Make It or Break It: Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Quality of Social Relationships Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic had shifted the lives of individuals especially in the aspect of socialization; hence, this study was conducted to determine the impacts of the implementation of lockdown measures on the social relationship quality among emerging adults. Concomitant output is a proposed wellness program which aims to help raise awareness about the necessity of strong social interactions amidst a pandemic. Descriptive qualitative research and purposive sampling technique were utilized to select participants in a variety of ways considering the objectives and goals of the study. As a result, thirteen (13) emerging adults enrolled at OLFU-Pampanga whose ages range from 18 to 25 years old were carefully chosen. For data collection, the study employed an in-depth semi-structured interview through Google Meet to gather the participants' collective perceptions on the studied phenomenon. The acquired data were analyzed using thematic analysis which was done in three levels: transcription, initial coding, and theme generation. Based on the findings, it was revealed that the lockdown modified the lives of emerging adults, and it impacted their relationships with their family, friends, and romantic partners. It appeared that these changes are categorized both in a positive and negative manner. Specifically, the quality of social relationships among families was enhanced compared to the quality of social relationships among friends, which was either maintained or weakened. Meanwhile, romantic relationships were unfortunately reported to have ended. In line with this, a wellness program consisting of different activities was proposed to promote a strong social relationship in times of crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Safety Measures, Socializations, Relationships, Emerging Adults

Introduction

A year ago, Filipinos had all the opportunities to go outside to bond with their families and friends, attend small or large gatherings such as birthday parties, religious mass, or concerts, and most importantly, they had the luxury to travel around the world. Streets all over the country were always packed no matter the day or time. Everywhere you look, you would see children running around or adults rushing to go to work or home as soon as possible.

However, on the 16th day of March 2020, the once loud, and lively streets turned into cold, silent, and eerie ones. This is because Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte had placed the country under a "State of Calamity" to respond to the threats brought about by the unexpected and rampant outbreak of the new variant of coronavirus, known as the Corona Virus Disease 2019 [COVID-19] (Official Gazette, 2020). Consequently, this declaration was accompanied by an immediate announcement of nationwide lockdowns, or commonly branded as the "enhanced community quarantine," which consists of a string of measures: (1) of social distancing, (2) travel ban, (3) stay- at-home orders, (4) prohibition of mass gatherings, and the like to prevent the spread of the virus (Tomacruz, 2020).

While experts believed that these lockdown measures are crucial to minimize the rapid spread of the virus, they also argued that they could cause serious consequences—especially on the social aspect of a person (Saladino et al., 2020). Results of different studies showed that the social relationships of individuals had been affected by the continuous lockdowns (Nicola et al., 2020; & Hao chu et al., 2020). Routines were disrupted, ability to engage in various activities was reduced, and social and physical contact with friends or relatives were prohibited; all of these caused boredom, frustration, distress, and a sense of self-isolation (Brooks et al., 2020, cited in Courtet et al., 2020). Correspondingly, Naser et al. (2020) stated that because of the rapid spread of COVID- 19, people had to detach themselves from their family, friends, and colleagues. As a result, their social relationships and ability to make qualitative connections that contribute to personal growth were detrimentally affected.

Nonetheless, some studies showed that while lockdown inhibits external social interactions, the quality of social relationships still increases, especially with immediate families and friends. Researchers pointed out that people have become more open and willing to share their feelings with people they lived closer to for quite some time (El-Zoghby et al., 2020). Likewise, Ellis et al. (2020) indicated in their study

that the closing of schools and establishments created an opportunity for emerging adults to bond and spend quality time with their family and other social relations. As they are forced to live closer, they have been given an opportunity to know, learn, and be more open about each other which provide social and emotional support to survive this battle.

People are used to meeting new people and conversing with them—actions that are key to their development. Based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), social interaction under the level of "love and belonging" is a basic human need essential to achieving a person's desire to self-actualize (Cherry, 2021). However, the feeling of being insufficiently connected to others, in the context of lockdown measures contributes to profound and lasting consequences and disruptions of the social relationships and well-being of persons.

Throughout history, although these protective measures are indeed essential for containing diseases, they may still deleteriously affect the social relationships of individuals. This was noted during the onslaught of the earlier epidemics such as the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The study of Murray et al. (2021) entitled "A community's experience during and after the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2016 in Sierra Leone: A qualitative study," showed that the outbreak had greatly affected the victims' relationships with others. For instance, the researchers' qualitative interview revealed that the relationship between husbands and wives was strained because they were unable to be intimate with one another. Since either the husband or wife acquired the Ebola disease, they were told not to touch, go near each other, or take care of their spouse. Such a situation is a taxing ordeal as they felt that they were hopeless or that their responsibilities on each other as partners were compromised. In addition, the study's results also revealed that during the outbreak, people experienced feelings of solitude as they could not go out and visit their family, friends, or significant partners, and could not welcome anyone in their homes. This proves that pandemics or epidemics, especially the safety measures associated with them, indeed inflicted significant changes in the quality of people's social relationships.

These views make it all the more important to find out the effect of lockdowns on Filipinos. The said effect will be assessed qualitatively through the lived experiences of emerging adults. This study will look into whether their social relationships have been affected negatively or positively. Doing so will not only contribute to efforts to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, but also help prepare and improve future pandemic management. Ultimately, this will ensure a more well-rounded response that will benefit most, if not all, Filipinos.

