

# **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE PARENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The surge of the CoronaVirus (COVID-19) all over the world adversely affected all individuals, including single parents who belong to vulnerable groups. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of single parents and describe their challenges during the pandemic. Also, this study utilized qualitative phenomenological research or descriptive phenomenology. Its purpose is to understand the lived experiences or current phenomenon faced by single parents and describe the challenges they had encountered during the pandemic. Likewise, purposive sampling was used in this study, including (6) single-parent participants living in Tacloban City. The researchers limit the participants' age to 40-65 years old. Moreover, this study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically phenomenological, with semi-structured interview questions. The data was collected through a face-to-face interview following the City Health of Tacloban pandemic restrictions. Furthermore, the findings revealed two themes in our study: economic challenges and socio-psychological. Economic challenges were indicated as the common difficulties the participants experienced during the pandemic. At the same time, socio-psychological revealed as the coping strategies/mechanism of single parents in decreasing their fear and worries. Additionally, the researchers had three recommendations for further research for future researchers, (1) to conduct a similar study in a different locale with a larger sample size, (2) different age group, and (3) and expand the target population that includes other genders which is also a single parent.

*Keywords: Single parents; Phenomenology; Lived Experiences; Pandemic; Coping Mechanism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, single parents were the ones who felt helpless. They struggle to deal with their health and children (Barger, 2021). Women's health, occupation, and wellbeing have been unaffected (Almeida et al., 2020; Power, 2020). Most of them became helpless (Hertz et al., 2020). The report of (the Center for Translational Neuroscience, 2020) shows that 32 percent of single parents during the pandemic became unemployed compared to 25 percent of parents of a complete family. As a result, income and employment hit worse for most women, who are more likely to be single parents than men. With that, they are likely to experience hardships and parenting problems due to these different stressors (Avison et al., 2007; Murry et al., 2001; Taylor & Conger, 2014, 2017; Waldfogel et al., 2010) cited in the study of (Taylor, Z. E., Bailey, K., Herrera, F., Nair, N., & Adams, A., 2021). Thus, this pandemic's economic, health, and socioeconomic situations have accelerated these circumstances.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries have been adversely affected. The effect of it was immeasurable to people. Individuals from different jobs, positions, social ranks, ethnicity, and social class also experienced suffering. However, the most compressed with the situation is the unfortunate groups which include youths, the elderly, persons with special needs and disabilities, and single parents, particularly the specific individuals who are receiving a less amount of income (DOSM, 2021) cited in the study of (Rahman, 2021). The Council of Single Mothers and their Children (CSMC) held a national survey around Australia, resulting in more than 1000 single mothers. They have found that over 70 percent of single mothers struggled to reach their overall cost of living at the onset of the pandemic and 44 percent had no savings (Maury, 2020). With that, the financial situation faced by single-mother families during this pandemic became more complex to manage their finances. Hence, they are more prone to encounter struggles in the poverty line than most complete parents living together.

Meanwhile, according to a current survey piloted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), there are more than 15 million single parents in the Philippines, and most of the 95 percent or over 14 million of them are women. They are more likely to exert additional efforts in finding ways to give the needs of their children. In addition, married or unmarried individuals are still included in the working poor. These individuals work at least 27 weeks, fulltime or part-time, yet they still earn less than in extreme poverty. According to the Labor Statistics Bureau, in 2012, over 10.6 million individuals were classified as working poor, consisting of several single parents. This impact may become more severe following seeking

multiple jobs to get an extra income (Universal Class, n.d.) cited in the study (Garcia et al., 2021).

This research focuses on single parents' who lived in Tacloban City with diverse experiences during the pandemic. This study aims to understand their lived experiences and describe their challenges during the pandemic. Thus, the mentioned problems above can be seen and observed across all countries, including the Philippines. Many single parents experienced unemployment, vulnerability, and other specific problems that resulted in difficulties coping with their struggles during the pandemic. Because of this pre-existing situation, the researchers conducted a study on the lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic. This research pursues to answer the following questions: *“What are the experiences of single parents during the pandemic?”* and *“How did the single parents cope up with the pandemic?”*

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study utilized phenomenology or descriptive phenomenology. Its purpose is to understand a particular phenomenon and describe human lived experiences. Thus, phenomenology is applied when researchers are interested in knowing the lived experiences of the individuals who were included in the subject that they will explore (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Robinson & Reed, 1998) cited in the study of (Groenewald, 2004). This study seeks to understand single parents' experiences and describe their challenges during the pandemic. Hence, by utilizing this research design, the researchers will be able to attain the needed results aiming for this study.

