

The Lived Socio-Emotional Experiences of Hypertensive Geriatric Clients from San Pablo City, Laguna During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:- The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a great threat to health, particularly in the elderly ones. The presence of underlying comorbidities, specifically hypertension, has contributed to a high risk of contracting the disease. Because of weakened immune responses, the elderly were restricted from going out. Moreover, imposed quarantines and lockdowns have been implemented. As a consequence, the socio-emotional health of the elderly was affected. Looking at this situation, the researchers believed that the need to explore the lived socio-emotional experiences of hypertensive geriatric clients is vital. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to deeply explore and examine the lived socio-emotional experiences of the participants. The researchers interviewed a total of 17 hypertensive geriatric participants aged 60 to 85 years old from San Pablo City, Laguna. The data gathered were transcribed and interpreted by the researchers. To have a comprehensive discussion of the participants' responses, the researchers used thematic analysis to come up with significant major and sub-themes. The findings of the study revealed that the lived socio-emotional experiences of the participants encompassed their morbidity concerns, multidimensional feelings of fear and anxiety, disconnection from the outside world, and internal and external measures to alleviate stress and discomfort.

Keywords:- COVID-19 Pandemic, Hypertension, Lived Socio-Emotional Experiences, Thematic Analysis, Morbidity Concerns, Fear and Anxiety, Disconnection from Outside World, Internal and External Measures to Alleviate Stress and Discomfort.

I. INTRODUCTION

For about three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has left no age group unscathed (Alam et al., 2022). Infants, children, young adults, and older adults have been affected in different aspects and among these population groups, the health of the elderly seemed to be greatly affected compared to other age groups. According to Maria (2022), the elderly is the population most at risk from COVID-19, which puts their lives and overall health at stake. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 62% of deaths in the population above 60 years of age were recorded by the Department of Health. With the numerous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, it

has also greatly affected those people who already have existing illnesses. According to Wang et al. (2022), unlike younger patients, elderly patients have a weaker immune response. Moreover, the presence of comorbidities and underlying diseases are factors increasing their risk of having the disease. In the data released by the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) last March 2020, the presence of comorbidities, specifically hypertension in older Filipinos, is also one of the risk factors for COVID-19. The prevalence of COVID-19 infection was significantly greater among elderly people with underlying multimorbidity who reside in long-term care facilities, aged care homes, and nursing homes. Because of quarantines, lockdowns, and imposed restrictions to mitigate the spread of the disease, elderly patients had additional barriers to their social networks. The inability to interact with others caused loneliness, neglect, depression, and anxiety (Santini et al., 2020). Furthermore, the loss or absence of a partner and the absence of a meaningful friendship were some of the root causes of emotional loneliness (Banerjee, 2020). Looking through the situation above, the need to understand socio-emotional health, particularly the experiences of the participants, was very vital. The researchers believed that exploring the lived socio-emotional experiences of hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic helped to add more information to the wider community as well as to increase the awareness of others in the socio-emotional health of our fellowmen. Furthermore, the researchers filled the knowledge gap since there have been insufficient and limited local studies that have been formulated regarding the lived socio-emotional experiences of geriatric clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. AIM OF THE PAPER

The researchers generally explored and analyzed the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following:

- *Central Question:* What was the essence of the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- *Corollary Question 1.* How did the participants describe their lived socio-emotional experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- *Corollary Question 2.* What were the themes that emerged from the study regarding the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- *Corollary Question 3.* What were the implications drawn from the study regarding the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

