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Research Article

Women College Students Situation During Pandemic Time: How's Their Access to the Future?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is a unique and rare occurrence in the whole world. It compelled colleges to close their doors and transition entirely to distance learning. It posed many challenges in the academe with the abrupt change in the educational landscape. Hence, the study was conceived on determining answers in a 15-question closed-question from a Plan International survey in which women college students were asked about their understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on their life and access to education, welfare, economic security, livelihoods, and access to technology. It was found out that the respondents knew little about COVID-19, it made a major change in their lives which led to huge effect to their access to their future plans. However, based from their responses on the qualitative side of the study they still have hopes and aspiration despite the pandemic situation. As a result, its impact on female college students, who confront special vulnerabilities, must be recognized, and their experiences and perspectives must be incorporated in the institution's COVID-19 pandemic preparedness processes.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic Situation, Women College Students

Introduction

COVID-19 first surfaced in Wuhan, China, in December of 2019. It is an uncommon and one-of-a-kind phenomenon that had a significant influence on the lives of the people. As cases continue to spread around the globe, it is becoming abundantly evident that the epidemic of this virus has far-reaching consequences that extend far beyond the immediate effect on people's physical health. What began as a public health

disaster is now creating fundamental societal changes as governments fight to manage the epidemic (Plan-International, 2019). To safeguard the populace, nations from all over the globe reacted in various ways. Lockdowns, quarantine, travel restrictions, social and religious gatherings, and firm closures had been commonplace before the implementation of school and university closures. Thus, by the end of March 2020, 150 nations had shut down

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their national educational institutions, impacting more than 80% of the global student population (Al-Rasheed, 2021).

In response to the pandemic's educational issues, universities changed rapidly from face-to-face instruction to online/blended forms of instruction. The undergraduate level was most influenced by the rapid transformation in the educational environment. The temporary cessation of classroom activity at HEIs has left students, particularly undergraduates and those on the verge of graduating high school and aspiring to enter tertiary education, in a completely new situation and without a clear understanding of how long the impact will last, the immediate impact it will have on their daily lives, costs, and other financial burdens, and, of course, on the continuation of their studies (UNESCO IESALC, 2020).

Undergraduate women with family obligations may be more susceptible to obstacles than their male peers (Orser et al., 2012). The scope of this epidemic impacts many elements of girls' and young women's everyday life, including their safety, well-being, education, economic security, nutrition, health, and access to technology. The COVID-19 virus exacerbates all existing disparities (Plan-International, 2019). In addition, adolescent females may drop out of school disproportionately owing to an increased risk of sexual exploitation, pregnancy, and (forced) marriage, and girls may study less or drop out of school at greater rates than boys due to an increase in unpaid family labour

(Gabster et al., 2020). In recent months, COVID-19 research has increased as the globe has sought to address the virus's medical ramifications and develop a reaction to its severe adverse effects. However, relatively few studies on the status of female college students during a pandemic were conducted. Consequently, this article examines the position of female college students in relation to the COVID-19 epidemic and its consequences on their lives and access to education, welfare, economic security, and technology.

Methods

Study Design

This study used mixed techniques, which include the collection and inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data. Convergent parallel design was used for the mixed-methods investigation. A convergent parallel design requires the researcher to undertake quantitative and qualitative elements concurrently at the same period of the research process, to weight the methods equally, to analyze the two components independently, and to interpret the results jointly (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). The researcher intends to triangulate for validation and confirmation reasons. Methodologies for directly comparing quantitative and qualitative statistical data outputs. During the research process, two datasets were separately obtained, examined, and compared. The process of design is shown in the figure below.

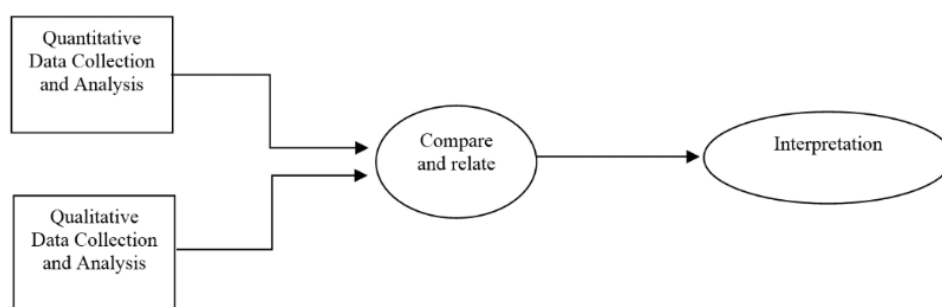


Figure 1: The convergent parallel design used in this study (Demir, 2018)

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are women college students enrolled in Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of

Agriculture and Technology (DEBESMSCAT) in the Province of Masbate SY 2020-2021. Purposive sampling method was used since saturation of the responses was considered. They are

both participants in quantitative and qualitative data collection. The total number of the participants is 1668 female students.