### **2.2. RESEARCH LOCALE**

This study will be conducted in Tacloban City, a city in the province of Leyte. We have chosen Tacloban City as a place of conduct for our research due to its feasibility and reliability of providing the study's rich information. Also, this study will only be limited to the AY of 2021-2022. Hence, there will be no specific barangay/s or areas selected because selecting the participants will be based on our inclusion criteria.

### **2.3.PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY**

The participants of this study will be single parents living within the vicinity of Tacloban City. As suggested by Morse (1994, p. 225) cited in the study of Mason (2010), the minimum number of participants will identify to be at least six sample size in phenomenological research design is sufficient. They are selected to be the participants because the researchers aim to understand their experiences and describe their challenges during the pandemic. Thus, the selection of single parents as the participants will be on the inclusion criterion.

### **2.4.RESEARCH SAMPLING**

This study utilized Non-Probability Sampling where subjects are chosen based on their availability, the study's aim, and, in rare situations, the researcher's exclusive preference (Baraceros, 2016). Specifically, the sampling technique, the researchers will utilize in this study is purposive sampling, also known as Judgmental Sampling. According to Business Research Methodology (n.d.), Purposive Sampling is a sampling technique in which the researchers choose participants grounded on the judgment or criterion. Thus, the purpose of selecting this sampling technique is to meet the necessary objectives of the study to provide holistic information to the survey. Researchers have openly stated that we will use an inclusion criterion for selecting our participants. The participant must be (1) A single parent, (2) Employed or unemployed, (3) Living within the Tacloban area, and (4) 40-65 years old.

### **2.5. DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

This study utilized an in-depth interview. This in-depth interview is a personal and unstructured interview that aims to classify the participant's sentiments and emotional state regarding a particular research problem. This method utilizes an unstructured interview wherein the researchers will ask open-ended questions, allowing an open-ended response from the participant. The main advantage of an in-depth interview is that it contains an exclusive and straight connection between the interviewers and the interviewee. However, interviewers need to establish the abilities to effectively administer the interview (Fisher, 2005, Wilson, 2003) cited in the study (Roumeliotis, G., 2014).

Moreover, this paper emphasizes the significance through conducting research that requires ethics. Thus, ethical considerations should abide by researchers, and conduction of this study will be safe and ethical. The ethical consideration that researchers must follow:

1. Informed Consent

The researchers will give a letter of consent to the participants; after they have filled out the necessary information, they must confirm participating in the interview. The importance and the basis of informed consent imply on the researchers in providing adequate evidence and reassurance about involvement for the individuals to completely comprehend the necessarily applied implications of participation and create an informed, measured, and giving of freedom to decide whether or not to participate, without any tension or intimidation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

2. Confidentiality

The researchers ensure privacy and confidentiality between the researchers and interviewees. Thus, any information that the interviewee says related to the research will be with complete respect and honesty.

3. Data Protection

The researchers guarantee that the data collected from the participants will serve as the only intended collection of information regarding the study. All the gathered information is from the participant will be used relatively and unbiasedly. Likewise, the data provided should be accurate and essential and keep up to date for a more extended time (Maijoy, 2011).

## **2.6. DATA ANALYSIS**

After gathering all the needed data, responses, analyzing, and thematizing were completed. Since the interview was face-to-face and used a voice recording, the researchers transcribed all of the participants' answers thoroughly. Following Collaizi's descriptive phenomenological process, the researchers identify the significant statements that have been transcribed word for word in the interview. Through those responses, the formulated meanings were also developed. Similarly, the organization of the cluster of themes and those themes resultant from the responses of the participants eventually benefited the progress of the thematic map of the lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic. The themes that were formed

are (1) Economic Challenges and (2) Socio-Psychological. Formulating these themes helped the researchers to arrange a Thematic Map based on Collaizi's descriptive phenomenology.

## 2.7. THEMATIC MAP

Theme Cluster	Emergent Themes
Unemployment Savings Seeking Job Financial Instability Trials Financial Assistance Low Income	Economic Challenges
Optimism Gardening Managing household chores Quality time and Family Bonding Emotional Support from family	Socio-Psychological

Table 1: THEMATIC MAP

The theme cluster is extracted from the formulated meanings of the participants' answers whereas the emergent themes are the completed themes from the cluster themes. This section shows the difficult challenges and the coping mechanism that experienced by the single parents during the pandemic.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study describes the lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic. Due to the current situation being faced by single parents, it emphasized the difficult challenges they have encountered. **Economic Challenges** and **Socio-Psychological** were the two themes emerged from the responses of the participants.

