A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE HOME ENVIRONMENT EXPERIENCES AMONG THE TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION STUDENTS OF A STATE UNIVERSITY IN NORTHERN MINDANAO DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THAT SHAPED THEIR PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT. *The novel virus called COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory illness that rapidly spreads worldwide. It was discovered on January 9, 2020, and declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization (WHO). The COVID-19 pandemic is causing not only life interruption, disease, and death but also poses a threat to the psychosocial well-being of the students. Through extensive literature review, the researchers found no studies concerning the psychosocial well-being of the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the main objective of this study is to discover the home environment experiences among eight purposely selected BTLEd students at the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines-Cagayan de Oro (USTP-CDO). An online interview with recording was conducted utilizing a validated semi-structured interview guide in data collection. This study employs Phenomenology under qualitative research design and conventional content analysis techniques to analyze and interpret the data narratives of the participants. The study's findings revealed that the BTLEd students experienced problematic home staying and frustrating family circumstances during the pandemic crisis. Thus, the researchers concluded that the BTLEd students' home environment experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly negatively impacted their psychosocial well-being. This paper includes recommendations for future research.*

Key Words: Phenomenological Study, Home Environment, Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd), Psychosocial Well-being, COVID-19 Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

In Wuhan, China, an unknown origin viral pneumonia outbreak occurred in December 2019 [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported the discovery of a new coronavirus, SARS-Cov2, on January 9, 2020. This infectious respiratory illness caused by this novel virus is called COVID-19. It rapidly spread worldwide, prompting the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic on March 11, 2020 [2]. Beyond being a cause of disease or death, they can have various effects, especially on psychological, social, education, and economy [3]. The government's recorded tactics range from social isolation and social separation to statewide lockdowns that include halting economic operations and closing borders. This shutdown impacts more than 90% of the world's student population [4].

The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster that can affect everyone's psychosocial well-being [5]. College students face higher levels of psychological stress under normal circumstances, with adverse academic effects as a result [6]. Undergraduate university students are more vulnerable to psychosocial difficulties during the present pandemic and may be designated a vulnerable category [7]. The twenty-first century is also marked by the emergence of a pandemic of mental diseases [8]. Thus, psychological and social readiness for this pandemic is critical on a global scale. Students' mental health is projected to be impacted by the pandemic's continued spread, tight isolation measures, and delays in commencing schools, colleges, and institutions across the country [9]. Hence, students' mental health suffers significantly, and they require immediate attention, aid, and support from the community, family, and educational institutions [10].

The home environment is regarded as safe and comforting [11]. However, home can also be strongly associated with stress [12]. There will most certainly be an accumulation of stressful occurrences and a lack of social support throughout the pandemic [13]. Some psychological problems within the home are caused by other factors, including the family's financial difficulties during the pandemic [14]. When a family at home lacks intimate emotions and effective communication or when the family management is in trouble, students are likely to experience loneliness within the family context [15]. Thus, there is an intimate association between family functioning, loneliness, and mental health [16]. Moreover, students exposed to family conflicts have significantly higher depression, anxiety, and stress levels than students with a harmonious family [17].

In the Philippines, family finances have deteriorated, especially for low-income families during the outbreak due to an unprecedented economic shutdown [18]. Several students also reported having difficulty getting food and were deeply concerned about the COVID-19 outbreak [19]. Higher anxiety levels were also associated with job loss, lower earnings, or fewer hours worked, while difficulty acquiring medicine and hygiene supplies was linked to higher stress levels [20]. Students who rely on work to support themselves and their families may be more susceptible to depression and anxiety due to financial

stress. Many students are concerned about their health, the health of their families, or financial difficulties, which may cause them to become less focused on academics, leading to increased academic challenges [21]. Furthermore, being a student, prolonged stay at home, and excessive worry about COVID-19 were all linked to a higher psychological impact of the pandemic [22].

