



***Down but Never Out!* Narratives on Mental Health Challenges of Selected College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines: God, Self, Anxiety, and Depression**

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is continuously causing serious effects on the mental health of college students due to the series of lockdowns and sudden shifting of face-to-face classes to fully online. The study aims to determine and explore the various themes that play a significant role in the development of this issue by an in-depth study of selected reflection papers submitted in class. These texts were interpreted and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Findings revealed three major themes: anxiety and depression as serious effects of the pandemic, God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support and, the essentiality of self-awareness and self-acceptance in improving mental health. These themes which are contextualized in nature hope to contribute to future research in formulating effective interventions and strategies in the war against the negative effects of the pandemic most especially for the welfare of college students.

Keywords COVID-19 pandemic · God/higher being · Mental health · Self-acceptance · Self-awareness · Support

Introduction

Lately, I've been having anxiety and depression due to the quantity of workload handed out to us with also the added weight of the pandemic. Since we're mobile in our own homes, it's easier for us to get into depression due to isolation. Being inside my room all day, doing all of the school works and

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requirements handed out to us with a lack of human contact and connections has taken a toll on me. I've been feeling so drained and burnt out like I cannot continue with this term anymore.

This excerpt from a student's reflection paper is a clear indication of her alarming situation during this COVID-19 pandemic. The devastating effects of this crisis pose a grave concern to the overall well-being of everyone most especially to college students. These ushered many students into greater risks during the lockdowns and other restrictions imposed by various governments worldwide. Colleges and universities throughout the world were obliged to shift to pure online classes. The sudden change caused students to break the usual routines of socializing face-to-face with their classmates, teachers, and friends. Government mitigated preventive measures to stop the spread of the virus and ensure the safety of everyone but negative effects emerged among the people of the society. Numerous studies were recently conducted highlighting the negative impact of this tragedy to the mental health of college students.

An online survey using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and Impact of Event Scale was conducted on 2530 members of the University of Valladolid in Spain. Findings revealed moderate to extremely severe scores of anxiety, depression, and stress by 21.34%, 34.19%, and 28.14% of the respondents, respectively. A total of 50.43% of respondents presented moderate to severe impact of the outbreak. Students from Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences & Law showed higher scores related to anxiety, depression, stress, and impact of the event with students from Engineering & Architecture (Odriozola-González et al., 2020). In Russia, Belarus, and Iran, the pandemic also caused various levels of fear, stress, and anxiety. Utilizing the Fear of COVID-19 Scale, 850 young adults from Russia and Belarus were able to complete the survey. The majority of participants were university students and graduates. Females, students, and others from Russia recorded higher levels of COVID-19-related fear than those from Belarus. Respondents from Russia and Belarus, on the other hand, showed less fear than people from Iran who were surveyed earlier (Reznik et al., 2020). In Switzerland, a total of 557 undergraduate students of Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts took part in an online survey regarding the disruption caused by the pandemic. Of the responding students, 85.8% were reported to have experienced anxiety, for which the symptoms, in the majority of cases, can be classified as "mild". Women, too, had significantly higher mean anxiety scores when compared to men (Lischer et al., 2021).

In Bangladesh, 476 university students participated in a cross-sectional web-based survey on the effects of the pandemic. Findings revealed that the students were experiencing heightened depression and anxiety. Around 15% of the students reportedly had moderately severe depression, whereas 18.1% were severely suffering from anxiety (Islam et al., 2020). In India, the lockdown also caused various levels of anxiety to college students. With the use of Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) among 209 respondents, findings revealed that 1.44% had severe anxiety, 14.35% had moderately severe anxiety, 36.36% moderate anxiety, and 47.85% had mild anxiety (Biswas & Biswas, 2021). In China, 7,143 responses were obtained utilizing cluster sampling from

Table 1 Spring 2020 College Student Survey Infographic Report on Mental Health

Findings on some aspects of mental health	Statistics
Students with a mental health problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% of college students say their mental health has significantly worsened under COVID-19
Students who reported the negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of college students report that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health
The most common ways that COVID-19 has impacted students' lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91% stress or anxiety • 81% disappointment or sadness • 80% loneliness or isolation • 48% financial setback • 56% relocation
Self-care has been challenging for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% have trouble maintaining a routine • 73% struggle to get enough physical activity • 63% find it challenging to stay connected with others
Spending time together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% say that focusing on schoolwork despite distractions has been the most difficult thing about the stay-at-home order • More than talking, especially about COVID-19, students say that the #1 way parents can support them is simply spending time with them
Resource needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than half of students (55%) say that they would not know where to go if they or someone they knew needed professional mental health services right away • Students are finding tools that promote social connection most helpful for caring for their mental health. These include video calls, digital social gatherings (i.e. games or Netflix watch parties), phone calls, and in-person conversations
The hopefulness of students despite the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79% of college students feel hopeful about achieving their school-related goals and their future job prospects

college students of Changzhi Medical College. The findings indicated that 0.9% of the respondents were experiencing severe anxiety, 2.7% moderate anxiety, and 21.3% mild anxiety. In addition, living in urban areas, family income stability, and living with parents were protective factors against anxiety while having relatives or acquaintances infected with COVID-19 was a risk factor for increasing the anxiety of college students (Cao et al., 2020).

Active Minds (2020), a premier nonprofit organization supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults in the United States, surveyed 2,086 college students regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health. The synthesized report of their findings is presented in Table 1:

Table 1 illustrates the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students' mental health. The crisis presented many challenges not only to students but also to their parents and teachers, since they are the ones who are usually in direct

contact with them, whether face-to-face or virtually. Having a healthy family environment led by parents is very important in managing the mental health of students. Since these teens usually look up to their parents as role models, there is a greater chance of imbibing their positive attitude in handling distress. Siblings too, provide an added support to the student. There are times where the student is more confident in expressing concerns to a sibling. There are concerns among siblings that they find awkward to share with their parents. Having a harmonious relationship within the family helps lighten a confused mind.

Teachers, on the other hand, also play a critical role in the promotion of psychological well-being among the students. In recent research, the authors summarized these educators' roles as to:

(1) devote some time related to educating about COVID-19 and preventive health behavior by using the guidelines of the international organizations, according to the maturity level of the students; (2) conduct creative online academic and non-academic sessions by making their classes more interactive; (3) promote mental health among students by discussing what well-being is and how it is important for students; (4) make students understand the importance of prosocial behavior and the importance of virtues like empathy and patience among others; (5) interact with parents online or by phone regarding feedback about students and their mental health; (6) serve as a doorway for identification and referral to specialty mental health providers; (7) make arrangements to ensure that the reading material related to academics and life skills are made available to the underprivileged students who do not have access to the internet. (Singh et al., 2020).

