

¹ Christian Dave S.
Geralde

² John Albert M.
Nares

³ Khalil Gabriel Y.
Galbo

⁴ Noreen Grace M.
Aguirre

⁵ Ashliah Elieza A.
Seriña

Displaced Workers During Pandemic: Stories of Resilience and Recovery



Abstract: - COVID-19 hit the world economy hard, and one of the setbacks during the pandemic was the displacement of workers due to lockdowns to avoid the virus. However, three years have passed, and much of the Filipino workforce has been left displaced, disrupting the lives of many, resulting from temporary layoffs to permanent unemployment. Thus, this study focused on the lived experiences of displaced workers during the pandemic, how they managed their difficulties, and the lessons they learned. The study used a phenomenological methodology to give meaning to the displaced workers' experiences as a single phenomenon. The 10 participants were chosen using the purposive sampling technique. One of the criteria for choosing the participants was that they were regular yet displaced employees during the pandemic. An in-depth interview was used in the study to collect the data. The researchers also ensured they followed ethical considerations. Through thematic analysis, the study revealed that while some had a chance to spend more time with their families due to the pandemic, the participants struggled mentally, emotionally, and financially. To recover from these struggles, the study would like to highlight the participants' coping mechanism, adaptive resilience. Lastly, these participants could reflect on their experiences by refining resilience and coping strategies to move forward in their lives as individuals. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that future researchers use this study to explore innovative ways to support displaced workers and understand the intersection of economic changes with social factors.

Keywords: Breadwinners, Coping Mechanisms, COVID-19, Displaced Workers, Lived Experience

I. BACKGROUND, MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVE

Since the last labor recession in the Philippines in 1991 [1], the COVID-19 pandemic has displaced millions of Filipino workers due to lockdowns. Four years have passed since the pandemic-caused global recession of 2020, yet many temporarily laid-off employees expecting to be called back to work have become permanent and, hence, displaced [2]—[4].

Davao City, one of the major cities in the Philippines, has also been negatively affected by COVID-19, with 11,871 workers losing their jobs due to the pandemic in 2020. Furthermore, the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Region XI stated that at least 20,592 workers in the Davao Region lost their jobs as of 2021 since the economic situation forced the businesses to take measures to reduce losses in the second and third quarters of 2020, including not recruiting at all, especially in the services industry, and cutting back on hours and pay [5]. Thus, employment ties between companies and their furloughed employees have deteriorated as the pandemic has persisted. It takes far longer to connect jobless people with new employers than it does to return them to their prior positions. These variables imply that future job recovery may be gradual since the longer displaced workers and new labor market entrants remain jobless, the more likely they will lose skills and become less employable [6].

Previous studies on displaced workers during the pandemic only focused on its impacts on mental health, policies, re-employment, and strategies for survival. Most of these studies were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

^{1,3,4,5} Student, High School Department, Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines 8000

1cdgeralde@mcm.edu.ph, 3kkgalbo@mcm.edu.ph, 4ngaguirre@mcm.edu.ph, 5aeseriña@mcm.edu.ph

² Junior Teacher, High School Department, Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines 8000, jamnares@mcm.edu.ph/jbjam.nares@gmail.com

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However, there is a dearth of literature on understanding the experiences of displaced workers, particularly breadwinners, who are still job-displaced and are now recovering from the struggles of being displaced and their stories of resiliency. Describing these circumstances has become the researchers' impetus to delve into this topic.

The study's main objective is to delineate the participants' stories of resiliency and recovery due to being job-displaced. Furthermore, this study specifically aimed to answer these research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of displaced workers during the pandemic?
2. How do displaced workers cope with those challenges?
3. What insights have they gained in coping with those challenges?

II. STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION/METHODS

A. Statement of Contribution

JAN conceptualized the research topic, re-analyzed and validated the findings, and prepared the manuscript according to the publication format, with all the contributions from the co-authors. CDG, KGG, NGA, and AES carried out the entire study by writing the entire manuscript, interviewing the participants, and performing an initial qualitative data analysis.