Data Collection Method

The data was obtained utilizing a questionnaire survey from Plan International in which women college students were questioned about their understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on their life in terms of education, welfare, economic security, livelihoods, and access to technology. It was collected thru online survey including the qualitative part of the questionnaire. Disclaimer and

ethical considerations were posted before the participants would answer the survey.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed through frequency count and percentage as descriptive data analyses. Qualitative data were analyzed through Quoda Miner Application. This is used for determining the themes and codes based from the responses of the participants. It analyzes textual data, such as interview and news transcripts, open-ended replies, and so on, as well as still photographs.

Findings

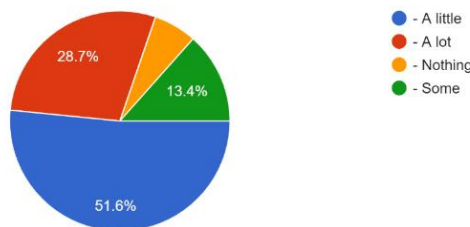


Figure 2. Levels of Perceived Knowledge about Pandemic of Women College Students

Pandemic information is crucial for female college students in order to keep them prepared. However, the accompanying graph demonstrates that they have little knowledge about the epidemic. They may be ignorant of its hazards and impact on everyday life. Several results on the relationships between KAP characteristics gave useful insights into how public health efforts might better safeguard the health of the community during public health crises, such as developing infectious disease pandemics, by implementing targeted behavioral interventions.

Knowledge may play an essential role in promoting public preventative behavior (M. Lee et al., 2021). In contrast, research done in Saudi Arabia found that students in Saudi Arabia seemed to have a solid understanding of COVID-19 and the suggested preventative actions, as well as a positive attitude and excellent behaviors (Alrasheedy et al., 2021).

Therefore, a wide distribution of information to pupils is advised. During pandemic periods, the hazards, modes of transmission, and other underlying variables must be discussed.

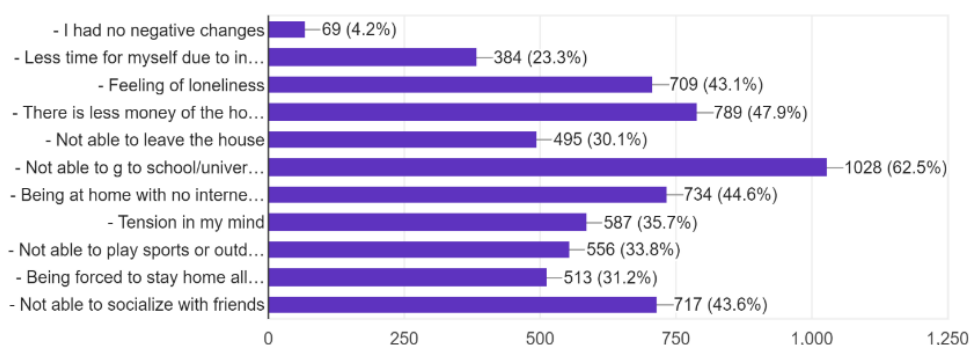


Figure 3. What are the negative effects that you experienced in this time of pandemic?

When face-to-face classes were replaced by online/blended learning, students reacted differently to the dramatic shift in the academic environment. Women college students consider the biggest negative consequence as the inability to attend college or university. This implies that female college students may feel comfortable, secure, and content among their peers and professors. Not attending school or college is equivalent to renouncing college experience, which contributes significantly to their growth as women in society. According to (J. Lee et al., 2021), a lack of this so-called "college experience" causes students' mental health to deteriorate, as evaluated by self-

reported increases in anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. Further, women, younger age, student status, jobless status, past psychiatric history, and those who had greater negative effect on their QOL were at a larger risk for increased anxiety and depression symptoms (Solomou & Constantinidou, 2020). Thus, it is suggested that the institution develop mental health strategies and activities to counteract anxiety brought on by the negative impacts of COVID-19 in order to reach out to vulnerable students. It may include online counseling, a mental health screening, or an awareness day for pupils.

