

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Displaced Library Workers During the Pandemic Using the Chime Framework

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ABSTRACT

Background. The education sector experienced unparalleled disruptions on a global scale as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. In the Philippines, schools and universities closed in March 2020, leading to a sudden shift to virtual learning, employee displacement, and mass layoffs. Library workers were not spared. Compared to most foreign literature discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of library workers, the topic is unexplored in the Philippines.

Objectives. This paper explored the experiences of displaced library workers in the Philippines using the CHIME framework to gain insights into how the pandemic affected their relationships with family and colleagues, their hope and optimism for the future, their perception of themselves, the meaning of library work to them, and their sense of workplace empowerment.

Methods. This paper adopted a qualitative approach. Snowball sampling was used to identify potential respondents. The researchers conducted a semi-structured interview via Zoom.

Results. It was evident from the interviews that the pandemic affected the psychosocial well-being of the respondents. Faith and family relationships played vital roles in helping the respondents navigate and survive the pandemic's challenges. Workplace injustices and institutional failures such as decreased pay, abandonment, a lack of empathy and micromanagement were the factors that affected how the respondents saw their future, the purpose of library work, and their sense of control over their personal and professional lives.

Contributions. The results of this study provided baseline data on the effects of the pandemic on the psychosocial aspects of library workers in the Philippines. It also added to the limited local literature on the topic.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the job market in the Philippines. According to a survey by the lobbying and campaigns management firm Publicus Asia, released in April 2020, at least one member of every Filipino household lost their job. This translated to a record high of over 7.3 million jobless Filipinos at the onset of the pandemic (Teo, 2020). Studies by

the Asian Development Bank and the International Labor Organization in 2021 showed that those most vulnerable to job loss were in the service industry, arts, and entertainment (Lazo & Rodriguez, 2020). However, it is significant to note that job displacement due to COVID-19 was not exclusive to these industries.

The education sector had its fair share of unemployment casualties. With the closure of 425 private schools, came the displacement of workers (Mateo, 2022). In the United States, thousands of school districts lost hundreds of full-time school librarians. This is a five percent (5%) drop from before the pandemic (Tomko & Pendharkar, 2023). Data has yet to be gathered in the Philippines.

Job displacement causes resource loss and negative psychological problems, such as, declines in subjective well-being, and depression (Bilal et al., 2022). It impacts individuals differently. Several studies have pointed to the lasting psychological impact of job displacement on an individual. The duration of the psychological effects of job displacement varies depending on the individual's circumstances and coping mechanisms (Navarro-Abal, Climent-Rodríguez, López-López, & Gómez-Salgado, 2018). Displaced workers may experience a decline in their sense of purpose, identity, and social interactions, which can lead to feeling of loneliness and isolation (Marie, 2021).

Many workers worldwide, librarians included, had to settle for alternative jobs. Others were laid off and forced to substitute emergency occupations for which they were unprepared or unqualified (Jensen, 2020). Philippine libraries were crucial in delivering information services amidst the COVID-19 health crisis. Filipino academic librarians adapted to the changing demands of their communities as quickly as any other industry by transitioning to the virtual realm (Fresnido & Esposito-Betan, 2022). Philippine libraries transformed in response to the pandemic. They offered both physical and digital resources, with the National Library focusing on cultural heritage and online access (Public Libraries Services—National Library of the Philippines, n.d.). Higher education institutions like St. Scholastica's College established online borrowing and educational resources (Narca, 2021). Librarians led information literacy initiatives to empower users to evaluate online content critically. Community engagement through workshops and resources further strengthened media literacy and combated the "infodemic" of false information (Santos, 2022).

Several studies adequately discussed the impact of the pandemic on library workers from various parts of the world. However, to date, there has been little work done on the experiences of librarians in the Philippines, particularly on the well-being of workers who lost their library jobs. To address this research gap, we gathered baseline data on the experiences of displaced library workers in the Philippines during the pandemic.

While the findings may not represent the experiences of all displaced library workers, they provide insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their relationships with family and colleagues, their hope and optimism for the future, their perception of themselves, the meaning of library work to them, and their sense of workplace empowerment. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of further investigation of the topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The pandemic underscored the need for systemic reform as librarians, staff, students, and community members faced personal losses and problems that flexible and empathetic policies and procedures should have structurally helped to handle. For most libraries, this implies a strategy for implementing remote work and a re-evaluation of where employment resources

and services are focused. Genuine care in libraries necessitates considering the community's needs, including those of library workers (McLay & Eva, 2022a).

The review of related literature examined how job loss during the pandemic affected the mental and social well-being of library workers. The themes that arose were categorized based on the CHIME framework's five factors: **connectedness, hope and optimism, identity, meaning, and empowerment**. According to the framework, these are essential factors to one's overall well-being, regardless of age or background (Recovery College, 2022). The review revealed that the pandemic-induced job loss negatively impacted these psycho-social factors.

Connectedness

Connectedness pertains to relationships with peers, social groups, and the community (Leamy, Bird, Boutillier, Williams, & Slade, 2011). Nunis (2023) reported that several library staff felt isolated from their patrons and colleagues due to working remotely. In recording the experiences of United Kingdom public library staff during the pandemic, Robinson, Ruthben, and McMenemy (2022) stated that several library staff felt frustrated that they could not properly communicate with and engage their patrons, due to a lack of knowledge of older library patrons on how to use social media which helped people stay connected at the height of COVID-19.