B. Methods

The study utilized a phenomenological approach, as this necessitates the researcher's focus on people's experiences of a phenomenon to collect comprehensive details that serve as a foundation for reflective structural analysis, which reveals the essence of the experience [7], which the researchers hoped to provide in-depth narratives and accurate descriptions of the experiences of displaced individuals during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper used purposive sampling to select 10 participants who were previously displaced workers in Davao City, considering the following criteria: 20 years old or above, regular/tenured workers but displaced during the pandemic, and must be a breadwinner. The researchers contacted interviewees to gather data from the participants for permission to conduct face-to-face interviews, ensuring confidentiality and ethical practices were maintained throughout the process. In processing the gathered data, a 6-step framework thematic analysis [8] was used to analyze the transcribed interview data, identifying patterns and themes. Trustworthiness was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability considerations, emphasizing ethical practices to protect participant privacy, informed consent, and compliance with data privacy regulations and risk mitigation.

III. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings were obtained through analyzing the data collected from 10 interviews, of whom 70% were conducted with males. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic profiles.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Participant	Sex	Occupation
Participant 1	Male	Barber
Participant 2	Female	Call Center Agent
Participant 3	Male	Photo Editor
Participant 4	Female	Manager
Participant 5	Male	Teacher
Participant 6	Male	Sales Marketing
Participant 7	Male	Safety Officer
Participant 8	Male	Accountant
Participant 9	Female	Stall Keeper
Participant 10	Male	Driver

A. Lived Experiences of Displaced Workers

Presented in Table 2 are the themes that emerged for this paper's first objective: (1) economic adversity, (2) psychological distress, and (3) adaptation to the new normal.

Table 2. Lived Experiences of Displaced Workers

Themes	Core Ideas
Economic Adversity	Financial Struggles
	Unemployment Challenges
Psychological Distress	Frustrations due to job loss
	Stress and fear due to the inability to provide for the family

Table 2 shows that the displaced workers who are breadwinners of the family experienced challenges ranging from an economic perspective to personal adaptation. In this paper, economic adversity is the difficult and undesirable situation in which these breadwinners face financial challenges, setbacks, or hardships. The participants marked this theme by financial struggles and unemployment challenges. The following statements can attest to this: *We don't have any food; I'm really struggling because we don't have anything to eat. That's why I fished because I don't have money* (IDI-P1, Q1-1.1). *A particularly difficult moment during unemployment, I think, is the lack of work and lack of money* (IDI-P5, Q1-1.1)

For breadwinners, having work is necessary as they are the provider of the family. According to Picardo [9], unemployment affects everybody, reducing their income and purchasing power and displacing employees. This is supported by Aladsani's [10] research that underscores the pervasive financial difficulties among breadwinners, revealing their anxieties about income levels and financial management. This aligns with the broader trend observed during the pandemic, where less than half of those affected felt financially secure compared to pre-outbreak times, indicating a significant decline in financial resources and a compromised sense of economic stability [11]. The unemployment challenges faced by displaced workers are elucidated by Ampurado and Padillo [12], who found a substantial link between prior work experience and the multifaceted impacts of unemployment on mental, emotional, physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual well-being. Moreover, Brand et al. [13] emphasized the extensive economic costs associated with displacement, encompassing unemployment, income reduction, degraded work quality, loss of benefits, and pension disruption, contributing to wider consequences such as declining mental health, diminished self-acceptance, and societal challenges.