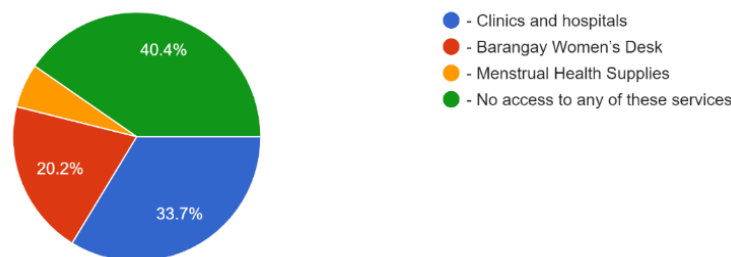


Figure 3. What are your access to sexual/reproductive rights?

As an occurrence that may inflict physical, emotional, and psychological trauma, the COVID-19 pandemic may impact people's sexual and reproductive health (Tu et al., 2021). The majority of female college students who took the DEBESMSCAT said that they had no sexual/reproductive rights. This indicates that, as the most vulnerable individuals along this border, they are denied these rights. It was also highlighted that the college's students come from distant sections of the province, therefore access to these rights may be really difficult. Since precocious pregnancies, undesired

abortions, sexual assaults, and the like may occur, a political will to make this available to female students is important. Moreover, the pandemic has a significant impact on women's sexual health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, basic reproductive health services and contraception supply chain activities should be assured to defend the rights and health of women (Tu et al., 2021). In addition, (Endler et al., 2021) found that various issues associated to the pandemic as well as the consequences of lockdown prevented women from gaining access to and using services.

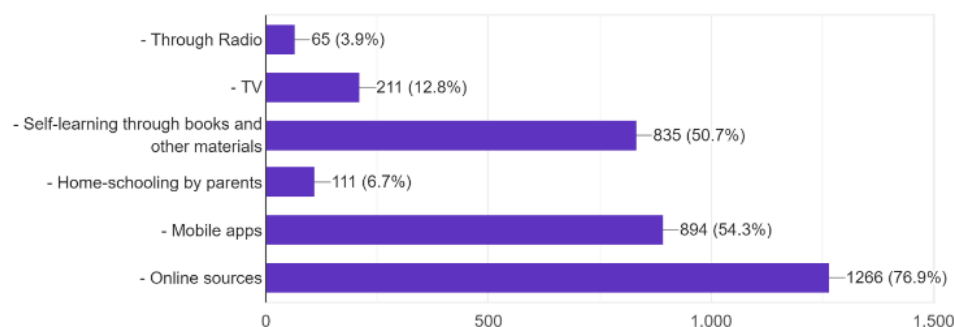


Figure 4. What are the modes/ways to continue your education at home?

The figure shows the modes/ways of college women students continue their education at home despite the pandemic. When they cannot be physically present at school majority of them find ways to access online sources in coping up with their lessons. This is followed by Self-learning through books and other materials. This means that despite the pandemic women college students managed to adjust on the abrupt changes in the educational landscape. In fact, related studies were conducted on the impact of online learning in other countries and they found out that it significantly has advantages than disadvantages. Online learning also reduces cost without reducing the quality of learning. For these reasons, professors are expected to be more facilitators, collaborators, mentors, trainers, directors, and study partners and provide choices and greater accountability for students to learn (El Firdoussi et al., 2020).

However, with its advantages there are still challenges posted as to accessing online learning resources given the geographical location of the province and of the country. Hence, there main challenges facing undergraduate women during the pandemic out- break.

Some challenges were associated with online learning in the literature, but their impact increased with the full transition and

quarantine, namely, technical issues, limited availability of digital devices, distractions and time management, stress and psychological pressure, and lack of in- person interaction (Al-Rasheed, 2021). Also, synchronized e-learning was the panacea at the time of the pandemic but it negatively influenced the learners' performance and learning outcomes (Mahyoob, 2020).

Nonetheless, where COVID-19 doesn't give women students any choice for face-to-face teaching and learning process utmost through the use of the above media, it gives them opportunity to continue learning and connect with their professors. Though they still have to familiarize the use of online/ distance education, they were given chances to explore how it is being done and be contented for the meantime for the sake of everyone's safety.

It is recommended that the college may provide virtual trainings to the students in using these online learning platforms to reduce the challenges and disadvantages they are experiencing.

Further, the availability of the journals and e-books of the college is recommended for students' access. An immense on information dissemination may be done to cater students' needs along learning resources.