### Theme 1: Economic Challenges

All of the participants faced a lot difficulties especially with regards to economic challenges. As the surge of pandemic, a lot of individuals across the world experienced financial

deficiency. As reflected by those subjects' economic challenges are the lived experiences of these single parents during the pandemic. With this, they have their own ways in finding a temporary job that can sustain their daily needs.

Participant 1 responded that during those lockdown restrictions she has been temporarily unemployed and when she realized that being unemployed without receiving any income is difficult, when she got back to her work, she has decided to save her income.

*"ito la nga waray trabaho"; "pero pagkuan ko adto nga sugad hadto nga nahitabo nahunahunaan ko ba kahuman nagtirok na ako, kada sweldo tirok-tirok, kay di ka maaram sugad yana di ka maaram kun anot kuan tirok ako kada sweldo."* (P1)

Whereas, Participant 2 stated that she had her own business but when the pandemic and restrictions was mandated, she stopped and eventually had a new business again.

*"aw kay mayda man ako kita, kay mayda man ako boarding house"; "...nagkukuan man ako hadto nagluluto man ako adto hin baligya, so an pandemic waray na, nagstop ako kay waray naman mamaralit."* (P2)

Whereas, on the same context but in opposite note, Participant 3,4, and 5 responded:

*"... a lot of trials like financial"* (P3)

*"... kay ha usa nga solo parent ikaw manla iton namimiling hin kuan, makuri, an akon mga anak tutulo na aadi haak, waray nabilig financially"* (P4)

*"yana la ako na 2021 na nabalo...", "makuri, makuri head of the family gud"; "Akon mga anak nahatag".* (P5)

On the same note but on different response, Participant 6 stated she had a hard time adjusting when she got back to her fruit stand after the lockdown because there was only a few of costumers buying due to the limitations of going outside and also the people had no income.

*“Kay syempre nagtitinda ako, maluya. Kulang an napalit. Amo ito tapos ngan in makuri an kwarta. Oo, syempre amo gud basta single-parent pagbabaligya maluya dire pareho hitun dire pa pandemic nga masurong.” (P6)*

The experiences of these participants led them to finding ways on having additional income, finding multiple jobs, to persevere, and acceptance of the situation.

## **Theme 2: Socio-Psychological**

By examining the participants responses on how they cope up during the pandemic we have noted that one of the coping mechanisms that single parents often do as a family at the onset of pandemic is having quality time. All 6 of the single parent participants that we have interviewed has different answers based on their time with their family. Despite the struggles they have faced and restrictions mandated by the government by not allowing most individuals to go out due to the sudden surge, the bond between their children became stronger and it creates a significant realization of valuing each presence in their family. One of the participant’s coping mechanisms was just accepting the death of her husband because of an accident.

Participant 1 still embraces the optimism and hope in spite of dealing with a global crisis.

*“Pag-ampo la nga tanan makaya mo, tapos adi man tak pamilya nakakuan man gihapon nakakabulig.” (P1)*

Participant 2 responded that her family where only staying at home having some time of bonding, managing household chores, and doing recreational activities to ease the fear of the virus and boredom.

*“Ah lugod adto, pirme nala adi ha balay, waray na lakat lakat, pirme nala ma kuan”; “ah pinurupulid pulid nala didi. Bagan maguol lugod ha lawas kay hiara man ak pag trabaho na kuan pagpinananom. Amo ito pagpinananom hin kuan”; “pagpinanahi naman. Hito, hito nga trabahuon ha balay. Ito nga mga trabahuon ha balay. Aadi la didi mga trabahuon ha balay. Tahi tahi naman hin mga punda, sugad ito.”; “danay liwat tagay tagay”; “nagbonding bonding nala, it amon trabaho, kaon, katurog, cellphone.” (P2)*

Whereas, Participant 3 and 4 only thinks of their children's daily needs and safety.

*"...because of my daughter I have to find way to feed, to find things." (P3)*

*"kuan ko la an akon mahihimo para haakon mga anak, nagbibiling biling (P4)*

For Participant 5 it is accepting the accident of her husband during fishing and with the global pandemic situation with the help of her children's care and financial support.

*"Ah kay acceptance."; "Akon mga anak nahatag." (P5)*

Whereas, on the same context from Participant 2 but in opposite note, Participant 6 stated:

*"an mga tanom ko, mga tanom. Mga paglimpyo limpyo hit balay amo it akon nabubusyhan ha tindahan amo iton akon nabubusyhan an akon baby boy, akon miggy akon ayam. Paglaba laba, amo it akon nabubusyhan. Pagplantsa-plantsa hin uniform." (P6)*

The participants' stated that they have created a solid bond and time with their family during the pandemic – it is their way of coping up in spite of the trials they have encountered. They also have a diverse and quite similar coping mechanisms during the pandemic to ease their boredom and fear of the infectious disease of COVID-19.