Another significant experience that needs to be addressed is their psychological distress. This experience can allude to these statements: *During the pandemic, an example of a difficult moment for me, "I think, was not being able to provide enough for my family, you know? Since my business does not have many sales, I'm really struggling to provide for my family"* (IDI-P6, Q1-1.1). Also, *"it is difficult for me because I am not used to being unemployed. Since college, I have been a working student"* (IDI-P8, Q1-1.1). The frustration stemming from job loss was evident, with studies by Hiswals et al. [14] revealing that participants perceived work as integral to their sense of belonging, and financial hardships resulting from unemployment led to a decline in self-worth, feelings of loneliness, and overall psychological distress impacting physical health. Prolonged unemployment exacerbated negative emotions, emphasizing the importance of extracurricular activities and social connections as coping mechanisms. Arena et al. [15] further emphasized the challenges of implementing coping strategies during unemployment due to issues such as fatigue and low motivation, hindering participants' ability to engage in activities that could alleviate their mental health struggles. The stress and fear of being unable to provide for the family were exacerbated during the pandemic, especially for displaced breadwinners. Garcia et al. [16] highlighted the emotional toll of unemployment during the COVID-19 epidemic, with individuals expressing sadness and anxiety, particularly challenging for those responsible for their families' financial well-being. Additionally, Nene et al. [17] emphasized that the pandemic heightened mental health issues for earners who grappled with increased stress, social pressures, and work-family conflicts while relying on crucial social support for their well-being.

The personal accounts of the participants highlight the importance of employment for these individuals, not only as a source of finances but also as a vital piece of their identity and feeling of purpose. The economic issues of displaced breadwinners, as shown by remarks reflecting financial hardships and unemployment challenges, are consistent with broader research emphasizing the group's prevalent financial difficulties. The multiple effects of unemployment on numerous dimensions of well-being, including mental, emotional, physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual components, highlight the complexities of these persons' circumstances. Furthermore, the psychological pain caused by job loss is evident, with a loss of self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and overall misery affecting physical health.

B. Coping Mechanism of Displaced Workers

For the second research question concerning the coping mechanisms of the participants, adaptive resilience emerged as the collective coping mechanism of the participants.

Table 3. Coping Mechanisms of the Displaced Workers

Themes	Core Ideas
Adaptive Resilience	Financial Coping Strategies and Planning
	Job Searching Strategies
	Technological Adaptation
	Health and Safety Consciousness
	Coping through Faith and Calmness

In the context of this study, adaptive resilience encompasses the multifaceted strategies displaced workers employ, including financial prudence, entrepreneurial efforts, effective job searching, technological adaptation, and a focus on health and safety. Some of the given statements illustrate how the participants cope with their experience: "When I really didn't have any money, I approached my colleagues and neighbors asking for any job just to earn money somehow. And the jobs they gave me helped a lot to reduce my burden. When I calmed down a bit, I saw more strategies that could be done." (IDI-P1, Q2-1.1). "Well, I lived together while looking for a job, so I accepted opportunities to earn money to reduce my problems, even if it was just a little bit" (IDI-P9, Q2.2).

Displaced workers, particularly breadwinners, have exemplified adaptive resilience in navigating economic adversity through diverse coping strategies—an integral facet of their resilience lies in financial coping methods and planning. Nene et al. [17] underscore the unwavering belief among breadwinners in the accessibility and adequacy of social aid, drawing support from friends, family, and coworkers. Adding intricacy to financial planning, Garrison et al. [18] identify variations in savings utilization tied to factors such as employment status and income during the pandemic. Notwithstanding the challenges, the adept navigation of financial resources emerges as a pivotal element within the spectrum of adaptive resilience.

Concurrently, job-seeking strategies constitute another vital dimension of the adaptive resilience displayed by displaced workers. Lens et al. [19] documented a spectrum of behaviors seeking support from non-governmental organizations, indicating a nuanced and multifaceted approach to assistance. Gillum et al. [20] illuminate the internet's transformative role in job searches, portraying technological adaptation as a cost-effective and expansive outreach tool. Furthermore, as Wolfers et al. [21] highlighted, technological adaptation extends beyond job searches, including seeking emotional support through social media. The internet's multifaceted role in modernizing job searches, reducing costs, and amplifying exposure aligns seamlessly with the overarching theme of adaptive resilience, showcasing the capacity to leverage technology for diverse needs.

