

Safeguarding the Holistic Wellbeing of Elderly People in the Municipality of Agoncillo during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: The health condition of the people in general must always be safeguarded in this new normal. This extremely affected the social health of the elderly people because of limited social interaction. In line with this, they felt social isolation wherein they cannot go outside to buy their needs on their own. They could not also attend social gatherings and they tend to limit social interaction to secure their health and safety. This resulted to more problems with regard to emotional health, mental health and physical health of the senior citizens in Agoncillo. The most common way on how elderly people and their families take care of them are following IATF protocols. Family members also conduct regular cleaning and disinfecting of their homes, cook and eat healthy meals and fruits. Majority of them take vitamins too to boost immune system. They also limit social interaction and are encouraged by their loved ones to do simple physical exercises. They also keep in touch with their loved ones through phone calls and social media websites. In addition, they find new hobbies like planting and have their online check up to monitor their overall health condition. Lastly, some of them have their vaccines.

Keywords: Dimensions of holistic health, elderly people, holistic health, well-being.

1. Introduction

It has been two years since the pandemic started a drastic change in the lives of many people. This predicament began when a novel coronavirus was identified as the cause by Chinese authorities on January 7, 2020 and was temporarily named "2019-nCoV". Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. Furthermore, the new virus was subsequently named the "COVID-19 virus".

The World Health Organization (WHO) then declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), WHO's highest level of alarm. At that time there were 98 cases and no deaths in 18 countries outside China. On March 11, 2020, the rapid increase in the number of cases outside China led the WHO Director-General

to announce that the outbreak could be characterized as a pandemic. By then more than 118 000 cases had been reported in 114 countries, and 4291 deaths had been recorded. Since then, the whole world including the Philippines and its people suffer the effects of the virus not just to human body but also its adverse effect to the economy of one's nation.

This novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is responsible for more fatalities than the SARS coronavirus, despite being in the initial stage of a global pandemic. The first suspected case in the Philippines was investigated on January 22, 2020, and 633 suspected cases were reported as of March 1. With this, protecting society's most vulnerable during the pandemic is of utmost concern of the government. Aside from children, senior citizens or elderly people are also at a heightened risk for their vulnerability to the virus because of their weakening immune system due to their old age. With this dilemma, older adults often report feelings of loneliness brought on by social isolation. COVID-19 is making matters much worse. The need for social distancing and the elderly's heightened fear of contracting the virus has exacerbated disproportionately the solitude of this age group. Meanwhile, their adult children are also coping with lives disrupted by COVID-19 and may have less time to check on their elderly parents.

In relation to this, the pandemic has affected the overall well-being of an individual because of the protocols being implemented by the government to secure the health and safety of everyone. Since majority of the people are still on the process of adjusting their way of living according to what the new normal is requiring, it cannot be avoided that many, particularly the elderly ones are having difficulties to the new setting that is happening.

The health condition of the people in general must always be safeguarded in this new normal. That is why the holistic well-being of them must be prioritized to ensure that they can still perform what a normal individual does even after this pandemic especially the senior citizens who are really vulnerable to many diseases. Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford English

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Dictionary as “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.” re However, it is important to realize that wellbeing is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel.

Moreover, wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole. Most people would agree that wellbeing is something they strive towards and the subjective measure of people’s wellbeing is deemed so important that it is included alongside health and the economy in measures of national well-being. But once we look beyond the definition it is difficult to drill down into what wellbeing really means to people day to day, the factors that may influence it (both internal and external), how we can best measure it and how we can support people to improve it. Yet that doesn’t mean we should shy away from it either.

On the other hand, in line with the numbers of people being infected by the virus, Metro Manila and Calabarzon have the highest number of cases. Meanwhile, in the municipality of Agoncillo located in the province of Batangas which is one of the provinces under Calabarzon, a total of 293 confirmed cases were recorded. 62 or 21.16 percent of them were senior citizens wherein 33 of them are male and 29 are female according to the record of the Municipal Health Office (MHO). This data is truly alarming that despite of their social isolation still many of them are being infected.

With the information presented, the researcher as a resident in the abovementioned municipality would like to know the effects of the covid-19 pandemic to their well-being in order to propose an action plan that would safeguard this group of people from the adverse effects of the changes brought by the pandemic to their lives.

2. Methodology

In order to know the effects of Covid-19 pandemic to elderly people and the ways on how they take care of themselves, 18 Senior citizens in Agoncillo were invited as participants of the study. To be able to gather the data needed in order to attain the objectives of the study, an interview guide question was drafted and validated to ensure its reliability. Select senior citizens were interviewed and some answered the questions with the assistance of their family members since many of them are having health issues. The researcher used qualitative research which involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences. Coding was used to analyze qualitative data in order to answer a research question.