Also, the Counseling and Psychological Services of the University of Michigan summarized the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of college students:

It is well studied that college students are especially prone to feelings of loneliness, and they experience higher rates of anxiety and depression compared to the general population. During this period of social isolation, uncertainty, and abrupt transitions, they are prone to further worsening of these feelings. Removal from their social support system and extracurricular activities at their school can cause students to feel less connected with their friends, organizations, and hobbies. Besides, they are facing uncertainty about their future, their health, and the health of their friends and loved ones. The situation they are living through is stressful and anxiety-provoking, as there is a constant fear of the unknown in addition to a loss of control, making them especially vulnerable to developing mental health concerns. (Michigan Medicine, 2021).

In the Philippines, college students are also experiencing similar challenges brought about by the pandemic. A study was conducted on 1,879 respondents during the early phase of the outbreak in the country. Findings showed 16.3% rated the psychological impact from moderate-to-severe; 16.9% reported moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms; 28.8% had moderate to severe anxiety levels; and 13.4% had moderate-to-severe stress levels (Tee et al., 2020). In another study, 243 respondents

from different colleges and universities in Western Samar, Philippines completed an online survey. Standardized scales were used to gather data including the Lockdown Fatigue Scale (LFS), Brief Resilience Scale, Coping Behaviors Questionnaire, and a single-item measure of general health. The research concluded that college students experienced moderate levels of fatigue during the mandatory lockdown or home confinement period. Resilient students and those who perceive higher social support experienced lower levels of fatigue during the lockdown period compared to students with low resilience and social support (Labrague & Ballad, 2020).

The pandemic had also affected nursing students in the country. In cross-sectional research conducted on 345 students of a government-funded nursing school, findings revealed that the pandemic had a significant moderate impact on the Quality of Life (QoL) of the respondents concerning psychological resilience (Guillasper et al., 2021). A related cross-cultural study was also conducted comparing the Filipinos' and Chinese's physical and mental health during the pandemic. The responses from the 849 Filipinos indicated significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than that among the Chinese respondents. Filipino respondents were more likely than the Chinese to report physical symptoms resembling COVID-19 infection, recent use of medical services with lower confidence, recent direct and indirect contact with COVID-19, concerns about family members contracting COVID-19, and dissatisfaction with health information (Wang et al., 2020).

These sample studies utilized mainly quantitative methods of analysis and presented numerical data which are obtained via online/web-based surveys. While this research explores the same theme – on the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of Filipino college students, the data were however individualized, since they were taken directly from the personal narratives of the participants through their submitted reflection papers in class. These data were then analyzed qualitatively to obtain themes that are essential in achieving the objective of this research. Thus, this paper aims to discover, in-depth, some basic realities regarding the effects of the pandemic on the various aspects of mental health of Filipino college students. With the explored contextualized themes, appropriate interventions can be formulated for future research which can be beneficial in addressing related issues.

Method

The researcher was persuaded to embark on this research because of the recurrent similar content of the reflection papers that were submitted by the students during the online class. I was tasked to handle four sections of *Encountering the Word in the World* (LCENWRD). It is an undergraduate general course offering in Theology that is focused on the Sacred Scripture. Since these students are studying in a Catholic university, they are required to take theology subjects regardless of whatever bachelor's degree they are pursuing. There were 179 college students enrolled in these sections for the second term of the academic year 2020–2021, with the age range of 19–22 years old. The variables in this research study consist of four demographic characteristics: gender, age, nationality, and religion. Table 2 presents the basic demographic profile of the participants.

Table 2 Participants' demographic details

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Religion
Participant #1	Male	19	Filipino	Roman catholic
Participant #2	Female	20	Filipino	Roman catholic
Participant #3	Male	22	Filipino	Roman catholic
Participant #4	Female	20	Filipino	Roman catholic
Participant #5	Female	21	Filipino	Roman catholic
Participant #6	Male	21	Filipino	Agnostic

One of the requirements of the course is to submit meaningful reflections regarding a specific topic. In this regard, I gave my students the task of writing a reflection regarding their most unforgettable faith experience in life. The experience may be a situation wherein they felt pressured or challenged about any aspects of their life. It was not surprising that the majority of them pointed out COVID-19 pandemic as one of the common challenges that they have experienced with the big adjustment of totally shifting from face-to-face classes to online setup. However, what was more striking, was that 41 of these 179 students (23%) highlighted on their reflection papers the effect of the pandemic on their mental health.

This study is a qualitative type of research with an in-depth analysis of reflection papers to obtain the desired result. It utilizes one of the popular data analysis tools in qualitative psychology which is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA was popularized by Jonathan Smith and it aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience and produces an account of this experience in its own terms rather than any prescribed by the pre-existing theoretical preconceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA gives researchers the best opportunity to understand the innermost deliberation of the experiences of research participants. In short, it is participant oriented since it allows the participants to express themselves and their “lived experience” stories the way they see them without any distortion and/or prosecution (Alase, 2017). In traditional phenomenological studies, Coyle (2014) suggested that the average sample size between one and 12 is acceptable. This implies that the lesser number of participants is needed for a concentration on the data of experience. Other researchers recommended that six to eight participants are appropriate for an IPA study, as this size allows examining similarities and differences between individuals. For this study, the researcher has chosen six out of the 41 reflection papers as the sample size. Again, it is important to take note that these reflection papers were chosen from the total sample since they have similar themes, which is, pointing to the pandemic as the cause of the participants' mental health problems. In an IPA approach, six as the sample size is sufficient to represent the total population of this study.

To present how the IPA as an analysis tool is applied, the four basic stages nominated by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), which can be adapted by researchers, are described in Table 3.

Table 3 Basic Guidelines of IPA and Brief Descriptions

Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	Brief Descriptions
Stage 1: Multiple reading and making notes	Close reading of the transcript several times to immerse in the data; Making notes about one's observations and reflections about the interview experience or any other thoughts and comments of potential significance; Highlighting distinctive phrases and emotional responses
Stage 2: Transforming notes into Emergent Themes	Reflecting on the source material to transform notes into emerging themes; Formulating a concise phrase (themes) at a slightly higher level of abstraction which may refer to a more psychological conceptualization
Stage 3: Seeking relationships and clustering themes	Looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label; Dropping of 'unfit' themes; Listing of major themes and subthemes, and relevant short extracts from the transcript
Stage 4: Writing a narrative account of the study	Taking the themes identified in the final table and writing them up one by one; Describing each theme and exemplifying it with extracts from interview, followed by analytic comments from the author/s

This research utilized all the IPA stages. It followed the first three stages of the tool while the fourth stage was integrated into the Results and Discussion section where the clustered themes were described and discussed thoroughly.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were guided by standard institutional research ethics involving the category of Human Participants. Informed consent was included in the online platform, communicated to the participants, and discussed thoroughly with them at the start of the term. The consent form authorizes the researcher to use, if needed, all reflection papers and discussion entries, both hard and electronic copies, strictly for research purposes. It also states that nothing in the consent form is intended to replace any applicable laws. Furthermore, participants have been assured that any personal information, like real names and other personal data would be kept private and confidential. Participants who did not agree to the consent agreement had the right to request the researcher, at any point in time, to not include any of his/her course output.