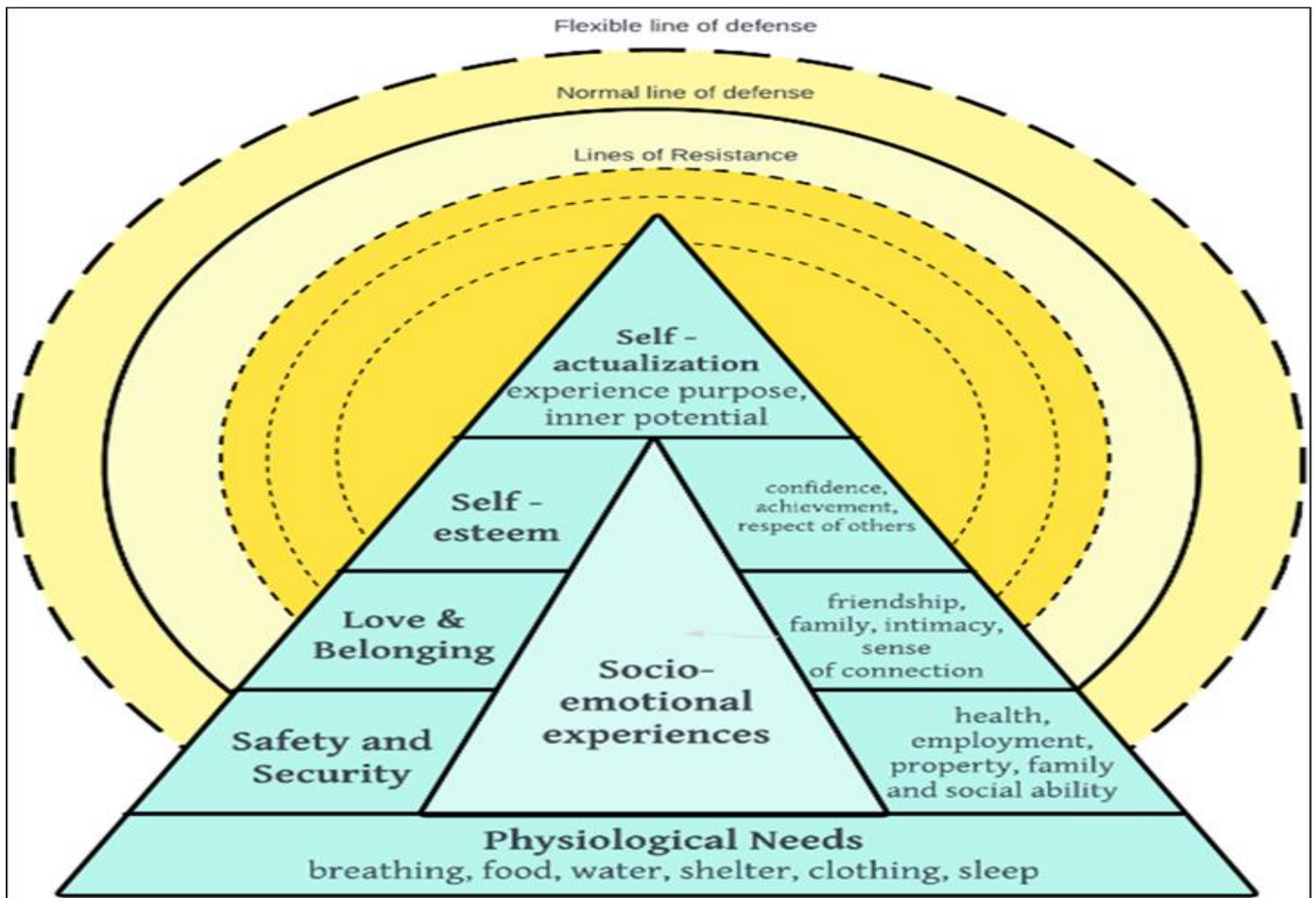


Fig 1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework showed the relationship between the theories and the variables in the study. To have an in-depth perspective on the lived socio-emotional experiences of the participants, the researchers tried to see the factors that influenced their socio-emotional health during the COVID-19 pandemic and how those factors affected them. For a more comprehensive and thorough analysis, the researchers used the theoretical lenses of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Neuman’s Systems Model.

In this study, Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs helped the researchers to explain the needs that the participants consider to be their priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This theory also helped in analyzing how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their needs – may it be physiological needs, safety and security needs, belongingness needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs.

Moreover, the Neuman’s Systems Model helped in distinguishing what stressors the participants consider as major contributing factors in their lived socio-emotional experiences. This may highlight the COVID-19 pandemic and the comorbidities they have, particularly hypertension. The researchers also explored how the participants coped with the pandemic and what mechanisms they used in order to alleviate the negative emotions or feelings brought about by the situation.

