinated response and support network to transform existing institutions, supply chains, and food systems in ways that improve conditions and resilience of the SSF sector [1]. All these combat against the pandemic has vastly affected the major economic sectors such as Agriculture and Fisheries. Agriculture and Fisheries serve as the most important economic sector endorsing food security and human development. It is important to assess the effect of this pandemic on the Agricultural sector and Food as it primarily involves the sustainability of human life and secondarily involves the economy. The pandemic protocols and provisions interfere with the supply chain of the market with impaired production and distribution accompanied by a lack of labor and supply of inputs. This vastly affects the livestock, poultry, fishery as well as dairy production [11]. Most of the fishermen were illiterate and live in the margin, were hardly aware of the threat from Coronavirus. Respondents believed that lockdown was a perfect initiative to control the fast- spreading of the virus while others argued that social distancing is not effective for them. Fishers reported they could not go out for fishing due to COVID restriction while most fish farmers mentioned Coronavirus had an adverse impact on their fish production due to scarcity of input and service provider. People felt the measures taken by the Government should be based on protecting the health and food security, although it could be detrimental to economic growth in the short term [14]. The study of [6] stated that the most affected by coronavirus are the small- scale fishers, primarily those residing in the islands far from the significant economic activities. The majority of the fishing communities still relied on middlemen. Currently, fish catch is sold to the village middlemen at a lower price than the price before the movement restriction period. Some reported could not afford to buy basic food like rice, which leads to the accumulation of debts in the village grocery stores. At these points of time, the affected communities are receptive towards assistance provided by the Government, politicians, philanthropists, NGOs, and others to help them to go through these challenging times amidst losing income-earning opportunities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the qualitative design using the Colaizzi approach through face to face interviews of 10 fishermen participants. Results from the interview went around in 7 participants since it was reaching already the saturation point. It is the intention to gain fishermen's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of their life experiences during coronavirus pandemic. The data were interpreted through phenomenological thematic analysis to scrutinize correctly how the participants seriously expressed their experience.

2.2 Description of Participants

The participants were selected from a coastal village (Figure 1) in Samar Philippines. They were subsistence fishermen who depend on their livelihood in fishing. Participants' age ranges from 30- 60 years old and all of them have a family with 5-6 members.



Figure1. The fishermen villages (source: author1 2020)

2.3 Data Gathering

The researchers developed an interview guide exploring the lived experiences of fishermen whose livelihood was paralyzed and was even stopped during the Enhanced Community Quarantine cognizant to coronavirus. The instrument was scrutinized by an expert. A letter of consent has been secured and signed by the respondents. The respondents were selected are those whose fishing is the main source of their livelihood and they are residents in the coastal area. Data for the study are derived from several open-ended questions, which were designed to probe participants' perceptions about their lived experiences in the midst of coronavirus pandemic such as : (1) what are your actual experiences as a fisherman during the pandemic period?, (2) What are your major problems and issues that you encountered during the pandemic period?, (3) what are your coping mechanism?, (4) What are the major factors that motivate you to survive and cope with daily lives?, (5) What are your recommendations based from your experiences to address the concerns of the fishermen?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

[13] in their study on the impact of coronavirus pandemic to agriculture, food security, and animal sectors showed that agriculture in terms of crop production, food, and animal production sectors will be adversely affected. Consequently, food crises are expected. The impact of coronavirus on food security depends on the availability of different food items. Additionally, it depends on the estimated time frame to contain the coronavirus pandemic. In this study, the handling of data as shown in figure 2.