Results and Discussion

The table in the Appendix presents the results of the data analysis using the IPA as a tool. As mentioned, six reflection papers were being analyzed and all these samples emphasized the significant effect of the pandemic on college students' mental health. The first column shows an excerpt from the original reflection paper with some highlighted selected words/phrases implying that these were of greater significance. Before highlighting these words, it is important to note that these excerpts were read multiple times for familiarity. The second column contains the exploratory notes and comments. This is where relevant insights and thoughts are formed to describe the highlighted words. Emerging themes are found in the third column. These themes are words/phrases that express what the notes/comments represent in general. The last column, then, is the synthesis of what the whole reflection is trying to drive at by clustering the emerging themes into major and minor themes. Non-relevant themes were excluded. These major themes then will be described comprehensively and used as the focus of discussion, since they were identified as the most significant thoughts that were drawn from the research. (See Appendix for the synthesized data analysis using IPA).

The IPA resulted in three major themes being extracted from the reflection papers. It is important to note that the minor themes were also important in the analysis since they greatly contributed to tracing the overall picture of the participants' experience. However, the major themes epitomize the concrete realities that describe the issue as well as the situation of the participants. The major themes include: *anxiety and depression as serious effects of the pandemic*; *God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support*; and, *the essentiality of self-awareness and self-acceptance in improving mental health*.

Anxiety and Depression: Serious Effects of the Pandemic

I was alone and desperate. I had nobody to contact. I didn't reach out to my family and friends. I didn't want to burden my parents with problems and disappoint them with failures... My stress and desperation accumulated to what I thought was insurmountable. I began avoiding people. Despite everything, I always do one thing to allay my fears and anxieties that drove me to mental breakdowns... — Participant #4.

The COVID-19 pandemic can cause mental health problems such as anxiety and depression which are considered forms of human suffering (Cordero, 2021b). This is what Participant #4 has experienced the first time when lockdowns and other restrictions were imposed because of the pandemic. At first, these initial restrictions by the government will simply result in the ordinary feeling of boredom that can be managed easily—since it will only be temporary. One can deal with it by diverting one's attention to other home activities such as cooking, playing computer games, learning to play musical instruments, doing gardening, and acting like *plantito* and *plantita*, and many others. But as the lockdown was extended into long weeks, then

lasted for months, and even for almost two years now, the negative effects on mental health became more serious and difficult to address.

Anxiety and depressive disorders are among the most common psychiatric illnesses; they are highly comorbid with each other, and together they are considered to belong to the broader category of internalizing disorders (Kalin, 2020). Anxiety is an “apprehensive anticipation of future danger or misfortune accompanied by a feeling of dysphoria or somatic symptoms of tension” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 820). It is derived from the word “to vex or trouble” which is commonly associated with feelings of fear, worry, discomfort, and dread (Antony & Barlow, 1996). Depression, on the other hand, is a state of disinterest in daily activities. It is surmised that people facing a pandemic with no vaccination would result in fear of the unknown making them anxious, stressed, and depressed (Rehman et al., 2020). Studies demonstrate that anxiety disorders generally lead to major depressive disorders (Kessler & Wang, 2008). In another study conducted on 255 depressed adult outpatients, comorbid anxiety disorder diagnoses were present in 50.6% of these patients and included social phobia (27.0%), simple phobia (16.9%), panic disorder (14.5%), generalized anxiety disorder (10.6%), obsessive–compulsive disorder (6.3%), and agoraphobia (5.5%). Both social phobia and generalized anxiety preceded the first episode of major depression in 65% and 63% of cases, respectively, panic disorder (21.6%) and agoraphobia (14.3%) were much less likely to precede the first episode of major depression than to emerge subsequently (Fava et al., 2000). These studies show the critical association between anxiety and depression.

During this pandemic, some college students were struggling to cope up with the demands of academic requirements most especially when the setup was shifted fully to online. There are several reasons why some students cannot perform well in a fully online class—adaptation difficulty to the online classroom as a new environment; technical issues like low internet speed/outages and crashes; poor time management; lack of human contact; too many and complicated requirements; poor support services, and many others. The college level is the opportune time to make a decisive move as a final preparation for landing a good job for one’s future. Achieving a high level of mastery for the chosen academic degree is a must. One major complaint of students is the volume of requirements that must be accomplished given the unreasonable deadlines set amidst the unfortunate situation they are experiencing. Thus, this aggravates their level of anxiety. In a related study, the results revealed that spending six hours or more a day watching TV or using computers was associated with a higher risk for depression (Madhav et al., 2017). For young people who spend seven hours or more a day on computer screens are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety than those who use screens for an hour a day only (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). What even adds to these woes is the pressure coming from some parents who expect outstanding performance from their children.

Depression in college students also became prevalent during this pandemic. In a nationwide survey conducted on 33,000 college students in the United States, one of the key findings revealed that 39% are suffering from moderate to major depression (Eisenberg et al., 2020). One common determinant that triggers depression is the lack of social support. Social support refers to the student’s network of friends,

acquaintances, and mentors to turn to, especially in times of need or crisis which positively influences academic performance, benefits overall wellbeing, and eases the anxiety many students face as they transition from life as a high schooler to college (Affordable Colleges Online, 2021). The suspension of physical/face-to-face communication of students with their classmates, friends, and professors greatly lessened this much needed support. While family support is essential in this situation, not all students can reveal their present condition to their parents because of either consideration/care or fear of the consequence. Some parents are in financial crisis and even jobless because of the pandemic, so they have to find a solution to augment the situation. As Participant #4 mentioned, "I did not want to burden my parents with problems and disappoint them with failures..." For those from affluent families, some students are afraid that if they reveal what is going on with them in terms of poor academic performance, they will be grounded or at worst, forced to stop schooling.

Anxiety and depression are serious mental health problems that are caused by the pandemic. Son et al. (2020) firmly posited that these mental health issues are considered as the leading impediment to academic success. It is also important to note that mental illness can affect students' motivation, concentration, and social interactions—crucial factors for students to succeed in higher education (Unger, 2007). If the students are suffering from anxiety and depression, they may not have enough capability to perform well academically. Thus, they may not graduate from their chosen degree courses with flying colors. More importantly, this condition may seriously affect their overall well-being.