IV. RELATED STUDIES

The review of literatures consolidated several elements on how COVID-19 affected everyone, particularly older adults, and how their co-existing conditions influenced their experiences with the pandemic. Despite having a small proportion of the total population, older adults had the highest mortality rate in the Philippines (Maria, 2022). COVID-19 severity increased in senior patients with pre-

existing comorbidities such as hypertension and asthma. Prior to the pandemic, complications arose as these people returned and forth for hospitals and other medications. Such studies discovered that other elements such as fear and anxiety began to develop, hypertension increased the danger of compromising their immune system (Howrey et al., 2020). Gender and age both contributed to increasing the risk of contracting COVID-19. It was revealed that women are more prone to getting COVID-19 (Romano et al., 2018). Access to healthcare has been restricted for older clients during the pandemic, as quarantines and lockdowns continue. The government has made changes to health protocols, and rigorous compliance is required. The geriatric clients had challenges and difficulties in getting to healthcare facilities because of limited mobility to avoid spreading the virus and outpatient visits were cancelled (Wilder-Smith et al., 2019). Some older adults faced difficulties purchasing medications and obtaining food during the COVID-19 pandemic (Newman et al., 2020). And so, with the pandemic situation, older adults faced a lot of struggles maintaining their socio-emotional health. According to Brooks et al (2020), quarantine events have demonstrated that psychological stress reactions can result from being physically and socially isolated. Face-to-face interactions have been limited and places of entertainment such as malls and parks have been closed. Along with the inability to go outside because of mitigation measures, elderly clients may experience loneliness, depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance (Avasthi & Grover, 2019). This has also been supported by the study of Barroso et al (2021) which revealed that feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, and grief have also been manifested because of absence of physical contact and the passing of family members. A lot of coping mechanisms have been adapted by the elderly to reduce stress and anxiety. Among others are reading, listening to music, sessions on meditation and prayer, etc. (Finlay et al., 2020).

V. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research design specifically phenomenological research method to explore and analyze the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants of the study were the hypertensive geriatric clients currently residing in San Pablo City, Laguna. This study was comprised of seventeen (17) participants, 3 males and 14 females, aged 60 to 85 years old who willingly and voluntarily participated. All the participants have primary hypertension which is defined as a type of hypertension that develops over time and is not associated with other medical conditions (Mayo Clinic, 2022). The study was conducted within San Pablo City, Laguna. Based on the Field Health Service Information System (FHSIS) Morbidity Report of San Pablo City, Laguna from January 1 to September 1, 2022, there were 165 males and females aged 60 years old and above who are hypertensive. The researchers selected this research locale due to its vicinity and its accessibility. Moreover, the number of hypertensive geriatric clients in

San Pablo City, Laguna was also one of the criteria in choosing the research locale.

To explore and have an in-depth understanding of the lived socio-emotional experiences of hypertensive geriatric clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers utilized an interview guide. This helped the researchers highlight important questions to be included in the study. The questions in the interview guide were self-made by the researchers and validated by three experts.

The interview guide consisted of two parts. The first part was the demographic profile of the participants such as their age, sex, address, blood pressure, years of having hypertension, and their maintenance medications. The second part consisted of questions concerning their lived socio-emotional experiences, the key issues affecting their socio-emotional health, and their coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To have a more comprehensive understanding of the lived socio-emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers used thematic analysis. This is a form of qualitative analysis that helps identify and analyze passages that were linked into a common theme or category, thereby establishing a framework of ideas. The researchers followed the step-by-step process of thematic analysis which includes familiarization of the data gathered from the participants, coding, generation of themes, reviewing of themes, defining, naming themes, and analyzation of the data. Moreover, the researchers used verbatim transcription which encapsulated every single word based on the interview including fillers, throat clearing, and incomplete sentences. With this transcription, the researchers had a clearer perception of the responses. After data coding, major and sub-themes emerged which helped the researchers to have an in-depth discussion of the participants' responses. The answers posed in the statement of the problem were interpreted by the researchers. To support the interpreted data, reviews of literature were added, and the relationships of the theoretical perspectives were connected.

To have an extensive and detailed interpretation of the data gathered, the researchers consulted for an intercoder which helped them to generate the major and sub-themes of the study. This also helped the researchers to reduce bias and seek the help of an expert in writing a qualitative research study. The coding process was done step-by-step. First, the researchers analyzed the data and had an initial coding. The codes generated were according to holistic coding which applied a single code to a large unit of data. This captured the overall content and categories that were developed in all the participants' responses. The initial codes were then sent to the intercoder to be examined. Secondly, all the data entered the process of open descriptive coding which enabled the researchers to organize each of them from specific to general. The open descriptive coding has sub-categories and among all of those, the data fell under the affective method which explored the

subjective aspects of the participants' experiences particularly their emotions, values, conflicts, and judgments regarding a specific phenomenon. After this, the data were highlighted into different colors to have a better classification and categorization of data. This helped the researchers to formulate the sub-themes of the study. Lastly, the data gathered were coded based on the pattern of events that occurred in the participants' life events. This helped the researchers to organize the previous coded data into fewer

sets, themes, and structures thereby establishing the final and major themes of the study.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected from the hypertensive geriatric clients, major themes and sub-themes have emerged.