As its leading support network, library workers relied heavily on their organizations for guidance and clarity. A study on the care and meaning of work in academic libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic found that positive work experiences were associated with flexibility, reliable infrastructure, and practices that prioritized the safety of workers. However, adverse experiences were associated with a lack of institutional support, a loss of clear delineation between working from home and being at home, and even ambiguous assignments (McLay & Eva, 2022a).

A supportive administration was also critical to an effective work experience during COVID-19 regarding infrastructure and communication (Al-Habaibeh, Watkins, Waried, & Javareshk, 2021). Furthermore, it is essential for librarians and staff to maintain strong connections during major crises to prevent miscommunication and feelings of disconnection. The lack of connection led to relationships breaking down and some library workers giving in to the extreme stress and urgency they felt (McLay & Eva, 2022b). Findings from a study on library crisis communication, showed that a lack of open communication can breed mistrust, support this claim (O'Neill & Kelley, 2021). The pandemic ignited a cultural shift in academic libraries, permitting long-overdue changes. While many professionals yearned for the simplicity of the pre-pandemic work setup and were concerned about their future, they were also eager to have a better working environment (Todorinova, 2021).

Another critical factor in connectedness is social support from family. According to a study by Gayatri and Puspitasari (2023), during the pandemic, many families experienced financial struggles, job loss, and mental health issues. Early efforts to contain the virus, such as social withdrawal and quarantine, impacted family dynamics. To ensure family well-being during this time, it was crucial to prioritize communication, handle conflicts, and spend quality time together.

Hope and Optimism for the Future

Hope is the belief that things can improve over time (Recovery College, 2020). Nunis (2023) revealed that the sudden and forced change in user demands and library processes made library workers uncertain about the future. Robinson, Ruthben, and McMenemy (2022) stated that

many of their respondents were challenged to stay motivated during COVID-19 due to worries about safety in the workplace, concerns not being taken seriously, and uncertainty about the future. Prioritizing mental health is crucial, given that individuals who endured prolonged separation from their family, friends, and colleagues may experience heightened anxiety upon returning to everyday life (Chrastka, 2021). In a field where mental illness was prevalent at high rate, the additional demands placed on libraries during the pandemic led to burnout among librarians (Breunig, 2022).

Identity as a Library Worker

Identity encompasses rebuilding or redefining a positive identity and overcoming stigma (Leamy, Bird, Boutillier, Williams, & Slade, 2011). It was found that librarians faced a significant threat of layoffs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of seniority was found to be the leading cause of these layoffs, disproportionately affecting equity-deserving groups (McLay & Eva, 2022a). Libraries across the U.S. and Canada were laying off staff or pushing them into emergency roles, raising concerns about worker safety and job security. Public libraries are particularly vulnerable due to budget cuts and funding uncertainties exacerbated by the pandemic (Jensen, 2020). Libraries and their staff are traditionally seen as providers of valuable learning resources and services. During the pandemic, however, library workers assumed varying roles, such as, advocates for mental health (Chenevey, n.d.) and providers of basic health information about COVID-19 (Hamad & Fakhouri, 2022).

Meaning of Library Work

During the COVID-19 pandemic, librarians across the United States of America were redeployed to assist with various community needs. In Multnomah County, Oregon, library workers staffed emergency shelters, provided communication support, and reached out to isolated residents. In Spokane, Washington, librarians operated a helpline to guide residents and businesses in accessing economic assistance programs. In New Brunswick, Canada, some librarians aided the Red Cross in implementing emergency income benefits. Additionally, in Framingham, Massachusetts, school librarians and other city workers conducted wellness checks on older residents via phone calls (Ford, 2020). In San Francisco, library staff were deployed as disaster service workers. While these responsibilities fell outside the bounds of traditional library tasks, they helped library workers reflect on the capacity of libraries to change their communities for the better (Jardine, 2021).

The pandemic exacerbated issues with the morale and welfare of academic librarians, with many librarians reporting adverse effects on their overall well-being due to stress, a lack of support, and external factors (Glusker, Emmelhainz, Estrada, & Dyess, 2022). Other librarians considered remote work to be disruptive, while others found it productive (Galanti, Guidetti, Mazzei, Zappalà, & Toscano, 2021). Throughout the global pandemic, library professionals worldwide showcased remarkable dedication by offering a diverse range of services, including digital, virtual, online, and curbside assistance (Ayeni, Agbaje, & Tippler, 2021). While these services were already established before the pandemic, the unprecedented surge in demand for library services, such as book borrowing, during the peak of the global crisis underscored the vital role libraries play in providing essential support to their communities (Wilburn, 2020). Arguably, a solely digital library may not align with our nation's future demands once the pandemic subsides (Chrastka, 2021). Thus, it is important to continue supporting and looking after library employees as we move forward into the new normal (Adetayo, 2023).

Empowerment in the Workplace

Empowerment is people's sense of control over their lives (Leamy, Bird, Boutillier, Williams, & Slade, 2011). Workplace empowerment means giving employees control over decision-making, finances, time, and access to information. It enables quick, informed decisions (Huq, 2017) and enhances employee influence by providing access to resources and information (Wójcik, 2017). Breunig (2022) briefly discussed the impact of the increasing and rapidly changing user demands on library workers in Milwaukee during the pandemic. Librarians were treated like frontline workers without being labeled as such. They were expected to be at work a month after everything shut down in 2020 and were forced to work in an unsafe environment where patrons refused to wear masks. Because of this, the workers felt that the administrators did not care about their needs, and morale was low.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHIME framework in Figure 1, is a recovery framework with five factors namely, connectedness, hope and optimism, identity, meaning, and empowerment. While rarely used in LIS, the researchers consider it useful to develop an understanding of the psychosocial effects of job loss during the pandemic on library workers. The five CHIME factors are considered core necessities, regardless of age and background. These factors served as themes from which the researchers derived patterns and meanings that formed the narrative about the lived experiences of displaced library workers in the Philippines during the pandemic.