God/Higher Being as the First and/or Last Source of Support

I decided to talk to God and ask for guidance: what to do, how can I cope, how to ease the burden, etc. Through these, I realized that opening up to someone somehow lessens the burden in your heart. God was always with me from the beginning. Even before the pandemic, God has always been by my side quietly looking out for me and listening to my problems; and I know that He has guided me and has been listening to my concerns... From the start of this year, 2021, my mental health is slowly becoming stable again... For that, I thank God for helping me through my toughest times and has been with me whenever I needed someone to open up and talk to. More importantly, I thank God for the guidance He has provided me and answered my prayers. — Participant #1.

Participant #1 stressed the role of God in her life during the pandemic. Having experienced big challenges such as stress from academics, pressure from family's high expectations to excel in the chosen academic degree, disconnection from friends, worry for the family getting infected with the virus—all these were handled accordingly with the support and guidance of God through prayer. Though the pandemic's end is uncertain, she already claimed with confidence that everything will be fine since God will always guide her at all times. In fact, out of the 41 reflection papers that were selected for this study, 38 or almost 92% pointed out the significant

role of God or any higher being as the source of support and guidance during this pandemic.

When catastrophe strikes, many people seek closeness to God. Prayer is a common way of dealing with adversity and it is one strategy for doing so (Dein et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic inspired members of religious groups to find alternate ways of nurturing connectedness to their relevant God/higher being. Many churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, and other worshipping sites have closed down due to lockdowns and safety restrictions and protocols. Religious leaders and adherents find creative ways to organize their respective practices and rituals—performances and sermons on various social media platforms without sacrificing public health and still following government protocols. The Roman Catholic Church has begun live streaming the Pope's daily mass and Sunday sermon. A live stream of service at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, drew more than twenty-five thousand viewers (Robinson, 2020). One priest in Maryland set up a drive-through confession, careful to keep a six-foot distance between himself and those who visit. Some Orthodox Jewish communities are bending their traditional rules and allowing *minyanim* (ritual prayer groups) to gather over Zoom (Heilweil, 2020). For Muslims, the closure of mosques does not mean that they will stop daily prayers communally. Individual prayers and worship in Islam play a greater role than communal ones. Muslims can pray five times a day wherever they are. Oftentimes, the home is the place where most praying takes place. In Hinduism, celebrations and prayers are home-bound events and if there is group worship, it is also live-streamed. Some temple priests in Uttar Pradesh said that they have declined requests to visit homes, suggesting instead that people should donate the money they would have spent cooking food to the chief minister's virus relief fund (Banerjee & Fields, 2020). In Buddhism, the *Dalai Lama* (spiritual leader of the Tibetan people), other senior monks, and Buddhist organizations in Asia and worldwide have emphasized that this pandemic calls for meditation, compassion, generosity, and gratitude. They offer prayers and protective rituals known as *apotropaics* (magical protection rites) to protect against disease. These are meaningful ways to confront the anxieties of the global coronavirus pandemic, providing comfort and relief (Salguero, 2020).

In the Philippines, where 81% of its 110 million population are Roman Catholics, the belief in God has a significant role most especially during times of crisis. This is why even during the pandemic, Filipinos find creative ways for religious practices. Catholic congregations have taken steps to provide the public with online-based Church masses, community prayers, spiritual recollections and retreats, and eucharistic adoration and processions. People dealing with issues about mortality, coping and recovery are provided with online formative counseling and pastoral guidance. Many netizens have been moved and encouraged to signify support, some have shared the hashtag #ChurchInAction on social media which can ease the impact of the current crisis (Del Castillo et al., 2020). Another alternative form of doing celebration is bringing it to the local parish instead of the big gathering in one place. This was done during the feast of the Black Nazarene where the priests in-charge just localized the celebration by bringing the sacred statue to various churches particularly in Manila and nearby cities (Cordero, 2021c). These creative faith-based

practices/prayer rituals amid the pandemic are manifestations of how people acknowledge God as a significant source of guidance and support.

Concerning mental health problems, the American Psychological Association (2020) points out that many researchers consider religion and belief, which covers the belief in God or any higher being, can help people cope with mental distress during the pandemic in three ways:

(1) Encouraging them to reframe events through a hopeful lens. Positive religious reframing can help people transcend stressful times by enabling them to see a tragedy as an opportunity to grow closer to a higher power or to improve their lives; (2) Fostering a sense of connectedness. Some people see religion as making them part of something larger than themselves. This can happen through prayer or meditation, or through taking part in religious meetings, listening to spiritual music, or even walking outside; (3) Cultivating connection through rituals. Religious rituals and rites of passage can help people acknowledge that something momentous is taking place. These events often mark the beginning of something, as is the case with weddings, or the end of something, as is the case with funerals. They help guide and sustain people through life's most difficult transitions.

Suffering in this time of the pandemic moves us to find any source of support. Various major religions proclaim the presence of God or any higher being in one's life as the provider of this needed support. God assures us of this promise as what the bible states, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will also help you, I will also uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10). The experience of suffering gives us the chance to go back and rediscover our good nature since we are created by a good God. We are capable of transcending the painful effects of suffering because God created us as such and God never desires that we will be separated from that goodness (Cordero, 2021a). Lifting to God even our suffering, through prayer, can lighten the burden in one's mind and heart from the negative effects of the pandemic.

Essentiality of Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance in Improving Mental Health

I started having the courage to acknowledge the situation and one step at a time, I started to open up to myself and others. I started accepting myself, recognizing my new strengths and weaknesses, working on myself. I also dared to fight against the sadness and day by day, I'm getting better at completing tasks and reconnecting with my friends. I was really glad when the time came that I no longer resent waking up in the morning. Although I didn't go back to my old self, I'm still proud of the current version of myself and I'm thankful for that moment that pushed me to end my suffering and allowed me to regain at least some parts of myself. — Participant #6

This excerpt from the reflection of Participant #6 relayed the initial steps that are essential in improving one's mental health amid the pandemic. Recalling his story, his mental health started to dwindle, and he became more anxious when the cases

of those infected with COVID-19 was surging. Unprepared for the situation, he admitted that everything inside his head was completely a mess and his productivity was almost non-existent. This was because he was not aware of what he could do to address it given the fact that it was a “first time”. Every time he encountered a difficult situation before, he just ran to his friends for support and this was done through face-to-face bonding. However, this response was not possible anymore because of the lockdown. Months passed by and he was feeling very heavy hearted. He could not function as well as he used to; his appetite was lost, he felt tremendous pressure meeting deadlines, he hated waking up every single day to face the same battle. He felt the need to look for support from a higher being—even though he is not affiliated to any religion. He also realized that connecting with friends virtually, although it may be less exciting, could still be helpful as being with them physically. In short, being aware of what he could do, recognizing his weaknesses and limitations, and accepting the current crisis, helped him to regain a healthy mind.