Through extensive literature review, the researchers found no studies concerning the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic that shapes the psychosocial well-being of the BTLEd students. Hence, there is a knowledge gap that needs to be filled in order to understand the mechanics of pandemics concerning how it affects BTLEd students in general. Therefore, this study will investigate and analyze the home environment experiences and perspectives of BTLEd students during the COVID-19 pandemic that shaped their psychosocial well-being.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically Phenomenology. This study aims to distribute and provide information on how specific individuals understand the phenomena in the current setting. Phenomenology assists in comprehending the significance of people's lived experiences [23]. The method of inquiry is not confined to a way of knowing; instead, it is an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning formation that is used to understand the lived reality of humans at a conscious level [24]. Data collection and analysis occur concurrently to illuminate the specific experience and identify the phenomena observed by the participants in a given circumstance [24]. This method is used to understand the underlying causes of the problem and discover the BTLEd students' home environment experiences to obtain data. Also, this research approach is the appropriate design to use as it will be able to attain the aimed outcome.

The Participants of the Study

The study's participants are the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) students in any year in the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines-Cagayan de Oro (USTP-CDO) school year 2021-2022 of the first semester regardless of demography. The purposive sampling technique was used to qualify eight student participants. They were selected after considering the following inclusion criteria: (a) they must be a registered Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) students, (b) college students enrolled in the academic year 2021-2022, 1st semester, and (c) must approve the consent letter for the interview.

Research Instrument

The researchers were the main instrument of the study and utilized a validated semi-structured interview guide in data gathering. Because the researchers were the instrument in semi-structured qualitative interviews, unique researcher characteristics have the potential to influence the collection of empirical materials [25]. A semi-structured interview is a research method in which the interviewer asks a few pre-determined questions, and the rest are not prepared ahead of time [26]. It unfolds in a conversational feature,

providing participants the opportunity to explore topics or issues that are important to them [27]. The interviewer's ability to invent and avoid questions in order to adapt to the topic makes the semi-structured interview more adaptable and flexible [28]. Thus, this leads to more effective data collection [26]. The pre-determined questions were checked by the research expert and a licensed psychometrician for validation to verify their reliability.

Pre-Determined Questions

How do the students' home environment and familial relationship status affect their psychosocial well-being during the pandemic?

1. How is your relationship with your family?
2. What are your social needs during your homestay amid the pandemic?
3. What other experiences within your home affected you physically, emotionally, and cognitively, and your health?

Data Collection

After the interview pre-determined questions guide was validated, the researchers prepared and sent a permission letter through email to the College Dean to conduct the study. After approval, a consent letter was issued online for the participants. When they decided to participate in the research, they were requested to set up a schedule and inform the researchers of what mode of communication they preferred to use for the interview.

Due to the pandemic, a face-to-face interview was highly discouraged. The use of online platforms or any online mode of communication such as Google Meet, Zoom Meeting, Messenger, Mobile Calls, etc., that had video and audio recordings capability is appropriate for the interview for data gathering. During the interview, the researchers asked each question in their own words, offered additional probes or prompts as needed, and communicated in a way that felt natural and comfortable to the participants [25]. When the interview was about to end, the participants were urged to offer any clarification, concerns, or confusing queries resulting from any technological challenges [29]. After the interview, the recorded data were gathered and prepared for transcription of the exact and complete verbatim of the participants to eliminate data ambiguities [29].

Data Analysis

The conventional content analysis under the thematic analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data in this study. The researchers used this technique because it is the most appropriate and effective method for examining and identifying recurring themes and patterns of meaning. Each qualitative research strategy has its own set of techniques for performing, documenting, and assessing data analysis processes, but the individual researcher ultimately must ensure rigor and trustworthiness [30]. In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data [31]. When conducting data analysis, the researchers become the instrument for analysis, making judgments about coding, categorizing, and theming the data [32]. Thus, all researchers and the research expert verified and confirmed the interpretation's coherence to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of

the codes, categories, and themes.