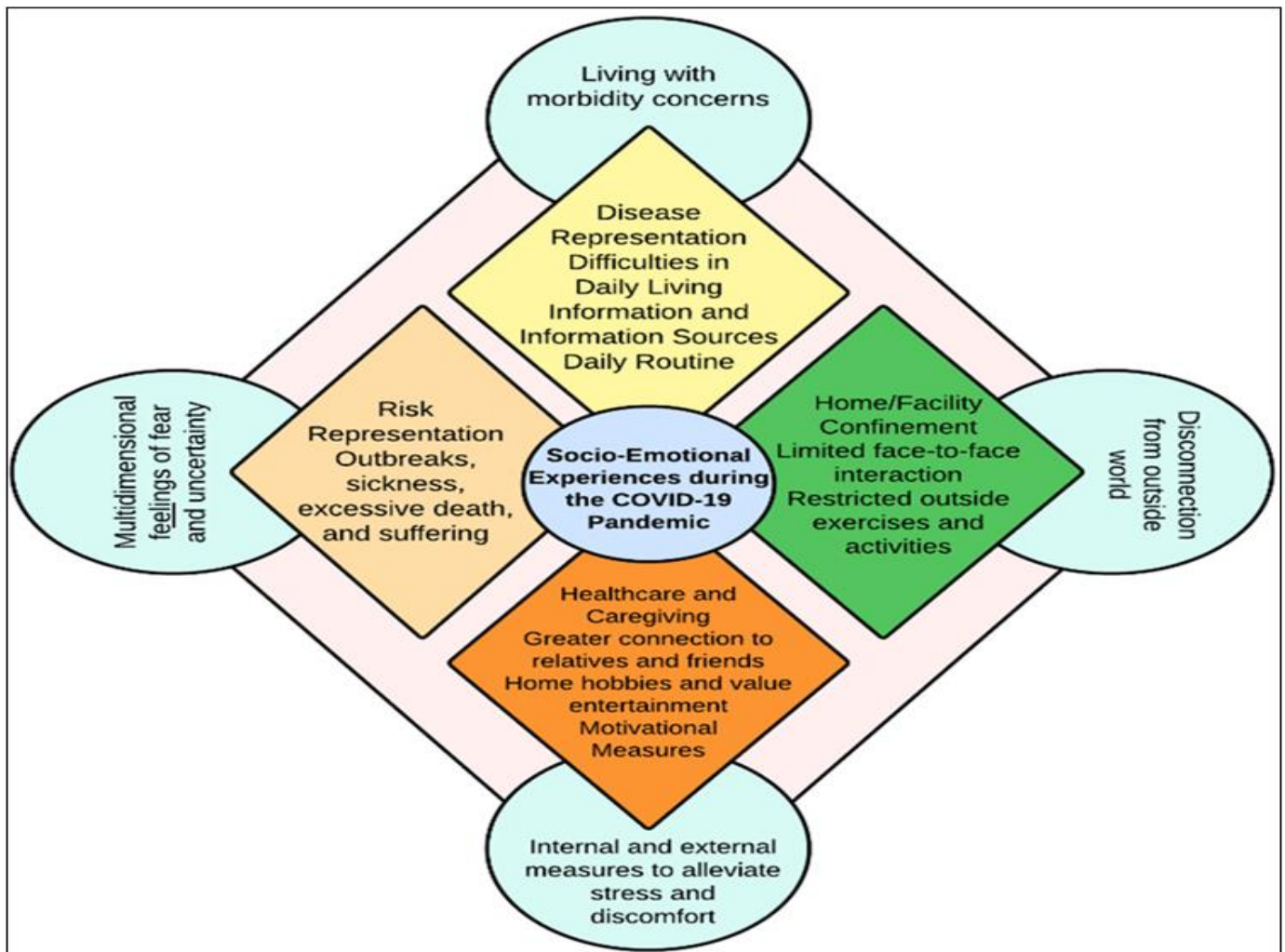


Fig 2 Visual Representation of Themes

- At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants have expressed living with morbidity concerns which pertained to their thoughts and perception about the situation. Four sub-themes were identified under this theme: disease representation, difficulties in daily living, information and information sources, and the daily routine of the participants.
- The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has led the participants to have multidimensional feelings of fear and uncertainty. Two sub-themes have emerged from the major theme: risk representation and outbreaks, sickness, excessive death, and suffering.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hypertensive geriatric clients had disconnection from the outside world. The inability to connect with others physically has been greatly magnified in older adults (Kivipelto, 2020). The