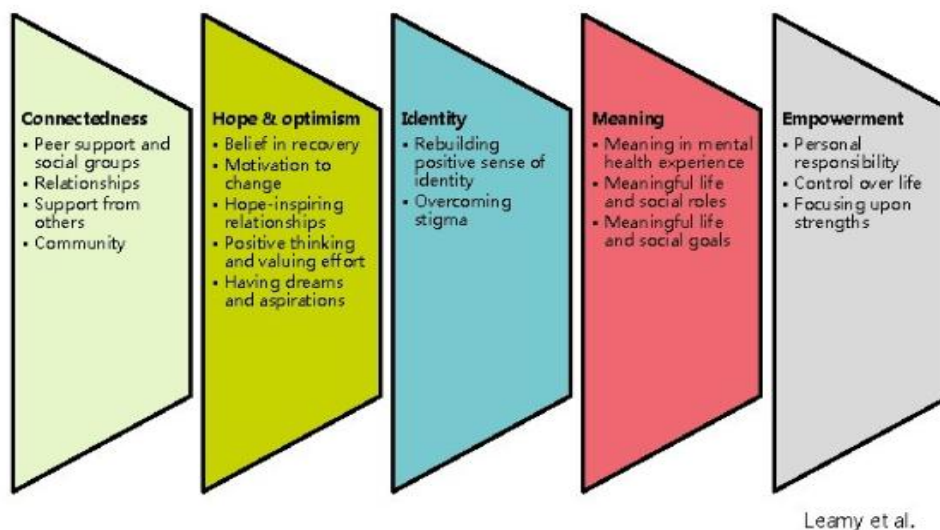


Figure 1. CHIME framework for personal recovery

METHOD

This paper adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of displaced library workers in the Philippines during the pandemic. According to the Human Research Protection Program of the Oregon State University (2010) and Simkus (2023), snowball sampling is ideal for hard-to-reach/hidden populations and/or sensitive topics. Due to the limited number of willing participants and the sensitive nature of the topic, the researchers therefore chose snowball sampling. Job loss is a sensitive matter. Brillantes (n.d.) demonstrated that it affects

mental health, including producing trauma, depression, and suicides. Additionally, Lee (1993) defined sensitive research as being substantially threatening to those involved.

The first respondent was identified with the help of a fellow librarian who worked at the same university as the researchers. He recommended that one of his staff, who gave her consent, participate in the study. The first respondent referred the researchers to colleagues who experienced job losses due to the pandemic. A semi-structured online interview and a thematic data analysis using a deductive approach allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the respondents' personal experiences. Thematic analysis was beneficial as it allowed the researchers to categorize large amounts of data and look for patterns of meaning that addressed the research questions. The researchers used a deductive approach because a set of themes (CHIME) was already expected in the resulting data.

Population and Sample

Library workers who were displaced during the pandemic were the target respondents of the study. The researchers first identified potential subjects at the institution to which they currently belong and then applied snowball sampling. Five librarians agreed to participate in the study. The researchers reasoned that this sample was sufficient, as the goal was to gather baseline data about the impact of the pandemic on the psychosocial aspects of displaced library workers.

This study involved five participants, all working librarians, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were either laid off, forced to resign, or simply decided to leave their jobs for various reasons. The participants' age ranged from 25 to 35 years old. The participants are identified in the study under pseudonyms. They are:

- *Tadhana* is a young man in his mid-twenties. He is independent and goal-oriented. During the pandemic, he worked in two libraries: a private school in Manila and a state college in Occidental Mindoro.
- *Ligaya* is a school librarian at a private school in Caloocan, where she has been working for nine years. During the pandemic, their school administration closed the library, viewing it as non-essential, and moved the library staff to the Student Records Department.
- *Mutya* is a cheerful, soft-spoken young woman in her twenties. She was a teacher-librarian at a private school in Quezon City at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mutya was assigned a different responsibility at school during the pandemic, outside her job description. Amid the pandemic, she was compelled to leave her job.
- *Soledad* is a K-drama-loving introvert who worked as a librarian at a private university in Nueva Ecija, where she was up for regularization. When the pandemic hit, Soledad was told that her services were no longer needed. She is now working at a state university in Quezon City.
- *Hiraya* worked as a librarian in a government-run library hub in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro. She was pregnant with her second child during the early months of the pandemic. After giving birth, she decided to quit her job, citing family problems as the main reason. She is now employed at a state university in Quezon City.

Research Instrument

The study employed semi-structured online interviews to collect pertinent data. The researchers organized the questions into five themes guided by the CHIME framework, focusing on the experiences of displaced library workers (see Appendix B). To ensure respondents were fully informed about their participation, a consent form, adapted from the

Nanyang Technological University website, was provided (see Appendix A)

FINDINGS

The pandemic significantly impacted the personal and professional lives of the respondents. Overall, the pandemic highlighted the importance of social support, resilience, and adaptability for library workers. While they faced challenges and uncertainties, they also found ways to connect with others, grow personally and professionally, and gain a renewed sense of purpose in their work.

