



VILOMAH'S STANCE: LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FILIPINO FATHERS WHO LOST A CHILD TO COVID-19 VIRUS

CHRISTINE ANNE S. MORENO
MSP Student

Laguna College of Business and Arts
09357501025
christineanne006@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study looked into the lived experience of Filipino grieving fathers who lost a child due to COVID-19 virus. The research design used was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The study explored the experiences of Filipino grieving fathers using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The study generated eight superordinate themes which were the Wake and Quarantine Restrictions, Extremely Difficult, Difficulty in Processing Grief, Maintaining Positivity, Keeping the Faith, and Indulging in social media, Focus on Work, Religion, Hobby and Family, and Use of Technology and social media, Family, and Friends for Emotional, Financial and Social Support, Thru Lessons that were Learned, Strong Disposition, Acceptance, and Same Belief.

COVID-19 indeed changed the natural way of grieving due to the implementation of quarantine protocols and isolation from the close contact of confirmed cases deaths. The changes that they encountered have served as challenges for their grieving process. Lastly, the experience that they encountered helped them to have a strong disposition to accept their loss.

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As an output of the study, an activity guide and grief workbook for grieving fathers that will help process their grief and build their resilience was proposed.

Keywords: *Grieving, pandemic, father, support, coping strategies*



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INTRODUCTION

Grief is a natural process experienced by all individuals, to one degree or another, after the occurrence of a loss. Significant losses, including the death of a loved one, the termination of a close friendship, or the loss of one's ambitions and dreams, are among life's most stressful events. Grief is a natural way of dealing with loss. It is not a weakness, but rather a learning process that takes time, patience, and effort. Each person's grieving process is different. Grief manifests itself in different ways for different people. Prior losses, traumatic circumstances surrounding the loss, a history of poor relationships, or other social or psychological problems can all make grief more difficult.

The emotional suffering fades for the majority of people, and energy is eventually redirected towards the future. On the other hand, some people's mourning response does not fade with time and continues to interfere with academic, social, or occupational functions. Following a significant loss, many people express feelings of numbness or shock. This can happen whether the loss was predicted or unexpected. People may go through a period of extreme emotional stress after this moment of shock, during which they may feel the full impact of the loss.

Furthermore, LaMeaux (2022) stated that while the pain of loss was genuine and must be experienced, one must eventually return to their own life. After working through the pain of a loved one's death, many will come to embrace death as a reality. They will be able to move

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forward and accept life without their loved ones by their side. Moreover, the global mortality rate has risen dramatically since the introduction of the COVID-19 virus. According to World Meter (2021), there were two hundred fifty-seven million and eight hundred fifty-seven thousand cases of infection and five million and one hundred sixty-eight thousand deaths registered as of November 2021.

As a result, the Philippines IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force) has implemented health regulations to prevent virus spread and help reduce infections in the country. It included lockdowns, reduced workforces, online classes, social isolation of confirmed patients, and limits on social gatherings, such as attending funerals, particularly for confirmed COVID-19 cases.

In addition, Burrell and Selman (2020) stated that attending funeral rites aided bereaved families in accepting and coping with grief since it symbolized social support. For those who died due to the COVID-19 virus special grieving rites were used to help the bereaved and helped them move through the grieving process faster.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has radically changed people's lives, particularly the process of grieving for deceased loved ones. The agony of losing loved ones in life does not end with death. That goes along with the culture, tradition, and norms practiced from death to tomb.

Moreover, there is no father who expects the death of a child because parents are really not expected to live longer than their children. In particular, fathers are concerned about the

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welfare of their children. And they do not just lose a loved one when they lose a child, they also lose their hope and dreams for their child.

Also, men are supposed to endure a lot of pressure because of society's demands on men. Society's standards have steadily shifted, but many men still try to remain calm even when battling a personal loss. Furthermore, children were intended to outlive their parents in the natural order of things. However, there were instances when parents were forced to bury their kids.

According to Writer (2022), a parent who had lost a child was referred to as "Vilomah." It was the Sanskrit for "against the natural order." Death is an unavoidable reality that no one can alter. It causes pain and other emotional reactions, which can have varying degrees of impact on an individual.

The researcher in particular experiences the loss of loved ones and it was such a tragic event, something that was unexpected, and overwhelming, the grieving researcher felt the same thing as the fathers.

With the above insights, this study delved into and deeply explored the lived experience of fathers who lost their children to the COVID-19 virus and understood ways how men expressed their grief in the context of Filipino culture. It also sought to investigate how social isolation and health protocols created an impact on the process of grieving and came up with an intervention program to help the participants cope with the current situation amid a serious health catastrophe.