During this pandemic, many people were filled with mixed emotions that overwhelm them. Some try to cope with the unfortunate circumstances that come their way—making ends meet financially, being fed up with voluminous requirements in school, coping with the effects of the virus, grieving for the death of loved ones, and worrying about the unexpected tomorrow. On the other hand, others try to look at the positive perspective. They allot more quality time with their family, thus, strengthening family ties; discover and develop their hidden talents and skills; enjoy a lesser polluted environment brought by the lockdown. The complexity of oneself can prompt us to have that longing to discover more, especially when opportunity arises. Self-awareness is an inwardly focused evaluative process in which individuals make self/standard comparisons with the goal of better self-knowledge and improvement (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012). In this paper, it is considered as the first step towards fulfilling the goal of achieving mental health. The role of self-awareness is paying attention to one’s feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, for the identification of goal-related obstacles (Kreibich et al., 2020). It has long been seen by practitioners and researchers as both a primary means of alleviating psychological distress and the path of self-development for psychologically healthy individuals (Sutton, 2016). After having evaluated ourselves, we have an idea of whether what we are thinking, feeling, and acting are following standards and values. This is referred to as comparing against our standards of correctness (Ackerman, 2021). This, then, leads us to accept ourselves and decide to improve more to achieve a healthy mind.

Self-acceptance, on the other hand, is pointed out as the next step after the process of self-awareness. It is considered the foundation of mental health and well-being. It is acknowledging that we are complex, imperfect human beings who are not only capable of achieving accomplishments but also committing mistakes. We possess a realistic awareness of our strengths and weaknesses and accept ourselves despite our imperfections and uniqueness (Bernard, 2020). Having known and paid attention to one’s character, an individual needs to accept whatever realities are present in one’s self. These realities may include both positive and negative tendencies or qualities of behavior. The majority of the participants in this study claimed that they were able to regain their mental health because they have decided to embrace not only the current unfortunate situation but also their initial inappropriate attitudes

towards it. They acknowledged in their reflections that some of them were weak in coping with pressure, too sensitive to feedbacks from others, complained a lot about assigned tasks, low self-esteem, and many others. Given these limitations, they have learned to accept and deal with the situation gradually, as the lockdown is continuously prolonged. In another related study, self-acceptance also became the initial step towards recovering from a mental issue caused by the pandemic. The author narrates:

... Since suffering is an unavoidable part of human affairs, the attitude of “acceptance” became my initial step. I realize that I cannot move on towards my recovery if in the first place I cannot accept the fact that I am facing a real mental issue. The numerous sleepless nights, sweating while the air conditioning system is on, speedy heartbeat rate, always feeling afraid of contracting the virus, and many other unusual experiences validate that indeed I am suffering from a mental problem. Accepting my condition does not mean I will remain helpless and not try anything to overcome it. (Cordero, 2021b)

The connection between self-awareness and self-acceptance is established. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize both personal strengths and weaknesses. Self-acceptance, on the other hand, paves the way to improve one’s mental health by welcoming these entities without reservations. Research suggests that when we see ourselves clearly, we are more confident and more creative. We make sounder decisions, build stronger relationships, and communicate more effectively (Eurich, 2018). Having these abilities enable us to move forward despite having faced big challenges even for future ones since these serve as our “confidence boosters” toward the actualization of our plans.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the mental health problems of the participants, specifically anxiety and depression, which were likely caused by the pandemic. In particular, the series of lockdowns and other restrictions by the government caused a lot of difficulties in terms of student academic performance and their behavior. There may be other causes of participants' mental health problems which were not included in this research such as bereavement, since some of their relatives/friends have died, or fear of getting infected with the virus, the poor financial standing of the family, and other issues. It is suggested that future studies dwell on these factors.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has continuously caused serious effects on the overall well-being of college students worldwide. A greater effect is identified on their mental health as expressed in their reflections. The significant themes that were determined, such as anxiety and depression as serious effects of the pandemic were: God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support, and, the essentiality of self-awareness and self-acceptance in improving mental health—which provide important implications for future research in the aspects of intervention and prevention from such catastrophe. These findings can assist in formulating effective strategies for battling the negative effects of the pandemic since these originated directly from the personal perspectives and in-depth experiences of college students.

Appendix

Synthesized Data Analysis of Reflection Papers using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 1:</i></p> <p>There was a time where I needed the guidance of God. It was from the start of the pandemic, wherein my mental health started to decline due to the circumstances. Maybe it could be because of the stress from academics, the current situation caused by the pandemic, how the government has been handling the situation, losing friends, etc. The stress from academics where my parents have high expectations from me to receive a high grade despite everything that has been going on. The current situation caused by the pandemic where I am worried for my family and my loved ones being infected by COVID-19. How the government has been handling the situation where people are dying and losing their source of income... Losing friends where we were slowly drifting apart caused by the pandemic and not being able to talk due to our reasons and problems that we are currently facing.</p>	<p>Recognizes God's guidance during crisis</p> <p>Refers to the pandemic as the cause of mental health decline</p> <p>Point to the pandemic as the source of stress from academics, poor government response, and losing friends</p> <p>Identifies parents' high expectation to excel in academics despite the pandemic</p> <p>Feels worried about the effects of the virus on family and loved ones</p> <p>Expects the government to manage well the situation especially the many cases of deaths and financial burden</p> <p>Expresses sadness for causing separation from friends who give support</p>	<p>Attributing God's support during the current pandemic</p> <p>Referring to the pandemic as the source of mental health problem, poor government response, stress, separation from friends</p> <p>Expressing being pressured by parents' expectations to do well in academics amid the crisis</p> <p>Showing concern for family and loved ones</p> <p>Hoping for an effective response from the government in handling the crisis</p> <p>Longing for support from friends amid the pandemic</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>Mental Health problems such as anxiety/depression as a serious effect of the pandemic</p> <p>God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support/guidance</p> <p>Self-awareness/Self-acceptance helps improve mental health</p> <p><i>Minor Themes</i></p> <p>Family support (Parents and/or siblings)</p> <p>Government's response to the pandemic</p> <p>Parental pressure to perform well in academics</p> <p>Friends/peer support</p>