The findings of this study are organized according to the recurring themes—*connectedness, hope and optimism, identity, meaning, and empowerment* in the CHIME framework. While all five domains were apparent in the responses, some were more nuanced than others. The responses are presented and patterned after the guide questions in Appendix B developed by the authors, which aimed to cover all five domains. It was, however, noticeable in the course of the interview that there was a tendency for the responses to overlap, which was anticipated given the relationship of the questions to one another. For instance, connectedness was often related to hope, while identity was often related to empowerment. The goal was to surface themes that were common during the interviews. As such, the researchers endeavored to present all responses as best as possible.

For clarity, the findings, as presented below, are numbered 1 to 5 and the sub-themes of a main theme are numbered alphabetically. For example, **connectedness**, the first theme of CHIME framework is numbered as 1 and its 3 sub-themes of are numbered as *1(a) Social Relationship, 1(b) Social support from family and 1(c) Peer support*.

1. Connectedness

Connectedness is widely recognized as a vital component of human well-being, contributing to positive mental and physical health and social and emotional adjustment (Thayer & Anderson, 2023). Essential themes in this domain, which surfaced during the interviews, include ***social relationships with family and peers***.

1(a) Social relationships

The respondents showed a level of similarity in terms of their connectedness. Social support, an essential factor of the connectedness construct, was apparent in the experiences of the respondents. Strengthened family bonds as a result of spending more time together at home during the lockdown and constant communication with friends and colleagues are essential themes in this domain.

1(b) Social support from family

During the COVID-19 pandemic, families became more central to respondents' lives. The challenges of the pandemic, such as social isolation, job loss, and illness, made people more reliant on their families for support and companionship. Many families spent more time together at home due to school and workplace closures, which allowed them to deepen their relationships and create new memories.

In March 2020, when the government declared the lockdown, Tadhana's parents suggested that he leave his job and return to their province of Mindoro. Tadhana was among many who chose to stick with their jobs, fearing unemployment.

“When the Philippine government announced that there would be a lockdown, my parents told me to quit my job. I just brushed it off because it was my first job and I needed the money.”

Despite living away from his family, Tadhana remained connected with his folks. His parents frequently called to check on him, as he was diagnosed with several autoimmune diseases. Tadhana also acknowledged that it was the support of his family and friends that kept him going.

“My family and friends helped me feel more at ease during the pandemic. I talked to them often, and it felt like I could not go a day without speaking to someone I loved.”

In 2021, Tadhana finally heeded his father's advice and went back to the province. He bonded with his family and enjoyed a new lease of life.

Ligaya felt her ties with her family grow stronger. Spending time with them made her reconnect and grow closer to her folks.

“I went home to Bulacan to be with my family during the pandemic. My family supported and took care of me when I contracted COVID-19. We grew closer because of that.”

Many people experienced greater workloads and increased burnout and stress during the pandemic. Mutya's case, however, was not only a simple case of burnout.

“There came a point when work just became dragging. The night before I quit my job, I could not sleep because I worried about being jobless during the pandemic. The following morning, my mom found me in tears when she opened my bedroom door. I could tell she was heartbroken when I confided in her about my problems at work and about my thoughts of ending my life.”

Soledad grew closer to her family during the lockdown. She added:

“My family has become closer because of the pandemic. Before the pandemic, we only spent time together on long weekends when my siblings were around. Because of the pandemic, we got to spend more time together.”

For Hiraya, being pregnant and raising a young family all at the same time meant being strong, by drawing strength for her children was her only option.

“As a mother, I knew I could not give up. My two young children needed me to be strong, so, I kept going and hoped things would eventually improve.”

While she was uncomfortable working from home, she eventually realized the significant positive change it brought to their family.

“One of the upsides of staying at home is that I got to spend more time with my child. I'm not sure if my husband was there all the time, but he was around. As a result, we all bonded closer as a family. Everyday activities, such as preparing food, became opportunities for us to connect.”

1(c) Peer support

A significant aspect for the respondents was the constant presence of colleagues and friends, even though they were physically distant. This suggests that proximity is not the only factor determining the importance of social support. Even when colleagues and friends

are not physically present, their presence can provide a sense of comfort, security, and belonging. This can be especially important for people facing challenges or transitions.

The pandemic strengthened Tadhana's bonds with his friends and colleagues. He revealed that they frequently called each other to check their health. His friends repeatedly reminded him that he could rely on them for help because they knew he lived alone.

“Just having them there helped me get through the day. They would keep me company and talk to me, even when we were all preoccupied. Knowing they were just a call or message away made the situation bearable.”

Ligaya's relationship with her co-workers also changed. They discovered similar challenges during the pandemic and eased one another's burden by communicating their feelings.

“My colleagues and I bonded over our shared experiences during the pandemic. We were all worried about our salary cuts, but we supported each other and hoped our employer would keep their promise to reinstate our original salary.”

While going through hard times, Mutya needed to be strong for her younger colleagues. In a way, they became each other's support system at work. She continued to share:

“I had suicidal tendencies before the pandemic, so I did not expect to survive 2020 without thinking about suicide again. The pandemic greatly impacted me because my two colleagues were from a younger batch at [name of Alma Mater], so I had to be strong [for them] at the time. Every day, we would stay behind after office hours to discuss our concerns.”

Soledad and Hiraya shared that they connected well with their colleagues during the pandemic but agreed that interaction has since become limited.