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METHODS

The study utilized qualitative research with phenomenology as an approach, according to Creswell (2013) Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that looks at how people experience things and provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by an individual.

Also, Smith and Osborn (2015) mentioned that the qualitative approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) strives to give extensive assessments of personal lived experiences. It creates an account of lived experience on its terms rather than one dictated by pre-existing theoretical assumptions and recognizes that this is an interpretive task because humans are sense-makers.

The data that formed in this study came from Filipino fathers who lost a child due to the Covid-19 virus. Those fathers were located in Calamba City Laguna, Los Banos Laguna, Bulacan, Muntinlupa, and Camarines Norte. A purposeful sampling method was applied to provide a sample that may be assumed to be representative of the population. Also, because of the limited number of participants, the researchers used snowball sampling as an additional sampling technique to gather participants.

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews as instruments, which are broadly used in qualitative research. In order to evaluate the "accuracy" of the findings as best stated by

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the researcher, the participants, and the readers, Creswell (2013) state that "validation" in qualitative research is necessary.

Semi-structured questionnaires used in this study were sent to the thesis adviser for feedback and revision in order to further increase the validity and reliability of the instrument. The surveys were subsequently sent to two registered psychometricians and two registered psychologists, who served as validators, for additional validation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the narrative interviews of the seven participants, the researchers were able to generate eight themes: 1. Wake and Quarantine Restrictions, 2. Extremely Difficult, 3. Difficulty in Processing Grief, Maintaining Positivity, Keeping the Faith, and Indulging in social media, 4. Focus on Work, Religion, Hobby and Family and Use of Technology and social media 5. Family, and Friends for Emotional, Financial and Social Support, 6. Thru Lessons that were Learned, 7. Strong Disposition, Acceptance, and Same Belief.

Theme A

The themes, **Wake and Quarantine Restrictions**, were derived from the 7 participants that describe the changes that they experience in terms of grieving in time of the pandemic. Looking at the responses of participants, the participant both reported that **quarantine**

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restrictions change their way of grieving because of the implemented **restriction of the wake** for the Covid-19 related deaths and received their child's ashes enclosed in a vase.

Participant A stated that *"Sobrang laki ng pagbabago hindi na sya katulad ng nakasanayan na may burol may mga taong nakikidalamhati sa pagkamatay ng mga mahal naming sa buhay. At the same time talagang sobrang lungkot kasi hindi di namin ineexpect yung nangyari. Hindi manlang naming napaglamayan ang aming anak dumating abo na."* Also, Participant C said *"Ano marami syang pagbabago in terms of grieving process most especially nung mga times nay un na hindi tayo makakapag conduct ng paglalamay o hindi natin mabibisita yung mga mahal natin sa buhay nung mga time nayun kasi ayun nga sa mga health protocols na umiiral nung time nay un. So ang hirap nia kasi gusto mo ipakita yung support mo dun sa anak mo kaso di mo magawa kasi dun nga sa mga protocol bawal yung physical contact nung mga time na yun. Ayun yung isa sa mga pagbabago na napansin ko."* Participants experience the changes in terms of grieving as they mentioned that grieving became difficult for them because of the protocols implemented in handling Covid-19 death and restrictions on mourning traditions such as wakes are not allowed.

The responses made the researcher realize that Covid-19 indeed affects the grieving experience of a person because of the restrictions and protocols that are implemented to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Also, the presence of Quarantine restrictions adds up to the pain that they experience because they are not given a chance to see their deceased child's body. After all, it was cremated.

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To support the participant's responses, Isca (2017) Funerals help the mourning process along by enabling us to express our sadness and loss in a healthy, therapeutic way. They assist mourners to recognize and accept the truth of death and provide a partial sense of mental closure

Theme B

The theme, **extremely difficult**, was derived from the 7 participants on how they described their grieving experience due to the Covid-19 virus. Looking at the responses of the participants, they all experienced difficulty in their grieving process. The participants reported that the absence of their families and relatives' physical support elevated the pain they feel which made their grieving extremely difficult to handle.