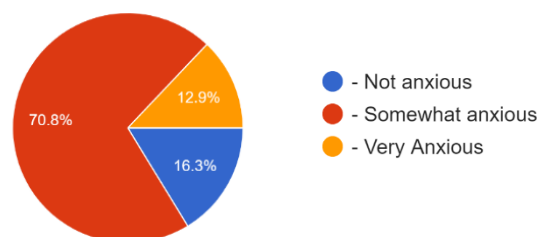


Figure 5. The perceived levels of anxiety by Women College Students

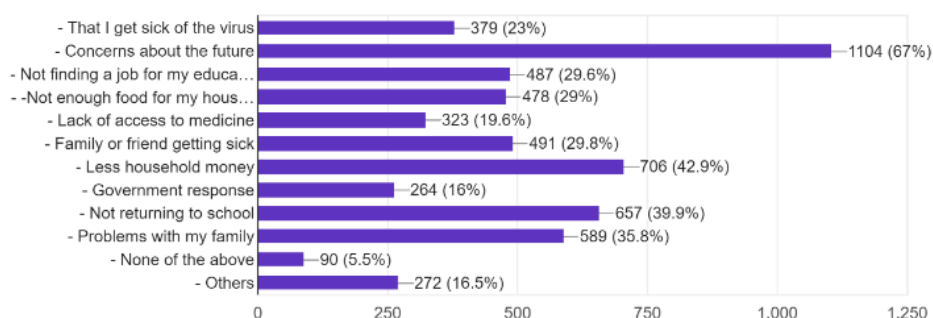


Figure 6. The reasons of anxiety by Women College

The following numbers represent the respondents' perceived levels of anxiety. It suggests that the majority of them are nervous. Numerous studies have indicated that women are more susceptible to stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder than males (Esteban-Gonzalo et al., 2021). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic may influence the mental health of people and communities (Salari et al., 2020). Consequently, due to this epidemic, everyone is susceptible to worry. In addition, there were identified causes of anxiety among the respondents, with worry about the future being the most prominent. What will occur next, and will everything return to normal? As though everything had become so unpredictable, they were concerned about the future of their education.

Students in the United States are apprehensive about their plans for further education, nervous about their lack of productivity at home, concerned about their money and the loss of employment and internship opportunities, and fearful of getting the virus (J. Lee et al., 2021). Moreover, Filipinos reported much greater levels of sadness, anxiety, and stress than Chinese during the COVID-19 epidemic (Tee et al., 2021).

Also, it should be mentioned that decreased family income is a common cause of worry. In the United States, a significant number of students said that they are now responsible for

financially supporting their families (J. Lee et al., 2021). Historically, male-dominated heavy industries, such as manufacturing and construction, were most impacted during economic downturns. However, during COVID-19, female-dominated sectors, notably service industries – tourism, hospitality, and retail – have been hurt worse (Plan-International, 2019). Consequently, the participants' parents lost their jobs as a result of the epidemic, causing them to worry about how to finance their online education. In Africa and Asia, the epidemic had a disproportionately negative impact on female, full-time, college students who were experiencing emotional and financial difficulties (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

In light of these results, it is advised that the institution provide systematic virtual trainings and seminars that promote mental health awareness to college students of all genders, not just women. In addition, online counseling and consultations by guidance counselors, physicians, and psychologists may be provided by building a pool of experienced psychologists and professors who are eager to help anxious students. In this pandemic era, it is possible to train the teachers and frontline staff of the institution on how to improve mental health, since this is one method of fostering resilience. Finally, a network of support groups may be established to maintain the college's mental health initiatives.

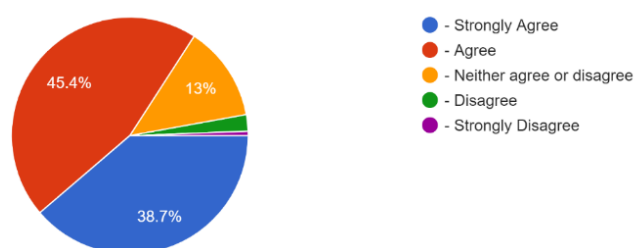


Figure 7. Do you agree that you still have access of your future plans despite the pandemic?

Women college students can be considered as hopeful respondents despite of the uncertainties brought by the pandemic. They still managed to agree in pursuing their future plans even it poses greater risks in their health safety. When people commit themselves to a meaningful project, they usually pursue it over a substantial period of time (Ritchie et al.,

2021). On the other hand, there are students who disagree in uncertain maybe because of some reasons of their anxieties mentioned above. Also, because of the delay of their graduation and release of credentials, they may have considered it as delayed in pursuing their future careers or plans. Thus, most of the respondents agree that they still have access to

the future as long as education is still available in different forms.

Qualitative Response of respondents in their access to their future plans despite pandemic.

In the survey conducted many emergent themes were identified to support the above figure. Most (45.5%) of the respondents agreed that they still have access to the future. This part in the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data of the study using the convergent parallel design in the descriptive manner. The following emergent themes were based from the codes in the Qouda Data Miner administered by the researcher.