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p>My mental health deteriorated so badly that it has led me to the point that I wanted to consult a psychiatrist but could not do so. To be honest, I find it hard to open up to anyone; however, I decided to talk to God and ask for guidance: what to do, how can I cope, how to ease the burden, etc. Through these, I realized that opening up to someone somehow lessens the burden in your heart. God was always with me from the beginning. Even before the pandemic, God has always been by my side quietly looking out for me and listening to my problems; and I know that He has guided me and has been slowly becoming stable again. I've been doing well in my academics, opened up to a few trusted friends, met new friends, and more. I knew I was more than blessed to have these things come into my life despite how bad my mental health was last year. For that, I thank God for helping me through my toughest times and has been with me whenever I needed someone to open up and talk to. More importantly, I thank God for the guidance He has provided me and answered my prayers.</p>	<p>Acknowledges mental health decline brought by the pandemic Feels ashamed of opening up regarding the mental health issue Points to God as the source of guidance and support since the start and during this pandemic Regains mental health Expresses gratitude for doing well in academics and having trusted friends Thank God again for being there always</p>	<p>Identifying again the pandemic as the source of mental health problem Showing lack of self-acceptance for the condition which prevents getting professional help Acknowledging God as the initial and last source of support Expressing gratitude for regaining strength and getting help from friends Being thankful for God's guidance</p>	

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 2:</i></p> <p>I think I struggled with this whole pandemic lifestyle, especially during online classes. At first, it was okay, professors were very lenient as everyone was adjusting and we were just finishing up Term 2... The next term was again okay. People got the hang of online classes, the workload varied depending on the class, but it was manageable. I passed off the struggles as simply an adjustment phase. The next terms, however, hit me hard. ... we had case studies almost every week. I felt so burnt out. I faced my laptop first thing in the morning, and it was the last thing I saw at night. For 20 years, my home was my 'relax place'; it was a place where I could chill and decompress after the stresses of the day. Now with online classes, there's no separation between work and home. I would relax after a class, but I would feel guilty because I could've been working on another requirement. When I would 'relax', I wasn't relaxing because the work is still in my face. I felt pressured to do things but there was no motivation to do anything at all. The continued days of online classes affected me a lot. There became points where I would lose focus during synchronous meetings... My attention span couldn't handle all the dead air, the professors asking questions that no one replies too, and I couldn't focus at all. There became a point where I would simply not attend class at all.</p>	<p>Acknowledges hardship during the pandemic</p> <p>Cites understanding professors</p> <p>Points out the difficulty in complying with the requirements of online class as time passes by</p> <p>Feels disappointed about the integration of home with work activities</p> <p>Maximizes time to finish all requirements without actually feeling relaxed</p> <p>Feels pressured and stressed so much by requirements</p> <p>Admits the loss of focus during synchronous classes; short attention span</p>	<p>Emphasizing the negative effects of the pandemic most especially in shifting to online classes</p> <p>Acknowledging understanding professors</p> <p>Stressing the difficulty of attending online class most especially the many requirements</p> <p>Missing the old routine of having a healthy home and schedule</p> <p>Utilizing the allotted time to complete all tasks</p> <p>Expressing too much pressure and stress from the academic requirement</p> <p>Emphasizing inattentiveness in the online class</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>Mental Health problems such as anxiety/depression as a serious effect of the pandemic</p> <p>Stressed out in academics (online class requirements)</p> <p>Self-awareness/Self-acceptance helps improve mental health</p> <p><i>Minor Themes</i></p> <p>Difficulty in dealing with online classes</p> <p>Family support (Parents and/or siblings)</p> <p>Friends/peer support</p> <p>Professor's concern and understanding</p> <p>Separation of home and work activities</p> <p>Self-relaxation as a must for self-care</p> <p>Low self-esteem and unmotivated</p>

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p>Canvas notifications made me feel anxious because it usually meant a new output. It was hard to continue learning this way. I distinctly remember a night where I left the house around midnight to stroll around our driveway. We had clear skies that night, the breeze was cool, and the air smelled fresh. I cried. I didn't know if I could continue to do well in school. I wanted to do well, but I didn't have the motivation to do so. The pressure to perform was eating me up inside. As I was emoting it out on the driveway, I was thinking, when was the last time I stepped out of the house? When was the last time I appreciated nature and the outside world since the pandemic? My life since then has been a series of waking up, opening the laptop, and working until I fell asleep at some ungodly hour in the morning. Somewhere along the way, I lost faith. I lost faith in myself and everything. I was lost. The stresses of the past terms caught up to me and I just broke down. When I went back inside, dad was in the kitchen cooking a midnight snack. I opened up to him about my struggles and I felt so thankful because he was very supportive. He encouraged me to take breaks, eat well, and even told me that taking a leave of absence was okay. I haven't been a firm believer in a while but moments like these make me thankful and blessed that I have people there to support me when everything seemed so difficult. My family and friends have faith in me, and that restored my faith in myself that I can go on because they'll always be there to support me.</p>	<p>Anticipates anxiety because of another task Stresses again over the difficulty of attending an online class Tries to relax oneself and breathe fresh air Describes the uncertainty of finishing the academic tasks Feels unmotivated and pressured to excel in academics Reminisces about the last time when there was no pressure yet Blames the pandemic for ruining a healthy schedule Feels being lost in everything Finds the timely support of a father Expresses gratitude for the father's encouragement and advice Acknowledges too the support of friends for the restored faith</p>	<p>Asserting the feeling of anxiety and being stressed out for another given task Finding a way to be in control of the difficult situation Doubting one's capability to continue the online class Claiming the need for motivation to proceed with the academic requirements Missing the old routine of not feeling pressured Pointing again to the pandemic as the source of hardship Manifesting low level of self-esteem Acknowledging parental support Adding the necessity of support from friends</p>	