Participant E stated that "*Halos nakakabaliw kasi wla kang makausap kung anu anu yung pumapasok sa isip mo kung anu nau yung naiisp na negatibo na hindi mo na alam kung panu mo maalis yun gusto mo nlang maka get away dun sa sakit na nararamdaman mo kakaiba sya mahirap syang iovercome sa totoo lang. Also, Participant C mentioned that "Mabigat ahh yung namatayan ka ng anak during pandemic halos kayo kayo lang pamilya nio actualy quarantine din kasi isa sa maganak nio nag karoon ng covid. Ayun kayo kayo lang kahit may kaibigan kamagnak na gusto makilamay wala din kasi ayun nga covid yung case tapos pagkaganun cremate din sya kumbaga hindi mapaglalamayan."*

Participants had the same responses as to how they described their grieving experience due to the Covid-19 virus. The participants shared their difficulty in grieving. Almost all of them

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answered that they don't know how to explain what they feel and that those feelings are hard to handle. Others said that they try to handle it but at the end of the day the feelings go back and the feeling became intense again. These responses made the researcher realize that the grieving experience of the participants at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic affect the way they were grieved and the difficulty that they are facing also affects their mental health.

In accordance, Newman (2022) mentioned that a mourning father could become completely engrossed in his work or household duties, or he might start a pastime to keep himself busy and keep his emotions under control. He might use exercise, like playing basketball or going to the gym, as a way to vent his rage.

Theme C

The theme, **Difficulty in Processing Grief**, was derived from the 7 participants that described the effect of quarantine in their grieving process. Looking at the responses of the participants, the participants both experience difficulty in processing their grief because of the quarantine requirements that they need to follow.

Participant C mentioned that "*Kelangan mag quarantine din kapag close contact ka sa kamag anak mong namatay due to covid. Mahirap sya kasi kasi nga diba pagnamatayan ka kahit papaano kahit sa huling sandali makakasama mo yung mahal mo sa buhay bago sya ilibing, gusto mo sana kahit papaano nandun ka kaso ayun may times na ang hirap hindi mo sya anu minsan di ka makatulog nakakiarapan iniisip mo kasi nga bawala nga gawa ng protocol na umiiral sobrang*

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hirap lang na gusto mong puntahan hindi mo magawa.” Also, Participant E stated “Nung na quarantine ako nung that time ano ehh syempre nung habang nagluluksa ka iniisip mo yung anak mo tapos iniisip mo din that time yung asawa mo yung isang anak mo kasi nawalan kana ng isa pwedeng naisip ko din that time na possible na mangyari din yun either sa asawa ko isa ko pang anak o sakin kaya anu ehh kaya medjo hindi ko maexplain kung anung klase yung nararamdaman ko nun may pain na may takot na nararamdaman.”

Participants reported that required isolation restricts them to give a farewell to their child and hinders them to express their emotions. Also, isolation adds up to the pain they experience and cause fear of transmitting a virus to their loved ones. These responses made the researcher realize the importance of physical and emotional support to the person who is experiencing grief. Being in an isolation escalates their pain and worry about their loved one’s health. Also, quarantine protocols restrict them to give their final tribute to their deceased child which made their grieving process difficult.

Comparatively, in the study of Maria Gayatri, Dian Kristiani Irawaty (2021) “Family Resilience during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Literature Review” pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has direct effects on family well-being such as loneliness, stress, depression, and anxiety. Quarantine results in a loss of mobility, economic hardship, loss of income, unemployment, obesity, and worse COVID-19 outcomes, which may increase the risk of

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hospitalization and death, disrupted clinical services, reduced food access, vulnerability, and risk within the family, and mental health problems.

Theme D

The theme, **Maintaining Positivity, Keeping the Faith, and Indulging in social media**, was the theme derived from the 7 participants on how they dealt with the challenges that they encountered in grieving at the time of the pandemic.

The participants divulged the different strategies they use to deal with the challenges they encountered in grieving during the time of the pandemic which include positivity, faith, and use of social media. The participants reported that despite the circumstances that happen they still **maintained to be positive** for their family. The **faith that they have** built a strong relationship with God that helps them deal with their loss. Participant A mentioned *"Ayun lang ako kasi positibo ako sa buhay kahit mahirap at masakit yung nangyari mas pinipili ko ko maging positibo sampo ng aking mga pamilya aking asawa ang mga anak ah patuloy na panalangin lang at pagbubuklod sa pamilya yun lang yung nagging key naming para malagpasan yung ganyang pagsubok nakahit na sobrang hirap sobrang sakit ay patuloy padin kaming kumapit sa Panginoon kasi sya lang naman talaga yung lubos na makakatulong samin lalo na sa panahong ito."*

Moreover, other participant mentioned that **Indulging to social media** help them cope with their loss and communicate with their family and loved ones even if they are still completing their required quarantine days. Participant E mentioned *"Nakatulong din kahit papaano yung*

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Social media kahit papano nakapag usap din kami kahit naka quarantine kami so yun yung medjo nakakatulong at nakakabawas ng pain nanararamdaman ko pero after nun balik ulit sa dati."