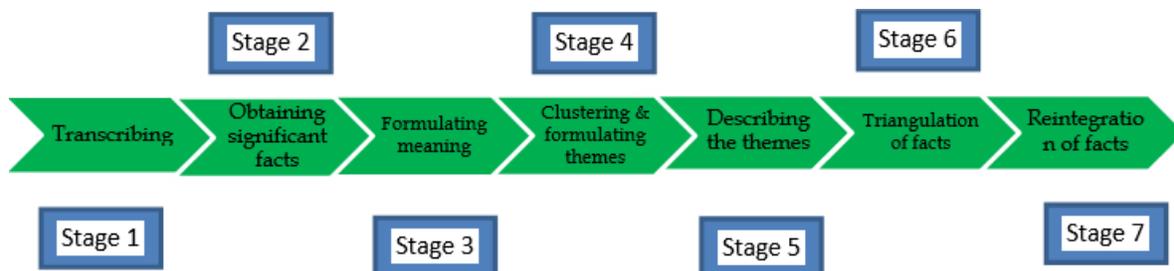


Figure 2. The seven stages in a sequence thematic analysis (adapted from Colaizzi's approaches)

Stage 1: The analysis of participants' interview

The interview was conducted in the residences of the participants, which were along the coast. They were speaking their native language (Waray-Waray) during the interview. The interview was recorded so that in the translation, the researchers will be able to grasp all the significant information. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into the English language. Participants' experiences differed based on the opportunity to reflect on their interview experiences, the sensitivity of the topic explored, and the number of interviews conducted but founded that no differences in participants' articulation of benefits and risks by interview orientation [17].

Stage 2: Obtaining Significant Facts

The researchers have marked all words and statements that were significant to the study. Words and statements were numbered based on the degree of relationship to the phenomenon. The study of [18] disclosed that properly conducted interviews should also be sensitive to both the interviewee's and the interviewer's cognitive processes. Specifically, the interview should facilitate the interviewee's search through memory and not overload either the interviewee's or the interviewer's limited capacity to process information. Interviewers should also avoid excessive questioning which may be perceived as pressure to respond. Interviews are most effective when interviewees provide richly detailed narratives.

Stage 3-5: Formulating Themes and Meaning (table 1)

An individual analysis each sought to identify themes of participants' experiences. This began by searching through data for descriptions of participants' experiences in interviews. It was highlighted, underlined, wrote memos about, and composed summaries of our participants' experiences, including stated and implied risks and benefits [17].

Table 1: Themes, Meaning, and Significant Statement

Themes	Formulated Meaning	Significant Statement
Normal state	Can regularly go on fishing with no fear, Earned money enough for daily food and other basic needs of the family	"Though our livelihood is hard and subsistence, we enjoyed as fishermen, our family is happy if we have income for the needs of the family"
Access to food and other basic needs	Most stores were closed and limited food and other family needs were sold	"Sometimes we have extra money but there were limited store are open"
Effect to Livelihood	Their fishing activities were stopped, No other livelihood that will give the family's daily needs	"The enforcers prohibited the fishermen to go out in our home, so we cannot go to fishing"
Income	No source of income, fishermen, Fishermen were not allowed to go out their home	" We only ate and sleep at home, we do not have another source of income"
Coping mechanism	Work as a porter, gathered firewood for sale, Ask free fish from big fishing boat, both couple work as a housemaid and other planted vegetables and other crops	"Since we were not permitted for fishing, escape from enforcer to do other work to earn money and survive"

Acceptance of laws	Wearing of a mask, follow self-distancing, stopped fishing	" We have no reason not to follow because it is our benefit and safety"
Family support	The wife & children of the fishermen help to work together to earn money	" My family is helping each other to overcome the crisis"
Fear and worry	Afraid going to City, afraid from coronavirus contamination, worry what will happen to the family during and after the pandemic	"I am afraid and worried about the contamination of the virus to my loved ones, I decided to stay at home, avoided joining groups of people"

Stage 6: Triangulation of Facts

After the identification of significant facts, formulating themes, and meaning, the researcher visited again the participants to ask confirmation of all information to ensure the reliability and validity of data. According to [16], investigator triangulation involves using more than one observer, interviewer, coder, or data analyst in the study. Confirmation of data among investigators, without prior discussion or collaboration with one another, lends greater credibility to the observations. The benefits of triangulation can include increased confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem.