Ethical Considerations

In order to adhere to research ethics, authorization from an institution or college was obtained before conducting the study [33]. Then, the researchers issued consent letters to the participants through emails. The document explained the purpose and importance of the study. It also described how the study would be conducted [34]. Questions about sensitive data were not included in the interview questionnaire. After being informed about the study's objective, all participants freely gave their informed consent to participate [35]. Those who agreed to participate in the study were assured that they had the right to withdraw or refuse at any time [36]. Furthermore, they had the right to remove any information they had submitted for this study without incurring any consequences. Participants' information was removed entirely to protect their identities, privacy, and confidentiality [34].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this section sought to answer this study's research question, which states: How do the students' home environment and familial relationship status affect their psychosocial well-being during the pandemic? Online interviews were done to collect the data to provide an in-depth understanding of the home environment experiences of the BTLEd students during the COVID-19 pandemic that shaped their psychosocial well-being. A conventional content analysis approach was employed in the thematic analysis of the data from eight online interviews conducted.

Following the conventional content analysis approach, two main themes emerged in the data analysis. These two main themes are labeled (a) problematic home staying and (b) frustrating family circumstances. Table 1 presents the codes, categories, and themes equivalent to the participants' narratives during the interview.

Table 1. Themes that emerged from the personal interview data

Codes	Categories	Themes
Financial Deficit	Resources Shortage at Home	
Food Undersupply		
Lack of Bonding or No Physical Interaction	Limited Socialization at Home	
Communication Problems		
Lack of Social Support		Problematic Home Staying
Sedentary Lifestyle or No Physical Exercise	Unhealthy Lifestyle at Home	
Bad Eating Habit		
Lack of Sleep		
Misunderstandings in the Family	Family Problems	
Family Conflicts		Frustrating Family Circumstances
Troublesome and Noisy Children or Family Members	Misbehaving Family Members	

Problematic Home Staying

The problematic home staying theme has three categories: resources shortage at home, limited socialization at home, and unhealthy lifestyle at home. This is further supported by 30 statements. During the online interviews, students shared that they experienced various problems while staying in their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some students experienced a shortage of resources at home. The pandemic harmed the students' families' employment and source of income; hence, according to P3, *"My mother and father both lost their jobs. I'm stressed and depressed because of financial problems and my study. Also, we experienced food shortages in the house, and our resources are limited these days."* Some participants also shared their experiences and perspectives about reduced communication and socialization with friends and significant ones, which affected their social and emotional needs because of their homestay amid the pandemic. P1 said, *"It's not like before that I could always socialize. Of course, that was face-to-face. Now I feel so lonely. Something is missing in me."* P4 also shared similar thoughts when he stated, *"In terms of hanging out with my friends. Like if you want to meet them up, but you can't. You are just stuck inside your house doing nothing. Only eat, lay down, and sleep. That's the only thing you can do every day."* P2 mentioned, *"My relationship with some of my friends is affected. Because of the pandemic, where communications are mostly done online, it causes misunderstandings and misinterpretations to our conversations."* While P3 talked about a lack of familial support, he clarified, *"No support because I don't share my mental and emotional problems with them."*

Furthermore, the participants were already practicing unhealthy habits because of a prolonged stay at home. P5 said, *"Due to always staying at home, we are less physically active. It may affect our health because a sedentary lifestyle affects our cardiovascular health and may lower our lifespan."* An unhealthy eating habit was also mentioned by P6, when she said, *"Maybe I eat a lot during isolation, that's why I got bigger: I always stay inside our home."* And P8 also shared her bad sleeping habit during her homestay amid the pandemic, and her words are, *"I am always sleeping late and not getting enough sleep."* Thus, the participants' narratives mean that obvious problems are occurring in staying in their home environment that affect their psychosocial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial difficulties for low-income families in the Philippines have begun to worsen throughout the pandemic due to an unprecedented economic shutdown [37]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity among low-income and disadvantaged families was a severe public health issue [38]. Students were more depressed, slightly more anxious, stressed, and lonelier due to social network changes [39]. A lack of face-to-face contact, and less communication with classmates, friends, and instructors, among other things, could have long-term negative impacts on the students' minds [40]. Furthermore, an increased dietary intake, increased weight, decreased physical activity, and decreased sleep are examples of potentially

unhealthy lifestyle changes that could occur during a lockdown [41].