The augmented awareness of health and safety concerns among displaced workers during the pandemic underscores another dimension of adaptive resilience. Pu et al. [22] asserted that the heightened awareness of health issues motivates individuals to formulate well-being-focused life goals and participate in home-based exercise. Moreover, Aksoy et al. [23] emphasized shifts in dietary habits and increased attention to health-related concerns as indicative of a proactive response to personal well-being amid adversity. This heightened health consciousness becomes an intrinsic part of the adaptive resilience repertoire, reflecting a proactive and holistic approach to well-being during challenging times.

Lastly, incorporating faith and calmness emerges as a potent component within the framework of adaptive resilience. Garcia et al. [16] underscored the self-motivation among jobless individuals, driven by the desire to provide for their families and explore new opportunities. Quirrez et al. [24] highlighted the behavioral capabilities of displaced workers to confront challenges calmly and manage issues efficiently by focusing on solutions. This spiritual and psychological dimension complements the multifaceted adaptive resilience displayed by displaced workers during the pandemic, forming a cohesive and comprehensive response to economic adversity.

The findings highlight the multifaceted character of adaptive resilience among displaced workers, particularly breadwinners, in the face of economic adversity during the epidemic. The findings show that financial coping strategies and planning are critical, with individuals exhibiting resourcefulness in exploring career possibilities and harnessing social assistance from their networks. The nuanced use of savings, influenced by factors such as employment status and income, complicates the financial dimension of adaptive resilience. Furthermore, the study underlines the necessity of various job-seeking tactics, including non-governmental organization help and technology for effective searches and emotional support. The increased awareness of health and safety issues indicates a proactive approach to well-being that includes lifestyle adjustments and a focus on health-related goals.

C. Insights Gained during the Coping Stage

As for the insights gained by the participants during their displacement, they highlighted the importance of (1) refining resilience and coping strategies, (2) practicing financial management and planning, and (3) managing their well-being through self-care.

Table 4. Insights Gained during their Coping Stage

Themes	Core Ideas
Refining Resilience and Coping Strategies	Family as Primary Motivation
	Faith as a Source of Strength
	Work as a Blessing and Hard Work
	Adapting to Change and Learning from Experiences
Practicing Financial Management and	Financial Preparedness and Planning

Planning	Entrepreneurial Opportunities and Business Ventures
Managing Well-being through Self-Care	Importance of Following Safety Protocols
	Health and Well-being Focus
	Reflections on Overworking and Health Impact
	Self-Sufficiency and Resourcefulness
	Constraints on Alternative Income

In the intricate landscape of economic adversity during the pandemic, displaced workers, particularly breadwinners, exhibit a profound capacity for refining their resiliency, practicing their finances, and managing themselves. This is illustrated in the following statements: "*Loving my family, especially during the pandemic. So, I just found that keeping in touch with my family increases our closeness, so that's my motivation*" (ID1-P4, Q3-1). "*I always think of my family as motivation, and even then, whether I do it at work or anywhere, my motivation is really family because my family was the reason why I worked hard every time*" (ID1-P5, Q3-1). The family emerges as a paramount motivator, providing a foundational support system that shapes the perspectives and actions of individuals navigating financial challenges [17], [25].

Likewise, faith is a wellspring of strength, offering peace and stability in tumultuous times and aiding in managing personal and societal needs [27], [28]. Work, viewed as both a blessing and the outcome of hard work, assumes a critical role in coping strategies, with individuals finding resilience through meaningful employment that aligns with personal values and identity [28], [14]. Moreover, the adaptive capacity to embrace change and glean lessons from experiences emerges as a key coping mechanism, reflecting active modifications in adaptability and the reliance on internal coping mechanisms, which collectively contribute to navigating the complexities of job displacement during the pandemic [29], [30].