3.1 Normal state

Most of the fishermen are living in coastal villages, they do their fishing activity depends on the kind of gear they have, like hook and line, fishing net and trawl. Some fishermen started their fishing activities early in the morning and end late in the afternoon, others started late in the afternoon and ended early in the morning. Fishermen are working 6 days a week sometimes 7 days a week, although most of them are subsistence fishermen still they are happy since they survive and give their family daily needs. Their daily income ranges from 300-500 peso which is just enough for their food and little savings for their children's health and education. Other fishermen's wives are helping them to have income, some are housemaid and market vendors. During the pandemic, and with the proclamation of lockdowns in most areas, the fishermen-participants continue their daily routine as if it was just a normal state for them. They believe that if they will not go out for fishing, they will not have incomes to sustain their food needs. However, if the government prohibits them from fishing, then they would comply provided that subsidies are provided for them. "Usa an kakurian han pagdagat-pangisda, ngatanan amon gin agi-an nga kakuri-an parti pagdagat. Dire kami tag-iya han panagatan kun sumering ngani nga estambay kami dara kay mando han gobyerno kay may covid, ma estambay kami, kon nasiring nga mapalawod, mapalawod kami". (We face a lot of adversities in fishing. We do not own the sea. If the government will say "stay at home because of COVID 19", then we will follow. If it does not say so, then we will go out to the sea.) – Participant number 1 "An akon napinsar deritso, aanhon ko dawla nak pamilya pagserbi kay nagwarning naman an gobyerno nga dire na puide makapanagat. Piro an iba nagpipiret gud panagat para la makakaon an ira pamilya." (When I heard about it, I immediately thought of how I am going to feed my family because the government has already pronounced the lockdown policy. But I've heard others have insisted going to the sea in order to provide food for their families.) – Participant number 2

3.2 Access to food and other basic needs

During the lockdown fishermen were not allowed to go out of their respective homes, the government and other private groups like Non-Government Organization assisted with food and a cash grant. This was supported by the study of [2] that during coronavirus pandemic families received cash and food assistance

from local government and other concerned INGOs, which was given to augment the expenses for food, health, and education of their children. Development partners including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also acted to support governments in dealing with the immediate impacts of COVID-19. Small-scale fisher responses to the pandemic have predominantly comprised actions that can translate into longer-term adaptive strategies that build resilience. Their actions comprise adaptive responses that can form the basis for building resilience. They targeted countries and regions where governments had limited capacity to implement social and economic measures seen elsewhere [8]. “Yana han pag lockdown na zero balance nawarayan kwarta na kami nga puropanagat. Waray na ginkakadtoan nga ginpapakabuhian, ultimo estabon na. Baman ha yana an gobyerno waray naman mag supporta”. (During the lockdown, we have nothing left. There are no work and livelihood we can turn to. We are literally idle. The government’s support and aids are no more”.) -Participant numbers 3, 4 & 6

3.3 Effect to Livelihood

Fishing is the major source of income; fishermen were affected by the pandemic. Fishing and other means of livelihood were stopped; like construction works, tricycle utility, closure of stores, and many other business establishments. Since the educational attainment of this sector was low they learned only works as laborers but same jobs were also closed during the lockdown. According to [7], almost half of the world's seafood comes from small-scale fisheries (SSFs), which also employ 90% of the world's fishers and provide crucial food and livelihoods in coastal communities globally. This important industry virtually collapsed in January 2020, as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4 Income

Most fishermen considered fishing to be an important occupation that provided their main source of income to keep their families well and access to their basic rights in society. The study of [4] articulated that during the closed fishing season most fishers become economically handicapped, all because of being deprived of their main source of employment and income. Some fished for consumption and the income earned from the surplus fish sales, was barely enough for family survival, considering that there were no viable alternative income-generating activities.