2. Hope and optimism for the future

Feeling powerless during the pandemic is a prevailing theme in this domain. The respondents primarily lacked autonomy over several aspects of their lives. Despite the odds, however, some developed simple coping mechanisms to deal with the stressful times, while others set clear goals for themselves in the aftermath of the pandemic. Thus, essential themes in this domain include a *sense of control and autonomy, goal-setting, and coping strategies*.

2(a) Sense of control and autonomy

The respondents felt overwhelmed and powerless in the face of the pandemic. They reported losing autonomy over their work, personal lives, and futures. They found it challenging to plan for the future as they focused on surviving each day. They also worried deeply about their job security and their financial well-being. The respondents' cases demonstrated a lack of agency in all aspects of their lives, from their workload and salary to their family relationships. This experience has had a lasting impact on their disposition as library workers.

Tadhana recalled feeling dejected as his academic and professional aspirations had to be put on hold due to the pandemic.

“The pandemic reset everything. I lost sight of my goals. I found it challenging to plan for the future as I was focused on getting through each day.”

Despite being a tenured employee, Tadhana received low pay. When asked why that was the case, he shared:

“There was no other choice but to cut the budget for our salary. The school said this was done to avoid laying off more employees.”

Mutya was devastated when her administration abruptly removed her teaching load and reassigned her to tasks outside her job description.

“Teaching is what I love most about being a school librarian. However, the last-in, first-out policy was implemented for teachers and staff when the pandemic hit. What bothered me the most was that we were only allowed to work three days a week, so our pay was cut accordingly. To make matters worse, they removed our IL classes, saying that Guidance [referring to guidance counselors] could handle it.”

She also endured micro-management when compelled to work overtime despite the stringent curfew hours imposed during the pandemic.

“Our supervisor would force us to work overtime, even though it was against the protocol. It just felt demoralizing to the point that I felt lost and unhappy.”

Mutya grew increasingly frustrated with what was happening at her job.

“During the strict lockdown, my boss sent me to the office to retrieve a book invoice, even though I lived far away from the school. I thought it was inconsiderate of her to demand that I report onsite because we could have faced severe consequences if we had been caught.”

She continued to share how uncertain she felt about her future:

“I felt utterly hopeless and unable to envision my future. Back then, my co-workers would ask if I would consider staying at [name of former organization], and I would openly respond that I intended to stay there until retirement. However, during the pandemic, I started questioning how long we would endure this state of no work and no pay. The situation just seemed highly uncertain.”

When asked if she thought of seeking help, she responded quickly:

“I never shared my problems with my parents because I did not want them to worry. If I told them about the issues at work, they might inform the school management, and I could lose my job. I could not afford to be a burden to them.”

Ligaya was disappointed when school management closed their library and reassigned the staff to the Student Records Section.

“The [school] board announced that the library will be closed because classes have moved online. They had initially asked us to draft a proposal for the library, but they eventually decided to shut it down and move us to the Records Department.”

Gutted by the news, she continued to share:

“We were licensed professionals, and they treated us that way. It was as if the library was a liability.”

Additionally, Ligaya and her colleagues were paid less than their regular salary.

“The board cut back on our salary until it is determined how many students would enroll that year. They promised to reinstate our regular salary if the pandemic would not impact enrollment, but they did not. We

were still grateful that we kept our source of income, even if it was less than we expected.”

When asked what she was going through amidst the pandemic, she had this to say:

“I felt scared because my expenses exceeded my salary during the pandemic, so as a result, I depleted my savings.”

Furthermore, Ligaya felt disappointed about how the office treated employees who contracted COVID-19 while on duty.

“Our office refused to shoulder the cost of my COVID-19 swab test when I tested positive, even though I was certain that I contracted it while reporting onsite. I did not have the money to pay for the test, so I had to stand in line at the barangay hall [for a free test].”

Soledad was mentally prepared for the possibility of losing her job during the pandemic because the last-in, first-out policy at her old office meant she had no say in what happened.

“I have only been there for less than a year; I joined them only in August 2018—just seven months. I was fortunate because they gave me a new contract before the lockdown, but since they implemented a last-in, first-out policy, the newest hires, including myself, were let go.”

When asked how she felt about being forced to work from home, Soledad shared:

“Before the pandemic, we had more face-to-face interaction, so it did not feel like work was everything. Now, it seems work is all there is.”

Since isolation was familiar during the pandemic, the researchers asked Soledad if she had ever felt isolated. She shared:

“Perhaps others felt isolated while on lockdown, but I did not. I talked to the same people before and after the pandemic, so it did not feel different.”

While without a job, Soledad focused on cooking and selling food. However, she grew worried that she might end up contracting the virus by going to the market where she would typically get her ingredients. She added that the pandemic made her realize the importance of a stable job. She further explained that:

“When the pandemic hit, I realized the importance of a stable job. You can lose your job in private companies anytime—it is just how things work. This prompted me to start looking for better opportunities in the civil service.”

Hiraya revealed that she grew concerned about working from home because she was not confident in her ability to balance her roles as an employee, mother and wife. While advantageous for many, working from home was different from what Hiraya anticipated. She explained:

“I started feeling anxious when I realized everyone would be required to work from home. It seemed like a challenge for me, especially with an infant. How would I concentrate on work while caring for my child?”

She added that working from home was not exactly good for her mental health.

“The routine of working from home is different from working in an office. When working from home, you wake up in the morning and have breakfast, but you do not shower first like you would if you were going to the office. You just open your laptop and start working right away. This

leads to a lack of separation between work and home life, which can have adverse effects in the long run.”