Emergent theme 1: Agree (45.5%) "Pandemic won't stop them from schooling."

Women college students are determined to finish their studies. Despite of the challenges met thru online education they still strive to pursue their dream and that is finishing their course.

"Pandemic won't stop me from doing anything in the future especially that we lack money because of this virus it won't stop me in achieving my dreams in the future especially that I need to get a job as soon as I graduated from college even if it is not related to my course". – Student M

The phrases "even it is not related to my course" indicates that any job that will give them salary will be accepted. There is a drive in their responses to look for a job and to make a living after their graduation.

Emergent theme 2: Strongly Agree (38.7 %) "I believe in God than the pandemic."

Respondents has this idea that God is bigger than the pandemic. As one the respondents claimed:

"I think there is a way to pursue my plans in the future despite there is a pandemic because I believe that God has a plan for my future and He only knows about it. All I have to do right now is to trust in Him, have faith to Him and even serve Him as His disciple then everything will be possible with Him. Also, I believe that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me as Paul says in Philippians 4:13." -Student T

Therefore, with the idea that there is someone who gives them hope in these uncertain times students tend to be more positive with their experiences. They still high hopes of achieving their future careers and explore it in the future. Thus, they become resilient and ready of the challenges they may encounter.

They remain steadfast and determined to claim their future. As supported by another respondent who claimed that:

"Strongly agree, because time doesn't stop, money goes along, people work every day in the midst of pandemic, I realized pandemic will not stop people working and chasing their dreams. So, I myself believe that no matter what comes in my life I will pursue my dream for my future even though there are some changes in my plans because my situation can be changed but still, I will go on.

Emergent theme 3: Neither Agree or Disagree (13%) "I am uncertain of what might happen."

Uncertainties may really be pressing the respondents' minds because of the pandemic. Reports on the increase of cases and deaths give horror to all the people across the world which led to mental health issues and problems. Several studied found out that women are more vulnerable to this, 13% of the respondents claimed that they neither agree or disagree along their access to their future.

"I don't think so because I don't know what's waiting for me in the future". -Student L

"Neither agree or disagree, because first, there is a possibility that I can't be able to find job because of the less job opportunity that is or will happen in the near future."- Student J

Therefore, it indicates that women college students' uncertainties give them low access in pursuing their future career plans. There may be factors that contributed to these claims however, pandemic itself is one biggest factor that led to life's precariousness and adversities that the women college students are facing.

Emergent theme 4: Disagree (2.1%) "Lack of skills in online class won't get me a good career."

The challenges in distance education led the respondents to claim that they lack would skills so they won't be able making a good career.

"I don't know if I should still pursue my plans in the future, because I'm not sure if I can find a better job after I graduated in college. Pandemic is real and that's the biggest problem that I face now and to my future."- Student B

Online education is the best solution during this pandemic. However, it provided a significant obstacle for the students, who had issues with internet connection, accessing classrooms, and downloading course materials. Moreover, online tests could not be accessed on students' mobile devices (Mahyoob, 2020). In addition, the following characteristics led to students' unfavorable experiences: delayed instructor response, lack of teacher technical help, lack of self-regulation and self-motivation, a feeling of isolation, boring teaching techniques, and poorly-designed course material (Yang & Cornelius, 2004). In addition, they discovered that their responders felt bewildered, irritated, and alone due to the instructor's lack of fast reaction or feedback.

The level of bewilderment and unease among online students increased when course material was poorly constructed and when instructors were unable to help students with technological issues. This prompted respondents to reject the notion that they can still have access to their future ambitions and occupations while discussing skills. Thus, it is necessary to monitor and assess the college's implementation of online/distance learning. Teachers who have received training in online learning platforms may be more equipped to prepare their pupils for the difficulties of online learning.

Conclusion

In this study the current COVID-19 pandemic posed considerable problems and difficulties for female undergraduates. The present pandemic has the potential to worsen already existing issues. The pandemic's timing is unknown, which will have an influence on undergraduate women's educational attainment, lives, mental health as well as their future careers and plans. Though it is resiliency can be sensed seemingly to most of the respondents an active response to the situations experienced by the respondents may be given importance. Also, a separate study on

the experiences of men college students may be investigated to formulate a gender based responsive approach to their needs. Further research into the impact of distant education on learners' achievement motivation during the COVID-19 crisis is also strongly encouraged. Finally, this study underlines the need of universities striking a balance between high-quality education and ongoing care for undergraduate women in crisis.

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