3.5 Coping mechanism

During the coronavirus pandemic, this provided opportunities to fishers to involve themselves in different income-generating activities to buy food and other basic needs for their families. Family of fishermen did vegetable planting, do house helping, firewood gathering, and ask fish donations from big fishing vessels. However, the income-generating activities do not sustain for their families during the pandemic since only minimal income were derived from such kind of ventures. Families have reduced their food intake and rice consumption. [2] articulated that amid coronavirus people coped with the food shortage by eating root crops and leafy vegetables and making rice porridge eaten with dried fish. Families received cash and food assistance from the local government and other concerned INGOs, which was given to augment the expenses for food, health, and education of their children. “Kada kaagahon nakadto ako ha pantalan, nakakaaro isda ha mga kilala nga nakakapanagat. Ngan nakakapalit bugas mga tag duha kilo. Nangungutang ha mga tindahan kon may napautang”. (Early morning I went to the pier and ask some fish from my friends who went out to the sea. From the sales of fish, I could buy two kilos of rice. I ask for credit from a store who can lend goods). -Participant number 1 & 3

3.6 Family support

Coronavirus pandemic ruins the families globally especially people who earn below-average income that includes the fishermen sectors. Since the head of the family was prohibited from fishing, all members of the

family were there to provide support. The wife and children help each other to find livelihood options to earn money for food and other family needs. Most of the fishermen's wives joined together to find alternative livelihood just for their family to survive during the pandemic. "Nagbubulig kami mag asawa kon hain nakita para maka palit pagkaon nagbubulig kami nga duha. Nak asawa natrabaho pag labandira, panhugas han mga plato". (Me and my wife helped each other in order to earn money to buy food. My wife works for laundry and dishwashing). -Participant number 1 & 4

3.7 Fear and Worry

All people were in a state of fear and worries during the pandemic, most of them opted to stay at home. The culture of Filipino of being hospitable and accommodating to relatives was naturally not practiced just to prevent contamination of the virus. Fishermen were emotionally affected since they were worried about how to support their families while afraid of being infected by Covid-19. The study of [9] stated that a further potential source of trauma foreseen is social division, particularly between privileged and disadvantaged groups. The financial fallout of COVID-19 will likely increase inequality between high- and low-income families. This unbalanced situation between groups might result in an increased risk of anxiety and depression, substance abuse, and panic disorders in low- income families. "Pagsiring han gobyerno nga dire magginawas-gawas kay dilikado bangin matapanan han covid. Akon mga anak-akon ginsagdunan ko nga magngaghirot kamo kay makuri an panahon". (When the authorities asked us to stay at home because of COVID 19, I asked my children to follow and to take care of themselves). -Participant number 7

3.8 Acceptance of laws

During the pandemic, fishermen were very disappointed but still, they observed laws required by the enforcers. They stopped fishing during the lockdown, the continuous wearing of face mask, and social distancing. During the lockdown, only the head of the family (father) was given the quarantine pass to go out from home once a week to travel to the City. Laws were followed but when hunger strikes, some participants admitted to violate the law. According to [10], regardless of the advice from scientists, doctors, and authorities, commerce, services, and schools will reopen. To implement any strategy aimed to control the pandemic and preserve the economy, the country needs leadership that centralizes and coordinates actions. "An dire panagat-danay dire kami nakakatuman, ha oras nga waray nagud, napiret kami panagat. Para tumindong ngan mabuhi. Magpipiret kami panagat kay waray kami monthly nga kita". (We still find a way to go to the sea despite warnings from authorities not to. We can't do otherwise but to look for ways to survive. We were forced to fish because we have no other income.) - Participant number 3 & 5

4. CONCLUSION

Fishermen experienced unprecedented impacts of the pandemic just like other sectors of the society. Since their major source of income was stopped, their family also had to sacrifice by skipping meals, looking for alternative livelihood and finding other means of income. Fishermen have been emotionally worried about how to support their families to survive and how they will not be infected by the virus. They have undertaken unacquainted works when they were prohibited for fishing as their coping mechanism for them to get money to buy food and other family basic needs. Despite the authorities' warnings, participants have violated some policies by going out to the sea in order to earn money to provide food in their table, yet, if government can only provide subsidies, then they will heed the stay at home policy. Government and non-government organizations should formulate a mechanism on how subsidies and aids can help marginalized sectors such as these fishermen to survive this pandemic.

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