Hiraya also shared her insights about whether working from home is more complex for women than men. She had this to say:

“Women traditionally take care of the household in Filipino families, right? Even though responsibilities are shared more equally now, it is still common for wives to be responsible for cooking, bathing the children, and other household chores. This can be a challenge for working women, as they must balance their time at work and home.”

During the interview, restlessness was a word Hiraya often used to describe how she felt while working from home. She continued to share:

“While I have a permanent job and am not worried about losing it, I cannot help but feel restless. What if the pandemic never ends? Will we always have to work from home? What if I ran out of things to do? What am I going to do next? These thoughts run through my head when I think about how much the stay-at-home order has changed our lives.”

The pandemic has shown that even in difficult times, people find ways to connect and build relationships. However, it cannot be denied that the health crisis changed people's lives, including their relationships with their loved ones. After Hiraya gave birth to her second child, she went back to work for a few weeks before deciding to finally leave for good. When asked what drove her to quit, she said:

“We have been having problems as a family for a while now. As they say, marriage is not easy and has been a roller coaster ride for us. We have resolved our problems in the past, but they keep coming back. The worst part was that it started to affect my job. It was hard, but I could not give up on my husband and our family, so I did the next best thing and let go of my job.”

When asked what was most challenging about working from home, Tadhana shared:

“That is [referring to augmenting the library’s online resources] where we focused our efforts, which became stressful because our online resources were not as extensive. We had to devise other ways to help students cope with the online learning setup, especially given that the onsite workforce was still limited.”

Tadhana had to join several virtual emergency meetings at night at his previous job since the school management would devise new guidelines to communicate to the employees before the next working day. He also worked at home late at night, feeling the need to put in more effort every time.

“We would hold emergency meetings online at 8 p.m. because that was the only time our immediate supervisor could reach the school management to get instructions for the ever-changing learning setup. That was one of the most complex parts.”

2(b) Goalsetting

Despite facing considerable challenges and obstacles, some of the respondents demonstrated a remarkable degree of clarity and focused on their stated goals. This suggests that they had a strong sense of purpose and motivation and were determined to overcome adversity.

Hiraya aspired to advance her career within her current organization. She was eager to set ambitious goals and pursue them with a positive attitude.

“I am currently on a [name of organization] contractual status, but I hope to get a permanent position at [name of current organization]. [Name of current organization] has been my dream for a long time, and I am finally here. I plan to stay and work here for many years to come.”

Despite being redirected to a path that was not his choice, Tadhana nonetheless felt a sense of pride in his accomplishments.

“Even though I still dream of becoming a doctor, the current circumstances do not favor me pursuing medical school, so I am continuing to study library and information science to earn a master's degree. That is where my journey is at now.”

2(c) Coping Strategies

Individual coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic varied, with each respondent employing unique mechanisms to manage the psychological impact and achieve a sense of normalcy. This reflects the multifaceted nature of the pandemic, which has profoundly and widely impacted people's lives. Some common coping strategies include social support (e.g., spending time with friends and family), a change of scenery, a strong religious faith, and even turning to TV shows for comfort.

Hiraya shared that she was able to establish a routine with her child. This routine has helped keep her restlessness at bay while living through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We feel secure at home because it is inside a gated subdivision where only residents can enter. In the morning or evening, my kid and I would go for a walk. I was pregnant then, so my stomach was big, but I did not mind because the walk helped relieve my restlessness.”

She added that doing field service for their church kept her afloat.

“Bible reading and study kept me going, and of course, my family, who is always there for me. I also enjoyed field service when we would go door-to-door to talk to people about [name of religious group]. After doing these things, I always felt better.”

When she left her job, Hiraya knew she needed a change of scenery.

“I knew I needed a change of scenery, so I decided to take some time to relax and recharge. I focused on my family and did not have to think about work. It was the best decision I could have made at the time.”

Ligaya also held on to her faith when times got tough. She believed the driving force kept her going during such an uncertain period.

“My faith in God was my rock when I struggled—when I felt like giving up.”

As someone who found solace in watching Korean dramas, Soledad naturally turned to watching her favorite shows to cope. When asked how K-dramas helped her cope during the pandemic, she quickly said:

“The show's protagonists are usually positive thinkers, so I thought maybe if I kept watching the shows, I would eventually

imbibe the same mindset.”

3. Identity as a Person and as a Library Worker

While there are many components under the identity domain, personal growth was the most apparent construct when the respondents were asked to share their insights. Personal growth is a process of developing and maturing that involves acquiring new talents, pursuing new interests, and fostering positive relationships with others. It is an essential aspect of the road to recovery, as it helps individuals develop a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. The identity domain of the CHIME framework includes *personal growth* as one of its components (Yung, Wong, Ho, & Molassiotis, 2021).

3(a) *Personal growth*

The respondents reported a significant shift in their personal growth during the pandemic, reflecting its profound impact on their personal and professional lives. This shift was characterized by a heightened sense of vulnerability, a reassessment of priorities, and a renewed appreciation for the interconnectedness of life.

Before the pandemic, Tadhana over analyzed everything. His goals were mainly centered on bettering himself. Because of events beyond his control, his overthinking intensified during the pandemic. After attending a state university, Tadhana developed progressive ideas and got involved in social movements. The government's callous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other social injustices sparked his moral compass.

“A lot has changed with the way I view things. I used to think only about myself, but the pandemic somehow made me kinder, and I started thinking of others, too.”