lockdowns and quarantines brought about by the pandemic situation have limited the mobility of the geriatric clients. Three sub-themes have emerged from the major theme: home/facility confinement, communication, and restricted outside exercises and activities.

- At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants have expressed their internal and external measures to alleviate stress and discomforts. Despite the stressors they experienced because of the pandemic situation, four sub-themes under this category have emerged such as healthcare and caregiving, greater connection to relatives and friends, home hobbies and value entertainment and motivational measures.

After having a thorough analysis of the themes that have emerged from the study, such implications were drawn regarding the lived socio emotional experiences of the hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic:

➤ *Health and Psychosocial Support:*

The study highlights the importance of providing adequate health and psychosocial support to hypertensive geriatric clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants expressed fear, anxiety, and concerns about their health and well-being. Healthcare professionals and caregivers should prioritize addressing these concerns through proper education, regular communication, and access to healthcare services. Providing accurate and reliable information about COVID-19, its prevention, and treatment can help alleviate fears and uncertainties.

➤ *Mental Health Interventions:*

The findings indicate that hypertensive geriatric clients experienced negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and uneasiness during the pandemic. These emotional states can have an impact on their mental health and overall well-being. Implementing mental health interventions, such as counseling or therapy, can help individuals cope with their fears and anxieties. Creating support groups or virtual platforms for social interaction can also provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation.

➤ *Importance of Social Connections:*

The study reveals that the pandemic has affected the participants' relationships with family members, friends, and their community. Maintaining social connections and support networks is crucial for the mental and emotional well-being of hypertensive geriatric clients. Strategies such as encouraging virtual interactions, organizing online activities or events, and facilitating communication with loved ones can help mitigate the negative effects of social isolation.

➤ *Adaptation to Lifestyle Changes:*

The participants described the challenges they faced due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, such as limited access to public places and changes in daily routines. Healthcare providers should assist hypertensive geriatric clients in adapting to these changes by providing guidance on alternative ways to obtain essential supplies and engage in physical activities within the confines of their homes. This may include telemedicine services, home exercise programs, and guidance on healthy eating habits.

➤ *Individualized Care:*

The study highlights the diverse experiences and reactions of hypertensive geriatric clients during the pandemic. Healthcare professionals should recognize the uniqueness of everyone's socio-emotional experiences and tailor their care accordingly. Considering their specific fears, concerns, and coping strategies can contribute to more effective and personalized care.

➤ *Health Education and Awareness:*

Given the impact of fear and anxiety on the participants' health status, it is crucial to provide comprehensive health education and awareness campaigns. These initiatives should focus on dispelling misinformation, promoting preventive measures, and encouraging vaccination. By empowering hypertensive geriatric clients with accurate knowledge, they can make informed decisions regarding their health and take appropriate actions to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Overall, this study underscores the need for a holistic approach to the care of hypertensive geriatric clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. By addressing their socio-emotional experiences, providing adequate support, and promoting well-being, healthcare providers can enhance the overall health outcomes and quality of life for this vulnerable population.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the indicated findings, the researchers reached the conclusion that the lived socio-emotional experiences of hypertensive geriatric clients from San Pablo City, Laguna during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted their morbidity concerns, multidimensional feelings of fear and anxiety, disconnection from the outside world, and the internal and external measures to alleviate stress and discomfort. Because of the number of cases of death from COVID-19, the participants perceived the pandemic situation as a great threat to their health. Moreover, the restrictions brought by lockdowns and quarantines have limited public mobility thus, adapting to certain changes brought by home confinement. This has also led the geriatric clients to have minimal interaction with their friends and relatives as face-to-face gatherings were prohibited. Concerns with daily living and routines were expressed and it was evident that feelings of fear and uncertainties emanated from the participants. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed the geriatric clients to spend more time with their family members and cope with the situation despite the difficulties encountered in daily living.

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