These responses made the researcher realize that having deep faith and a positive outlook on life helps the participant to handle their grief despite the challenges they have experienced. Social media also play an important role for them to deal with the challenges because it helps them somehow handle their grief.

Furthermore, Ochman (2020) Men grieve independently and then utilize employment and other pursuits to divert their attention from their suffering. In contrast to women, who rely on their female friends for assistance, they typically have a smaller network of friends to turn to in difficult times.

Theme E

The theme, **Focus on work, Religion, Hobby, Family, Use of Technology, and social media**, was derived from the 7 participants on the coping strategies that they use in terms of grieving in time of the pandemic.

Looking into the responses of the participants, participants use different kind of coping strategies to manage their grief. Most of the participants **returned to their work and focus to their family** needs to divert their emotion and in order to support the needs of their family. Participant C stated "*Balik nalang ulit sa trabaho kaylangan kasi lalo na may mga naiwan pa akong anak kailanagn ko bumangaon para sa kanila.*" While other participants focused on their religion

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and hobbies Participant G, said *"Nag pray ako the yung mga hobby ko yun pinagtuunan ko ng pansin pinaggugulan ko ng oras minsan kumakanta kanta lang sa bahay at nagtrabaho na din.*

"Technology and social media were really helpful in coping with their loss according to Participant F *"Buti nalang yung technology natin nanjan na ehha mabilis tayo makapag usap nanjan na yung video call yung chat napaka accessible na ng communication natin so nagkaroon ako kahit papaano ng outlet."*

Although there are many limitations the Covid-19 brought to their grieving process participants discovered that there were a variety of things that they can do to cope with their loss.

In accordance, Ochman (2020) mentioned that it is critical to understand what male mourning looks like in all of its forms. Some men will lose their temper. Others will mourn, while others will appear strong and continue to function, returning to work to keep themselves occupied.

Theme F

The theme, **Family, and Friends for Emotional, Financial, and Social Support**, was derived from the 7 participants on their support and how it helps in their grieving process.

Participants stated that **Family and friends served their support during their grieving process by providing emotional, financial, and social support.** According to Participant D *"Bukod sa misis ko magulang ko anak ko financially magulang ko wla na eh kasi*

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nahiya nadin ako humigi ng tulong sa kaibigan syempre hindi ko din alam pano kukunin ang tulong nila during that time.” Also, Participant F stated that “Partner, family and friends ko nanjan ang kelangan lang nman natin sa buhay ay yung makikinig lang hindi natin kelangan makahingi ng sagot sa tanong natin kung bakit ngyari ito bat nangyari yan ang gusto lang natin mairelease. Ayun dahil nan ga sa help ng mga tao naggging outlet talaga sila.”

In addition, providing emotional support is vital for those who experience loss, especially during the time of the Covid19 pandemic. Despite the limitation that the pandemic brought to the grieving individuals, families, and friends were able to lend their hand by finding ways to provide the support they needed.

In relation, Weir (2020) in her article “Grief and COVID-19: Mourning our gone lives” mentioned that social support and the importance of social responsibilities may be lost when people are isolated from their loved ones. As a result, mental health professionals advise people to communicate with their family, friends, and relatives by the use of cellular phones and social media.

Theme G

With a theme Thru Lessons that were Learned, Strong Dispositions and Acceptance, the participants elaborated on how their experiences helped them overcome the grieving challenges they encountered. Challenges were part of a person’s life, it teaches a valuable lesson that can help a person to have a strong disposition in life as mentioned by participant

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B, *"Anu lang siguro, siguro dahil nga nahirapan and mahirap yung sitwasyon tumibay nlang yung loob ko na lahat naman ng problema ay malalagpasan."* On the other hand Participant E stated that *"Accept talaga natin na lahat ng tao talaga lahat tayo mamamatay yun na nga yung anu ehh yun na din yung isa sa mga pain ko nung isang pagiging tao mamatayan ka ng magulang, asawa, kapatid at anak kaya parang expect na natin na posibleng mangyari yun although hindi naman mababawasan yung sakit kahit expect natin pero mas more of unti unti nating maintindihan mauunawaan na nangyayari talaga yung mga bagay nayun kaya dapat talaga every moment and every seconds count bigyan mo ng time yung mga love ones mo para atleast kahit papaano kung ikaw man mawala or either sila meron kang maiiawan na magandang memories sakanila."* Indeed, the pain of losing someone that one loves causes so much hurt but, in the end, all of this should be accepted and thankful for the time and memories that they spent with them. Despite what the pandemic brings, it teaches people to accept the unfavorable situation and it helps them have a strong disposition. At the end of the day, it brings out a lesson that helps a person face the challenging world.