Ligaya saw herself as a dedicated person and worker. Despite the injustices she suffered from her institution, she continued to do her best at work.

“After the pandemic, I put more effort into my job. Our library was swamped with three academic years' worth of subscription deliveries that needed to be processed. I had to manage them alone, as my colleague had left the job for good.”

Mutya considered herself a loyal employee. She often heeded instructions and kept silent, even when she knew her ideas could improve things in the workplace. Her setbacks during the pandemic helped her discover her voice and inner strength.

“Before the pandemic, I hesitated to speak up and fight for what I believed in, even though I knew I should. I would just keep it to myself. That changed during the pandemic; I broke out of my shell and stood up for myself. When I tendered my resignation and the school principal told me that my boss was just like that [referring to her attitude towards her staff], I stood up to him and told him that he enabled her—that he was not hearing our side because he was fortunate not to be in our shoes. It felt great to be able to finally speak my mind.”

4. Meaning of Library Work

In its most practical sense, the respondents viewed their work as a source of income. This was paramount; they all wanted to keep their jobs during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the respondents could not deny that working during this global health crisis gave them a sense of purpose and some semblance of normalcy.

The main themes under this domain are *a sense of purpose* and *making sense of experiences*.

4(a) Sense of purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted library workers, both personally and professionally. While some respondents found their sense of purpose, others struggled to find their footing amid the pandemic.

When asked how she felt about her work today, Hiraya excitedly shared:

“I am so happy to be back in an academic library! I worked in an academic library for six years after college, and it felt like coming home. I need to remember all about the library hub. It is like going back in time. I am an academic librarian again. It has been a bumpy road, but I am finally back on track”.

In contrast, Mutya was starting to lose sight of why she became a librarian. She immensely enjoyed teaching information literacy classes as a teacher-librarian before the pandemic. However, when the lockdown began, and her teaching load was taken away, it left her feeling undervalued. She shared:

“I was unsure if I was still a librarian at that point. I had not been doing library work since the pandemic started, even though we were still required to come in. The teachers taught online, but the library staff had to report to work without hazard pay. We made learning packets for the teachers and stacked pages by subject and grade level”.

Mutya went on to say:

“I loved my job as a librarian, so I never questioned my purpose. However, when the IL classes were removed, I felt like I had lost my way. Without them, I felt like I could no longer fulfill my role as a librarian”.

4(b) Making sense of experiences

Each experience, whether good or bad, left an indelible mark on the respondents, shaping their perspectives about their jobs and informing their future decisions. Through reflection and analysis, they learned to make sense of their experiences during the pandemic and extract valuable lessons from them.

The loss of lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic prompted Hiraya to respect life more. When asked how the pandemic affected her self-perception, she replied:

“During the pandemic, I realized that losing a loved one can happen suddenly. That is why my time with my family was invaluable—we were creating lasting memories. It challenged my resilience and ultimately led me to quit my job”.

In the beginning, Ligaya was hesitant to leave her library work behind. However, when she took on a different role as a student records clerk, she realized something about being a librarian. She further shared:

“My job in the Records Section was much easier [than my work at the library]. I did not have to catalog books, do inventory, or

create reports, invoices, and book requests anymore. All I had to do was encode student information and grades. I liked it better in records because the work was more manageable.”

Soledad knew her job well. She described her work environment in the province as “*laid-back*.” She saw herself retiring in the private sector and no longer entertained the idea of looking for better job opportunities elsewhere.

“I was content being in the private sector. When I was in Nueva Ecija at [name of former organization], I considered retiring there because their benefits were better than those of other private institutions.”

When the contract was not renewed, however, Soledad had time to consider her friends’ advice to seek better opportunities in the government sector.

While her family was blessed not to be affected by the COVID-19 crisis, she felt the loss of her friends and colleagues. She wanted to be there for them but also knew how important it was to keep going.

“After the death of a loved one, what do we do next? Do we dwell on the loss, wondering what we could have done differently? What can we do to make ourselves feel better? I was worried that, because I had never experienced it, I may not be equipped to comfort my grieving friends. That is why I would constantly read about how to deal with loss, hoping to find some wisdom or guidance that could help me support others who were grieving.”

5. Empowerment in the Workplace

Despite the initial lack of empowerment, the respondents persevered and regained their autonomy. Their reflections revealed that most of them had become more attuned to their inner selves, enabling them to make informed decisions about moving forward. They also developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy, having survived the COVID-19 health crisis through resilience and resourcefulness. **Autonomy** and **Self-efficacy** are essential components of empowerment, and the respondents’ experiences demonstrate the transformative potential of these qualities in the face of adversity.

5(a) Autonomy

The regained confidence of some respondents enabled them to develop a clearer vision for their future, including their non-negotiables and compromises. This newfound clarity empowered them to move forward with greater purpose and determination.

Tadhana initially kept his job because he wanted to maintain his source of income. Naturally, he felt attached to it, as it was his first professional job. However, later on, he had to decide between staying and quitting his job when the management suddenly shifted its priorities.

“At one point, the school administration would reduce the number of library staff, which threatened my employment status. Most people disagreed with the decision to lay off staff from the library since it would be challenging to find a new librarian. As a solution, they laid off an employee from another department instead. Eventually, I decided it was time for me to go.”

Hiraya eventually decided to go to work because she refused to rely on her husband

for financial support.

“I must also earn money since my husband provides for our children. I cannot wait for him to give me money to buy things or go out and do things for myself so I can relax or unwind. That is why I realized I needed to earn money.”