This phenomenological study discovered the lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic. We, the researchers, are interested in discovering the challenges they faced and the coping strategies they applied during the pandemic. The lived experiences of 6 participants from the vicinity of Tacloban City were conducted through a face-to-face interview, categorized into 12 clusters of themes, and then further extracted into two emergent themes.

There is a correlation between the literature review and our study: every single parent had lived experiences and expected coping strategies. Participants in the study reported that economic challenges were the circumstances most experienced by single parents during the pandemic, including unemployment, savings, seeking job, financial instability, trials, financial assistance, and low income. For our first theme, **economic challenges**.

Maury (2020), the Coronavirus has drastically increased the Jobseekers Payment and Parenting Payment Single in the pandemic. Forty-two percent give a slight reprieve to those who depend on government assistance as their source of income. Financial hardships

are overwhelming the single mothers since, for years, they have been financing their children's essential needs. It tells us they have acquired necessities such as a functional refrigerator, children's clothes, and abundant food. In contrast, 65 percent of survey respondents work in some capacity, and unemployment among single mothers has increased.

According to Gladow & Ray (1986), for the families to acquire financial goals and lessen their deficiency of resources in emergency circumstances, just like the global crisis being experienced, they need to have savings. One way to decrease an economic difficulty is by allotting an income to its respective savings. Also, it was discovered in the study of ASAGEM (General Directorate of Family and Social Researches, 2011) cited in the study (Ozturk, M. S., & Boylu, A. A., 2015) that in a usual setting single-parent family obtains financial assistance from their relatives who are close to them to help in household cleaning and maintenance activities. The results of these two studies parallel the literature that creates an impression that single-parent families' income is insufficient, especially during the pandemic, and that they receive financial assistance from their relatives and family.

The participants in this study also reported having the socio-psychological coping mechanism of single parents, including optimism, gardening, managing household chores, quality time and family bonding, and emotional support from family. For our second theme, ***sociopsychological***.

This second theme is associated with the coping mechanisms of single parents. According to Son & Bauer (2010), they have a solid family support system, as suggested in some research that it is one of the essential aspects for single parents. By acquiring a family resiliency, they can cope with the adversities they are experiencing in their life; this includes the single mothers' diverse challenges. With this, having strong support from their family and community makes sense of being in the right place and increasing the number of single mothers (Black & Lobo, 2008). Also, research has shown various adaptive coping strategies single mothers utilize, from getting pets, exercising, having internal strength, toughness, wit, counseling, arts, and volunteering (Broussard, Joseph, & Thompson, 2012) cited in the study of Maness, N.E. & Munoz, K.R. (2019). The results of the studies presented in this theme are somewhat aligned with the discovered literature. However, some studies have different results that came out on the coping mechanisms of single parents.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The pandemic brought changes in individuals' lives and led to different problems. Single parents are no exception to problems and difficulties, especially they independently support the family's needs due to the absence of a partner. Hence, the researchers explored a study to understand the lived experiences of single parents and describe their challenges during the pandemic. We use a phenomenology method to come up with the findings. The

researchers interviewed six (6) participants who are single parents residing in the city of Tacloban. Much of the data and information was gathered and analyzed from the in-depth interview of the participants.

The findings revealed two (2) themes relating to single parents' lived experiences during the pandemic. Economic Challenges and Socio-Psychosocial. Findings showed that participants mainly faced diverse challenges, specifically on financial aspects. A change in their economic status has been evident since the pandemic's start: families and employers supported them. Likewise, having a coping mechanism for their daily life during the pandemic provides a substantial role that helps them lessen the difficulties they are experiencing. Emotional support from the families is also observable. Thus, this research paper provided a deep understanding of the lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic. Their stories provide a more profound glimpse into the day-to-day lives of single parents that have never been visible to society or have little attention. Evidence suggests that single parents' vulnerability during the pandemic is visible, especially since they do not have a partner they can depend on when they encounter a problem related to the sustenance of their children.

Moreover, since this study had only focused on its locale in the vicinity of Tacloban City, a similar study must be conducted by future researchers from other local municipalities and barrios with a larger sample size to identify the different lived experiences of single parents during the pandemic from other places if there are any resemblances with the findings. Likewise, this study only limits the age group from 40-65 years old; it is encouraged the future researchers to conduct this study with a different age group to examine if the same findings will be established. Also, we recommend further research to expand the target population to include other genders and to have more diverse single parents' demographics.

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