The participants also exhibited another nuanced approach to coping, centered on financial management and planning. This is also demonstrated in the participant's sentiment, "*My strategy was to save money and that if there's a chance to invest in something, invest on knowledge or invest on something I can earn even in small amounts. That was the opportunity that I am preparing for*" (ID1-P3, Q2-1). The insights gleaned from their experiences underscored the pivotal role of financial preparedness, emphasizing the importance of informed decision-making and strategic planning to enhance overall economic resilience [31]. Surprisingly, the correlation between better financial preparedness and reduced engagement in social distancing, as found by Warmath et al. [32], illuminated the intricate interplay between economic stability and societal behaviors during crises. Moreover, the coping stages revealed a proclivity for entrepreneurial opportunities and business ventures among displaced workers, as evidenced by leveraging social media for marketing and exploring online retailing of essential goods [33].

Lastly, throughout their challenges, the participants provided another reflection: they learned to regulate or manage their well-being through self-care, as revealed in this statement: "*When I had too many problems, my body was a bit affected because I had many illnesses in the first place. Maybe I should have been more careful when I worked hard*" (ID1-P9, Q3-2). Also, "*I'm training myself to wear a facemask and face shield, which is also included. Just follow the health protocols to avoid the virus and then, in the meantime, avoid getting penalized*" (ID1-P8, Q3-2). One aspect of this, adhering to safety protocols, emerged as a pivotal strategy, ensuring a secure environment and maintaining resilience amid unprecedented disruptions, echoing findings from studies in diverse contexts [34], [35]. Prioritizing health and well-being, especially for historically marginalized groups, became paramount, focusing on diverse coping mechanisms and mental health support reflecting the unique challenges posed by the pandemic [36], [37]. Insights into reflections on overworking underscored the intricate relationship between work hours and well-being, necessitating interventions to address the negative impact of prolonged working hours on mental health [38], [39]. Additionally, self-sufficiency and resourcefulness emerged as critical traits, allowing individuals to navigate financial stress through diverse coping techniques, though challenges persisted due to constraints on alternative income sources [40]–[42].

The interplay between financial preparedness, sociocultural behaviors, and displaced workers' predisposition for entrepreneurial chances underscores the necessity for adaptable tactics in response to economic crises. Furthermore, the participants' views on self-care highlight the need to follow safety protocols, prioritize health, and address the complex relationship between work hours and well-being. These results illuminate the importance of holistic resilience approaches, including familial, spiritual, professional, financial, and health dimensions, as people navigate the complexity of job displacement during a crisis.

D. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the participants shared stories of similar experiences, particularly challenges such as economic adversity and psychological distress. Moreover, they proved resilient by employing several coping mechanisms, categorized into one major mechanism, adaptive resilience, to curb those challenges. Finally, after giving thorough reflections on their experiences and how they coped with them, they have been recovering by refining their resiliency skills, practicing their financial management, and managing their well-being through self-care.

Describing and understanding the stories of resiliency and recovery of displaced workers, particularly breadwinners, are crucial since they reflect individuals' unique experiences concerning economic adversity and significantly contribute to the academic community. Through these accounts, researchers glimpse the diverse approaches displaced breadwinners utilize in coping with and recovering from job displacement at difficult times such as the COVID-19 epidemic. Besides, these personal narratives contain an abundance of qualitative evidence that can shed light on the complex interplay of aspects such as family relationships, faith, work motivation, financial management, and self-care routines. The discussion of these stories improves the academic conversation on resilience and recovery and has practical consequences for lawmakers, social workers, and organizations aiming to assist persons facing similar circumstances. Recognizing the various coping mechanisms used during the recovery phase benefits the academic community by providing an in-depth knowledge of the human experience in the face of economic adversity, fostering more effective and empathetic approaches to mitigating the impact of job loss on individuals and communities.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Christian Dave S. Geralde, an Accountancy, Business, and Management student, has continually worked for academic and personal improvement, from his formative years at Agro-Industrial Foundation Colleges of the Philippines Inc. during elementary and junior high school to life-changing encounters at Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao during Senior High School. Although he has not yet contributed to academic publications, he is eager to do so in the future. From developing experiments to evaluating data that advance the field's understanding, he has actively participated in organizing and supervising the many areas of the research work. As for publication, this work is his first engagement in the scientific community. He currently holds active memberships in two organizations that share his passion for learning and the arts. His accomplishments include taking first place in an extemporaneous speaking competition in 2019, being known as Mr. Lakan in 2023, maintaining consistent honor throughout his academic career, and graduating with the highest distinction in 2020-2021 due to his commitment to excellence and relevance. A dedication toward excellence has molded Christian Dave Sinining Geralde throughout the years.