Frustrating Family Circumstances

The frustrating family circumstances theme entails only two categories: family problems and misbehaving family members. This theme is supported by 8 statements. During the online interviews, students shared that there were circumstances within the family during the COVID-19 pandemic that made them feel disappointed, annoyed, and stressed.

P3 shared that *"I have some misunderstandings with my mom and my relationship with my siblings. We have misunderstandings at home."* Some misunderstandings had led to trouble at home. P2 mentioned, *"We often fight with my siblings because we don't understand each other."* And some students experienced annoyance at home because of a noisy parent. P1 explained, *"There are times when it is inevitable to argue. There are days when talking back is unavoidable. Usually, my mother is so noisy. There are days when I don't speak. I didn't make a talk because I was annoyed. I could talk back because I was too tired listening to so much noise."* And P2 also shared her stressful experience when she was given additional responsibility at home. And her words are, *"Nephews are causing trouble because they are misbehaving. Nephews are causing mental stress. We are taking care of these children because their mom is working. They stress us, and they cause us delays in our school activities. We are constantly watching over them because sometimes they don't sleep. They cause us so much stress."* Hence, the participants' narratives talked about the frustrating circumstances within the family that affect their psychosocial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many college students faced difficult circumstances at home as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and quarantine [42]. Home environment issues, such as relationship tension (either between themselves and others or being exposed to tension between others), feeling trapped with the same people, and a lack of understanding from family members, may jeopardize students' mental health [42]. For students who were studying from home, family interference during class participation was a major concern [43]. Some students had to balance being a student at home with caring for a child, which often conflicted, resulting in a disrupted learning environment because it was difficult to focus on anything due to the uncertain living circumstances [44]. Furthermore, conflicts at home, problems isolating themselves, and noisy environments all contributed to students' stress, regardless of their residence [45].

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to discover and determine the home environment experiences of the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLEd) students during the COVID-19 pandemic that shaped their psychosocial well-being. The findings of the study revealed that the BTLEd students encountered staying problems and frustrating circumstances in the family in their home environment during the pandemic crisis. A shortage of money and food complicated their everyday survival. They were unable to

meet their social and emotional needs at home due to a lack of physical bonding or interaction, a lack of social and emotional support, and communication problems with their friends and family. BTLEd students also had an unhealthy lifestyle due to a lack of physical activity, bad eating habits, and lack of sleep during their homestay amid the pandemic. Furthermore, the BTLEd students were also found to be involved in family conflicts and subjected to stressful behaviors of some of their family members at home. Thus, the researchers concluded that the BTLEd students' home environment experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly negatively impacted their psychosocial well-being.

Recommendations

(a) The BTLEd students should be gentle when communicating online with friends and significant ones. They should keep in touch in order to build a strong social support system and network. Healthy and supportive relationships have been shown in studies to reduce stress and increase general health and well-being [46].

(b) The BTLEd students should find ways to stay active, get adequate sleep, eat a healthy and nutritious diet, and make time to take care the self to stay healthy at home even amidst the pandemic [47]. Thus, adopting healthy lifestyle choices that improve psychological well-being and decrease mental health issues is beneficial to mental health [48].

(c) Genuine familial love through support is required to decrease or eliminate the occurrence of family problems and issues. All family members should respect each other and accept everyone in the family, regardless of their personal beliefs. They should have genuine love, loyalty, deep affection, and healthy attachment because these are family characteristics [49]. As a result, having a support system is beneficial to one's physical and mental health, and family members, in addition to other people in one's life [50].

(d) This study acknowledges its limitation of being conducted with a small number of participants. A similar study may be conducted to add to the body of knowledge about the mechanics of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the psychosocial well-being of BTLEd students, with a larger sample size or with more research questions to confirm, intensify, or invalidate the current study's findings. This study was also conducted qualitatively and only intended to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of BTLEd students during the COVID-19 pandemic that shaped their psychosocial well-being. Therefore, the study's findings cannot be used to generalize to a larger population. Furthermore, quantitative research may also be undertaken to assess the present study's findings or variables and how they affect the students' overall psychosocial well-being. Lastly, future research may explore deeper into students' lived experiences who are enrolled in other programs.

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