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 3:</i></p> <p>As a third-year college engineering student, third-year subjects are the core of my course, hence the pressure is tripled compared to other years. Lately, I've been having anxiety and depression due to the quantity of workload handed out to us with also the added weight of the pandemic. Since we're mobile in our own homes, it's easier for us to get into depression due to isolation. Being inside my room all day, doing all of the school works and requirements handed out to us with a lack of human contact and connections has taken a toll on me. I've been feeling so drained and burnt out like I cannot continue with this term anymore. The two weeks break before the start of this term isn't just really enough for us to detoxify and rest. On top of that, I also miss hanging out with my friend during break times and after classes. Human contact is important and is a significant part of college life. I'm also not as privileged as the other students, my family is experiencing a financial crisis right now hence we are unsure if I will be able to finish my degree. However, despite all of these struggles and uncertainties, I know that I still have that one person that I can talk with. God has always been there for me through the good and bad times in my life in the past. I believe that He will still be with me right now. For quite some time now, He has gone quiet and lately, I don't feel Him in me anymore, but despite that, I just remember the saying, "When God is quiet, He is working". So this reassures me that even though everything is going down and into shambles in my life, He will still be there to pick me up. I still constantly pray to Him and ask Him for guidance and strength just to go through my day. I'm grateful that I have a God that I can run to when everything gets too much for me. I need His guidance the most right now at this stage of my life as I've never felt this lonely and stressed out through the course of my life so far. Hence, I always pray at night and just talk with Him, sharing how my day was and what were my activities. I also believe that I've developed some kind of mental illness ever since the pandemic happened due to isolation and lacking the usual environment that I am exposed to when I'm outside. Despite all of this, I know that God is still holding my hand and I know that soon, these will all pass and everything is going to be okay.</p>	<p>Feels a lot of pressure during the current academic level</p> <p>Identifies directly being anxious and depressed due to the volume of academic requirements</p> <p>Points to isolation at home given the voluminous tasks as the cause of depression</p> <p>Signifies losing hope to proceed with the online class set up</p> <p>Longs for the physical presence of friends for support</p> <p>Points out the importance of human contact to college life</p> <p>Admits one's financial shortage which brings uncertainty to finish the degree</p> <p>Expresses the presence of God for support since the beginning</p> <p>Believes that God is still there to support despite moments of doubting His intervention</p> <p>Reiterates the loving care of God and still hopes for His support during this crisis</p> <p>Admits experiencing mental challenges due to the isolation and change of environment as brought by the pandemic</p> <p>Hopes that this trial will end with God's continuous support</p>	<p>Expressing feelings of pressure, anxiety, and depression from many academic requirements especially during this pandemic</p> <p>Retierating 'isolation' brought by the pandemic as the cause of depression</p> <p>Running out of motivation to continue participating in the online class</p> <p>Confirming the necessity of direct communication from friends as a source of support</p> <p>Affirming the necessity of human interaction during college life</p> <p>Facing the reality of family's financial problem which doubts finishing the degree</p> <p>Conveying the loving support of God at all times from the beginning despite occasional feelings of doubt</p> <p>Acknowledging the effect of the pandemic on one's mental health</p> <p>Never losing hope for the end of these challenges</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>Mental Health problems such as anxiety/depression as a serious effect of the pandemic</p> <p>Pressured/Stressed out in academics (online class requirements)</p> <p>God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support/guidance</p> <p>Self-awareness/Self-acceptance helps improve mental health</p> <p><i>Minor Themes</i></p> <p>Isolation and change in environment as causes of depression</p> <p>Friends/peer support as a source of motivation</p> <p>Family's financial inadequacy to support one's needs</p> <p>Human interaction is a necessity to college life</p> <p>A temporary feeling of God's absence in trying times</p>

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 4:</i></p> <p>... I was considering physical self-harm to the point of even entertaining suicidal thoughts. I was alone and desperate. I had nobody to contact. I didn't reach out to my family and friends. I didn't want to burden my parents with problems and disappoint them with failures... My stress and desperation accumulated to what I thought was insurmountable. I began avoiding people. Despite everything, I always do one thing to allay my fears and anxieties that drove me to mental breakdowns... I sat silently, cried out to God until tears ran dry, and enjoyed the solemn silence. Then and there, I asked silently and internally, Why am I suffering? Why do I have to suffer? My internal outburst manifested into tears once more as I cried again, but I felt suddenly a wave of calm and comfort. I didn't have anyone there to comfort me, but I felt it, a presence pushing me to move forward and find out. It was like someone saying to recognize my thoughts but do not succumb to their temptations, telling me to think about my family and friends even though I think I don't have anyone to reach and that these people care despite what I think. Afterward that faithful day, I came forward to my parents, and I was prepared to take anything that they had to say whether positive or not. Surprisingly, they listened and even asked me how I was doing. My parents comforted me even after I began crying in front of them, and I cry rarely in front of them. I felt there the same warmth and comfort... It was like God manifested Himself in my parents to affirm my feelings. I feel a deeper personal connection to Him. I may have been broken, but I now realize that while painful, it was necessary to make myself stronger and better than before. I bettered myself and have rekindled my relationships with both family and friends. My experience felt something that was beyond an abstract that I cannot explain in simple words, but it is there, and I firmly believe in it. So now, in face of challenges, I move forward to see beyond my perspective.</p>	<p>Admits having negative thoughts of doing self-harm amid the pandemic Thinks of not involving one's family and friends in sharing about the unfortunate condition Manifests a lot of stress but prefers not to share it with anybody Pointing out to God as the only confidant in what is going on Questions the presence of suffering in life Feels the gentle presence of God that brings calmness, relaxation, and clarity of thoughts Decides to approach parents for whatever words will be spoken Feels happy for the parents' reaction and encouragement/support Compares the show of comfort from parents and God Realizes that pain is necessary to become stronger Self-examination to study oneself Renews one's open communication to family and friends Determined to move forward and start a new beginning in life</p>	<p>Manifesting a feeling of hopelessness during the crisis Deciding on the exclusion of support from family and friends for them not to be affected Stressing having mixed feelings about anxiety and depression that greatly affect mental health Singling out God as the source of lone strength and support Conveying weary/confused mind Expressing great awe in the healing presence of God during crisis Building up one's confidence in opening up to parents Appreciating with gladness the support of parents, as well as of God Developing a feeling of acceptance of the reality of pain as part of life Reflecting on one's internal struggles Understanding the importance of family and friends as sources of support Preparing oneself to have a fresh start in facing life's challenges</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support/guidance Mental Health problems such as anxiety/depression as a serious effect of the pandemic Pressured/Stressed out due to numerous trials Lack of communication to parents/friends for support <i>Minor Themes</i> Hopelessness during crisis Hesitancy to reach out to family and friends for support Doubting the presence of suffering in life Pain is necessary to become stronger in battling challenges in life Self-examination to determine a possible solution in addressing one's problems</p>