John Albert M. Nares is a Licensed Professional Teacher with eight years of teaching experience specializing in Academic Writing for Senior High School students, including English for Academic and Professional Purposes and Research courses. He finished his Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English at the University of Southeastern Philippines. He is pursuing his graduate studies, taking a Master of English in Applied Linguistics at the same university. Last March 2022, he published a paper entitled, (De)Constructing Myths in Editorial Cartoons: The Case of Philippine Elections, in the *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. He is also a member of the prestigious linguistics organization in the Philippines, the Linguistic Society of the Philippines. Currently, he is teaching at the Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, where he consistently empowers students to excel in critical thinking, effective communication, and independent research, shaping them into proficient academic writers. Lastly, his interests in Applied Linguistics extend to the realms of Language Education, Philippine English, Academic Writing, and Corpus Linguistics. Beyond the classroom, he advocates for promoting literacy and communication skills, significantly impacting the educational community.



Khalil Gabriel Y. Galbo was a consistent honor student from first grade until Senior High School. He strives to do his best in each task he has been given and finds the most efficient way to complete it. He studied at Davao Christian High School during his Elementary and Junior High years and took Senior High in Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, specifically Accountancy, Business, and Management. This paper is his first work presented and published in an international

conference. He has contributed to the research work in many significant ways, from collecting and analyzing data and connecting theories and related literature to participant responses. He is confident in writing essays due to his experience writing journal articles for his old school paper and participating in competitions such as the Division Schools Press Conference and the Regional Schools Press Conference. He has graduated lately with high honors during his 11th Grade Recognition, a testament to his commitment to excellence and relevance.



Noreen Grace M. Aguirre takes immense pride in her accomplishments. She graduated as the Class Salutatorian in elementary from St. Therese of Lisieux Montessori School. She continued to excel academically with consistent honors while studying at Assumption College of Nabunturan during junior high school. She is pursuing her education as a Grade 12 student in the Accountancy Business and Management program at Mapua Malayan Colleges of Mindanao. This paper is her first research engagement, specifically in an international conference. While she does not actively participate in membership activities, she did take part in organizing feeding programs for underprivileged children in rural areas during her junior year through her club involvement. Ashliah's journey is a testament to her unwavering commitment to self-improvement and her determination to inspire others. Her dedication to being the best version of herself serves as a motivating force, driving her to achieve greater heights. Ashliah Elieza Amodia Serifa is a young individual with a bright future ahead, poised to make meaningful contributions to her chosen path and inspire those around her.



Ashliah Elieza A. Serifa is a motivated and accomplished individual with a strong track record of academic success. Her educational journey began at St. Paul College of Davao, where she established a solid foundation for their future endeavors. Noreen consistently earned good grades throughout her time there, demonstrating a deep commitment to her studies. In High School, Noreen continued studying at St. Paul College of Davao and Mapua Malayan Colleges Mindanao, where she continued to thrive academically and in other extracurricular activities outside the school. She has not contributed to academic publications yet, but this opportunity to publish made her enthusiastic about the prospect of doing so. Her unwavering passion for learning and determination to achieve her goals have driven Noreen's impressive academic journey. She is eager to continue their pursuit of knowledge and make a meaningful impact on the world.