3. Objectives

The present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of Covid-19 pandemic to the holistic wellbeing of elderly people in the Municipality of Agoncillo as assessed by the participants?

2. How do they and their families protect their overall health during this new normal?
3. What plan of action may be proposed to safeguard the holistic health of elderly people in the municipality of Agoncillo?

4. Findings

The findings which cover the results and discussions of this study are presented in accordance with the research questions.

A. *Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic to Holistic Wellbeing of Elderly People in the Municipality of Agoncillo*

The interview with the select senior citizens in Agoncillo revealed that Covid-19 pandemic extremely affected the overall wellbeing of elderly people particularly their social health. In line with this, they felt social isolation wherein they cannot go outside to buy their needs on their own. They could not also attend social gatherings and they tend to limit social interaction to secure their health and safety. Because of this predicament, other dimensions of holistic health like mental health, emotional health and physical health were also affected. Relative to emotional health, fear was always felt since they have limited social interactions with others. They were afraid, lonely, bored, anxious, emotional, irritated, stressed and uncomfortable. With regard to mental health, participants disclosed that they suffered from overthinking, sleep disturbance, anxiety and depression. Lastly, when it comes to physical health, some of them reduced physical activities and weakened immune system that is why they got sick and acquired severe illness.

B. *Various Ways on How Elderly People and their Families Take Care of Them during Covid-19 Pandemic*

The most common way on how elderly people and their families take care of them are following IATF protocols like staying at home, wearing face mask and face shield and sanitizing hand using alcohol. Family members also conduct regular cleaning and disinfecting of their homes. They also cook and eat healthy meals and fruits. Moreover, majority of them take vitamins to boost immune system. They also limit social interaction and are encouraged by their loved ones to do simple physical activities and exercises. They also keep in touch with their loved ones through phone calls and social media websites. In addition, they find new hobbies like planting and have their online check up to monitor their overall health condition. Lastly, some of them have their vaccines and some family members provide psychosocial support activities to ease boredom and stress.

Likewise, some more challenges focused on sustainability of financial assistance from LGU, manner of hiring, promotion and transfer, availability of scholarship grants, membership in professional organization, and publication of vacancies and number of items.

C. Proposed Action Plan to Safeguard the Holistic Wellbeing of Elderly People in Agoncillo

Objectives	Activities	Resources	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Success Indicator
To strengthen communications and social interactions with friends and other senior citizens in the community without compromising health and safety	Online Kamustahan	Cellphone, Laptop and other available gadgets	Senior Citizens, Family Members, MSWDO Personnel	Monthly	Elderly people met friends and are able to share their issues and problems in line with covid-19 pandemic that will be facilitated by the MSWDO.
To comfort elderly people and to find support system and strengthen coping mechanism against stress and other negative emotions	Provision of Psychological First Aid and Psychosocial Support Activities	Cellphone, Laptop and other available gadgets	Senior Citizens, Family Members, MSWDO and MHO Personnel	Quarterly	Senior citizens are able to have better relationship with their family members and established strong coping mechanism against stress.
To intensify the implementation of Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010	Reorientation on the Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens	Cellphone, Laptop and other available gadgets	Senior Citizens, Family Members, MSWDO Personnel	Yearly	Indigent Senior Citizens receive quarterly pension.
To boost Immune System of Elderly People	Stretching time!	Sound System	Senior Citizens and Family Members	Weekly	Elderly people do simple exercises.

families take care of them are following IATF protocols. Family members also conduct regular cleaning and disinfecting of their homes. They also cook and eat healthy meals and fruits. Moreover, majority of them take vitamins to boost immune system. They also limit social interaction and are encouraged by their loved ones to do simple physical activities and exercises. They also keep in touch with their loved ones through phone calls and social media websites. In addition, they find new hobbies like planting and have their online check up to monitor their overall health condition. Lastly, some of them have their vaccines and some family members provide psychosocial support activities to ease boredom and stress.

3. The proposed action plan will be of great help in safeguarding the holistic wellbeing of the elderly people in the town of Agoncillo.

Meanwhile, in the light of the findings of this study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were offered by the researchers.

1. The MSWDO should conduct online kamustahan with senior citizens to know their issues and challenges during this covid-19 pandemic.
2. The MHO is recommended to provide free online consultation to address the needs particularly access to healthcare among elderly people.
3. The proposed action plan can be presented to the local executive chief for possible approval and implementation.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn based on the highlights of the findings.

1. The Covid 19-pandemic extremely affected the social health of the elderly people because of limited social interaction. This resulted to more problems with regard to emotional health, mental health and physical health of the senior citizens in Agoncillo.
2. The most common way on how elderly people and their

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