Ligaya shared that while she continued to do her best at work, she no longer felt pressured to do more than she should.

“I am willing to give whatever I can, but I will no longer put myself under too much pressure. I have been honest with them, saying that I cannot simultaneously handle the demands of being a librarian and a teacher.”

Before the pandemic, Soledad focused only on work and her household. She spent much of her time between these two and often turned down invitations from friends. She used to feel guilty about turning down these invitations, so she would say yes to some of them even if these exhausted her.

“After the pandemic, I became a recluse, but I no longer feel guilty about turning down invitations to go out and socialize. I am now more comfortable putting my needs first. I am still a recluse at heart, but I have to deal with people more now because of work. I feel exhausted when I get home after a long day of socializing. I used to feel the same way at my old job because they always seemed to want more from me, even when it was unreasonable. I was exhausted there, too. Now, I am finally able to balance my negative emotions.”

5(b) Self-efficacy

Despite experiencing unpleasant challenges during the pandemic, some respondents felt their self-efficacy increase as they rediscovered their profession. They became driven to excel and do more, not just for their organizations, but also for themselves.

As a newly licensed librarian in 2019, Tadhana felt he missed two crucial years due to the pandemic. However, working at a state university in Quezon City helped him find his career path.

“We are happy that we are finally working here [referring to the current organization]. We finally have a clearer vision for our career path. We are now writing research papers. It has been my friend’s and my dream since college; now, we are making it happen.”

Soledad did not realize that getting a job at a state university meant developing new skills. She quickly admitted that there was resistance and questioning at the beginning.

“At first, I rejected the idea of learning new things. I thought to myself, “Why do I need to learn this? It is so hard!” When something is difficult, I tend to rant and rave. I need to complain about it before I can get started. So, complaining helped me take action.”

Furthermore, her mindset shifted from being an introvert to being driven after the pandemic.

“As someone who tends to keep to myself, I usually think long and

hard before taking on any task. I often wonder if I was up to the challenge. However, when the pandemic hit, I started pushing myself out of my comfort zone. I began to see it as a chance I might not get again, which motivated me to do things I once thought were too hard. This whole experience changed how I see things, and now I believe in making the most of every opportunity.”

Mutya shared that finding a job at a state university made her feel empowered again, especially her involvement with work for gender and development. She happily quipped:

“My career path became apparent, and I have become more assertive. Now, I am happier than ever”.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study made it abundantly clear that the pandemic affected the respondents' psychological and social well-being. The respondents' faith and the support they received from their families were significant factors in their ability to overcome the pandemic's challenges and live through them. Workplace injustices and institutional failures, such as decreased pay, sudden and forced changes in work roles, feelings of abandonment, a lack of empathy, and micro-management, were the most prevalent variables that affected how the respondents saw their future as library workers, the meaning of library work, and their sense of control over their personal and professional lives.

Even though everyone's experience with the pandemic was different, it is clear from the responses that the COVID-19 health emergency affected their perspectives on the workplace and everyday life. The pandemic highlighted how vital it is to safeguard library workers, guarantee that they will continue to have jobs, and ensure that they are aware of and on board with any changes that could impact their jobs. How institutions handle library staff needs to be improved, and when things get complicated, these people should be seen as valuable. Long-term impacts will be felt as a result of the experiences of library staff during the pandemic, particularly their ties with their administrators. These librarians were experiencing confusion, stress, and a shift in priorities, leading them to question the significance of their jobs.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Respondent Details and Nature of Participation

Respondents will only be asked to provide basic personal details relevant to the study to comply with data privacy concerns. Participating in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participate. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and /or refrain from participating in any component of the research, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The interview will be conducted either online via Zoom or in person. The interview might last about one hour and will be recorded for data analysis.

Information Confidentiality

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researchers, will know about your involvement in this research. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one can connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a pseudonym, and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as book chapters, conference proceedings, conference presentations, and journal articles. The resulting research reporting methods will protect your privacy and only publish anonymous details. Individual participants will not be identifiable in the presentation of the results.

Research Results

Data collected for the research will be published in research reporting methods such as, book chapters, conference proceedings, conference presentations and journal articles.

Data Security

All of the data collected will be stored on the researchers' password-protected computer. Copies of your answers will be stored for two years. Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the computer's hard drive through a relevant software program after five years.

Contact Information

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, require any further information, or want to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please email avpalaya@up.edu.ph or fllabiano@up.edu.ph. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule was developed using the CHIME framework to align with the study's objective to find out how the pandemic-induced job loss affected the psychosocial well-being of library workers. As discussed earlier, CHIME was used for its universal applicability across different ages and backgrounds.

- **Basic information about the interviewee**

Name:

Designation:

Institution affiliated with during the pandemic

Institution affiliated with at present:

- **Background**

a. What happened to you during the pandemic?

- **Connectedness**

a. How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues before the pandemic started?

b. How did the pandemic affect these relationships?

- **Hope & optimism**

a. Did you ever feel hopeless during the pandemic? If yes, what made you feel this way?

b. What motivated you to believe that everything will be okay despite the challenges and difficulties brought by the pandemic?

- **Identity**

a. How did you see yourself before the pandemic?

b. How did the pandemic affect this perception?

- **Meaning**

a. How did you perceive your work before the pandemic?

b. How did the pandemic affect this perception?

- **Empowerment**

a. What were the changes in your life brought about by the pandemic, and how did you feel about it?