In accordance, Vasquez (2022) mentioned in her blog "How to Finally Accept Death & Cope with Your Mortality" that embracing human mortality and the fact that they shall all die one day was merely the first step toward living and dying happily. Despite the measures

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to refrain from discussing or preparing for death, everyone would die eventually in the human life cycle.

Theme H

With a theme, Same Belief all participants answered that their view about death did not change despite the loss that they have faced. All of them believed that death was a natural phenomenon and it was inevitable that all humans will face death in time. According to Participant F “*Yung death kasi para sa akin natural phenomenon sya kaya para sa kinatotohanan yung lived as if it is your last day kasi anu ehh always give yung best shoot kasi kasi hindi natin lagi makaksama ang kaibigan natin partner natin himdi kasi natin maibabalik na nag panahon ehh kaya maganda maging Mabuti tayo sa mga nasa paligid natin para pag ikaw naman yung Nawala may maganda kang memory sa kanila.*” Also, Participant G stated that “*Ganun naman siguro bilang krisyano alamo ko nman na ganun ang kahihinannan ng buhay natin pero iba padin napakadali lang talaga ng buhay ng tao.*”

Life is an unpredictable thing and no one can control it that is why every moment should be cherished. People should show their love to their family, friends, and loved ones so that at the end of the day they will not have regrets when they are gone.

Moreover, Vasquez (2022) stated in her blog “How to Finally Accept Death & Cope with Your Mortality” that embracing human mortality and the fact that they shall all die one day was merely the first step toward living and dying happily. Despite the measures to refrain

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from discussing or preparing for death, everyone would die eventually in the human life cycle.

Consolidated Findings, Reflections, and Recommendations

In the phenomenological study on the lived experience of Filipino fathers who lost a child due to the Covid-19 virus, eight (8) themes emerged. There were Wake and Quarantine Restrictions, Extremely difficult, Difficulty in Processing Grief, Maintaining Positivity, Keeping the Faith, Indulging in social media, Focusing on work, Religion, Hobby, Family, Use of Technology, and social media, Family, and Friends for Emotional, Financial, and Social Support, Thru lessons that were learned, Strong Dispositions and Acceptance, and Same Belief.

Quarantine protocols restricted funeral traditions such as wakes hindering families and friends to show their support to the grieving families. Those protocols had an effect on how the father handled their grief and quarantine restrictions due to the viral Covid-19 virus indeed contributed to the changes that they experience in the time of grieving and add up to the pain that they are feeling some of them cannot find the right support because they are isolated while others have a hard time understanding their loss which contributes to the difficulty that they encountered. Their suppressed emotion elevates the pain that they are feeling and made grieving extremely difficult for them. It also brought difficulty in processing their grief which damaged their mental health.

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Moreover, participants became focused on the different activities like work, hobbies, and religion that help them somehow forget their loss. Participants maintain their connection with their families by the use of social media for them to manage the pain that they are feeling.

Lastly, the difficulty that they encountered helped them to have a strong disposition in life and help them accept the loss of their child. Throughout the person's life challenges and problems help a person to become strong and provide learning that can be used to survive unfavorable circumstances that may happen in life.

Fathers show a proactive and positive response in handling their grief by focusing on responsibilities, getting back to their jobs, and focusing on the task that they enjoy. While the father possesses a strong disposition and positive outlook in life on how they handle their grief it can be seen that they are still vulnerable to the pain. As they shared their experience it indeed shows the soft-hearted part of a father. With that, their feelings should be recognized and validated.

This study recommends Grieving Fathers are encouraged to be open and willingly engage in a support group that will help them express their emotions to process their grief. Also, they are encouraged to seek mental help support if needed. Also, the Local government is highly encouraged to build a grief support group that will help its people to cope, expressed their emotions, and processed their grief. Moreover, Future researchers with the same objectives and

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endeavor of the study may use this as their reference. Other factors included in the study regarding the lived experience of Filipino fathers who lost a child due to the Covid-19 virus could be subjected to future studies. They may also utilize other appropriate methods and designs.



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