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 5:</i></p> <p>In the early days of the lockdown, being one of the leading places when it comes to COVID-19 cases, my heart was filled with worry, anxiety, and fear. I remembered holding my breath for 15 seconds every morning just to check if I was already infected since my dad goes out twice a week for market day. We're not as strong as other people since we inherited our mom's asthma, and that heightened my fear. I was so scared every day but I tried my best to distract myself by playing games and immersing myself in the world of social media. However, at the end of the day, there was this lingering fear that I just couldn't escape, it made my stomach churn. Yes, I do pray every night but in retrospect, I can't pinpoint how important God was for me back then. I prayed to him every night, asking for healing of the world and for the pandemic to end, but that was it.</p> <p>As time passed by, the cases in our barangay skyrocketed and I just thought maybe getting infected would just take away the fear of getting infected. Of course, that was absurd, I was so scared and I knew there was no way out with just me using my brain cells, and so I opened my "untouched" bible application in my phone and started a "reading plan." It was a feature of the application wherein there are sets of plans for people encountering difficulties in life, whether it be family problems, anxiety, jealousy, toxicity, etc. I clicked on a 22-day reading plan and reading the reassuring words of God was the ONLY thing that alleviated the fear I felt. I made it a point to read the bible every day, and that somehow helped me communicate more with God. I was able to talk to him even during the day not only at night. When I was alone, I sometimes just prayed and talked to Him. Undoubtedly, He has become my best friend. He became my anchor, He was, still is, and will always be there for me. This pandemic drew me closer to God. I'm not saying that the pandemic was a good thing, but rather in every bad event, there will always be something good to come out. Some people say "cheer up, it's just a bad day, not a bad life" but I do think that we can turn every perceived bad day into a good one when we learn to see the blessings that God continues to give us, such as the gift of life, and when we learn to completely trust Him.</p>	<p>Develops worry, anxiety, and fear during the pandemic</p> <p>Feels anxious about getting infected with the virus</p> <p>Confirms being vulnerable to any disease due to family history</p> <p>Expresses fear of getting sick but turns to social media for distraction</p> <p>Calls out to God for healing</p> <p>Tries to calm oneself to lessen anxiety</p> <p>Considers the bible as the main source of guidance and healing at the same time</p> <p>Makes a habit of reading the Bible</p> <p>Reiterates God as a best friend who never leaves our side</p> <p>Accepts the fact that personal effort is not enough to maintain a good life but it comes from trusting God</p>	<p>Admitting having mental health disturbances during the pandemic</p> <p>Getting anxious as the lockdown progresses</p> <p>Adding the heredity factor which resulted in being immunocompromised</p> <p>Turning to social media to divert one's fear from the virus</p> <p>Finding God as a source of healing</p> <p>Making fun of the situation as a way of distracting oneself to manage anxiety</p> <p>Directing one's attention to the role of the bible as an effective guide to handle mental health problems</p> <p>Finding the habitual reading of the Bible as a solution to alleviate fear</p> <p>Highlighting one's relationship to God as the ultimate source of support</p> <p>Positing the role of God as the one that completely turns a bad life into a good one</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>Mental Health problems such as anxiety/ depression as a serious effect of the pandemic</p> <p>God/Higher Being as the first and/or last source of support/ guidance</p> <p>Praying using the bible as the tool for alleviating fear</p> <p><i>Minor Themes</i></p> <p>Worry due to being immunocompromised</p> <p>Social media as a distraction from fear</p> <p>Jokes as a means to manage anxiety</p> <p>Bible as the most effective source of strength in dealing with the crisis</p>

Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes / Comments	Emerging Themes	Clustered Themes
<p><i>Participant # 6:</i></p> <p>It started when the pandemic hit the Philippines. At that time, my classmates and even my professors are not taking things seriously because to us, it's just a flu virus and nothing too harmful. Although we had that mindset, of course, we take precautionary measures like wearing masks and limiting contact. When the cases started rising, so did our anxiety. My mental health started dwindling, it almost reached the point where it's hard to process thoughts, much more my lessons. Everything inside my head is a mess, and my productivity is almost non-existent. I know the cause is the lack of connection with others but it's really hard to address that given that I can't meet my friends and even go outside. The way I express my love to others is by physical contact, particularly through hugs, and having quality time with them. Bonding time with my friends has always been a part of my everyday life since I could remember and for it to be taken away so suddenly brought a lot of stress to me. A few months after the first announcement of lockdown, I just felt heavy. I do not function well, I cannot do the same amount of tasks I can normally do, I also lost my appetite even for my favorite foods, I'm pressured every day from my requirements which were piling up at that time. In general, I just hate waking up at that time because I know I'll face the same amount of chaos, maybe even doubled, and it makes me even madder that I couldn't fight it. I don't like it when I'm awake and conscious during those times because I'm already drained and tired and I don't want to succumb to the darkness by being awake so I tend to sleep when I can. At one point, I realized I can't keep running from the things that stress me out because I'm afraid I will become my nightmares. I started accepting the fact that I can't run from those things every day for the remainder of my quarantine life since we're uncertain until when this will last. I don't have a religion but I do believe that there is a Higher Being than us and that being resembles us, maybe even resides in us. With that thought in mind, I started having the courage to acknowledge the situation, and one step at a time, I started to open up to myself and others. I started accepting myself, recognizing my new strengths and weaknesses, working on myself. I also dared to fight against the sadness and day by day, I'm getting better at completing tasks and reconnecting with my friends. I was really glad when the time came that I no longer resent waking up in the morning. Although I didn't go back to my old self, I'm still proud of the current version of myself and I'm thankful for that moment that pushed me to end my suffering and allowed me to regain at least some parts of myself.</p>	<p>Takes lightly the effect of the virus but still practices precautionary measures to protect oneself</p> <p>Acknowledges anxiety as a result of the rising cases of people infected with the virus</p> <p>Sees the lack of face-to-face connection with friends as also a factor that causes a lot of stress during the pandemic</p> <p>Enumerates the serious effects of the lockdown on academics, schedule, and physical health</p> <p>Confesses incapability to battle against the effects of the lockdown</p> <p>Resorts to sleep to avoid facing the challenges posed by the lockdown</p> <p>Realizes that "sleep" is not a permanent solution to the negative effects of lockdown</p> <p>Acknowledges the essential presence of a Higher Being in one's life</p> <p>Accepts the difficulty of dealing with the current situation</p> <p>Becomes aware or conscious of oneself</p> <p>Connects with friends for support</p> <p>Feels happy for being able to cope with the situation despite one's limitations</p>	<p>Taking an initial light treatment of the virus until it is proven serious, thus, exercising safety protocols</p> <p>Pointing out the pandemic as the cause of anxiety and dwindling mental health</p> <p>Highlighting the importance of physical contact and communication with friends as a stress reliever</p> <p>Concluding that the lockdown has ruined the everyday schedule and affecting much of one's general wellbeing</p> <p>Exhibiting having not enough confidence to face the effects of lockdown</p> <p>Treating "sleep" as a way to forget the challenges temporarily</p> <p>Believing in the existence of a Higher Being despite not being affiliated with any religion</p> <p>Being able to accept the current situation</p> <p>Manifesting an adequate level of self-acceptance and self-awareness</p> <p>Emphasizing the importance of connecting with friends during this crisis</p> <p>Building up enough self-confidence to be in control of the difficult situation</p>	<p><i>Major Themes</i></p> <p>Mental Health problems such as anxiety/depression as a serious effect of the pandemic</p> <p>Physical contact and communication with friends as a stress reliever</p> <p>Pressured/Stressed out due to numerous trials</p> <p>Higher Being as a source of support/guidance during this pandemic</p> <p>Self-awareness/Self-acceptance helps improve mental health</p> <p><i>Minor Themes</i></p> <p>Bonding time with friends is an important factor for mental health</p> <p>Lockdown disrupts the overall well-being of the person</p> <p>Sleep is a way to temporarily escape the effects of lockdown</p> <p>Friends/peer support</p> <p>Belief in a personal capacity to handle difficult situations</p>

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Animal and Human Rights No animals were involved in this study.

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