Research Questions

This study aims to determine how the COVID-19 lockdown measures affect the quality of social relationships among emerging adults of Our Lady of Fatima University-Pampanga Campus through an evaluation. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the participants towards the implemented lockdown measures?
2. What are the lived experiences of the participants during the lockdown period?
3. How do the perceptions and experiences of the participants towards lockdown measures affect their social relationships?
4. Drawing from the results, what wellness program may be proposed to improve the quality of social relationships of the participants amidst the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown measures?

Literature Review

Several studies related to COVID-19 and social relationships have indicated that the lockdown measures have impacted the quality of social relationships among different populations, both in a negative and positive manner. Hence, this section firstly reviews that since the COVID-19 lockdown already has a negative connotation, its effect on the quality of social relationships to people is aligned in a *negative* manner as well.

According to the study of Naser et al. (2020) entitled "The effect of the 2019 coronavirus disease outbreak on social relationships: A cross-sectional study in Jordan," the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly reshaped the social relationships of the respondents to various population categories. The researchers administered an online survey to 4,301 Jordan individuals, and results showed that the social relationships to friends, extended families, and colleagues were negatively impacted by the pandemic, especially the lockdown measures associated with it. The inability to go to the mall, restaurants, or movie theatres, as well as the closing of schools and other establishments where friends and colleagues could

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interact and work with each other, lessened or hampered communication and social activities between groups. This eventually strained the quality of their social relationships towards each other.

The rise of COVID-19 had an adverse effect on the family and friendship dynamics. In the study of Rogers et al. (2021), it was found out that adolescents have experienced significant changes in their social relationships, particularly with parents and friends. The pandemic hindered the adolescents from socializing with their family and friends in an outdoor setting; thus, the adolescents reported that friend support is perceived to have decreased as they still felt a lack of emotional connection despite having the means to connect and interact electronically. On the other hand, despite some families doing well during the first few months of the pandemic, adverse effects were experienced eventually due to generation difference. According to the survey results of Aggarwal et al. (2017), there is a great deal of dispute between parents and their children on how they view their relationship. It was discovered that parents usually claimed higher relationship quality, whereas children reported a relationship quality that was not as high as what their parents claimed, and the main reason for this discrepancy is a lack of communication in the context of parent-child relationship. As a result, a significant minority of adolescents had negative experiences with their relationships with their families due to the increased conflicts about personal space and differences in opinion.

The pandemic has allowed some couples to spend more time together at their homes. However, such situation gave way to the rise of changes in the dynamics of romantic relationships. A survey conducted by Sweet (2021) showed that couples struggled, and their relationship became worse because of the pandemic. Some couples reported that despite the foundation of love and respect for each other, the time they spent together made them experience increased anxiety, manifesting through anger and irritability that could cause a strain in their relationship, and being unable to go on dates make them feel that their relationships are stagnant. Additionally, lockdown negatively affected the well-being of some individuals living with their partners. In such a way that even the emotions formed outside of a specific relationship are frequently carried into romantic relationships, and are capable of causing problems to the nature of partner's social connection (Fardis, 2011).

Another thing that affects someone's relationship is

the disadvantages the technology advancement may bring. According to Quaglio and Millar (2020), relationships are more difficult to form because the internet is a poor environment for communication, particularly emotional communication, due to lack of context or deeper sense of meanings from a mere virtual message. This in turn results in the difficulty of building and maintaining effective attachments just like in face-to-face.

This paper also provides literature and evidence in line with the researchers' main participants—the emerging adults. This specific age group is more susceptible to the risks (i.e., especially on social relationships) brought about by the lockdown. As argued by Tigar (2020), emerging adults will most likely feel overwhelmed, nervous, and afraid when they do not have the freedom to do their usual activities, which can lead to taking these negative emotions out on the first person they see—be it their significant other or other members of the family. Similarly, even though no problems were raised before, members of the household have discovered that they have very different attitudes towards the lockdown-related measures. These differences in opinion have become major sources of relationship conflict, especially when one person feels the other is not being safe or is putting the household at risk. Moreover, siblings are also fighting more about the division of labor inside their home. According to the study of Prime et al. (2020), due to social disruption brought about by the lockdown measures, relationship problems between siblings arises because of the household chaos, lack of regimen, as well as excessive exposure in television because of boredom.

Thomas (as cited in Tigar, 2020) also mentioned that the lockdown measures affect one's social relationship more negatively if the foundation of their bond is already fragile prior to the pandemic. This means that whatever issues may have existed before will likely be laid open because of stressful situations such as the COVID-19 outbreak. This coincides with the study of Hall et al. (2011), in which they mentioned that individuals with friends who require a high maintenance type of relationship report more disappointment and unhappiness than those with lesser standards. This implies that a demanding relationship built even before the pandemic will likely bring grave changes to the quality of relationship during these times.

Correspondingly, it was also discovered that living conditions in terms of family arrangement—such as families with parents working full-time (i.e., on-site or

at home) and families with single parents—find the lockdown situation difficult to bear. They never seem to have enough time because they are caught up not only with parental responsibilities, but also with their work demands. The same goes for children who juggle their time between being a student and a member of the family. With that, the study's results stated that since work and school demands are more important for their survival, they are forced to spend less time with their families. These created more tension, causing their relationship to be developed undesirably (Clayton et al., 2020).

In relation to academic performance, it was proven in the study of Singh (2021) entitled, "The COVID-19: Did It Affect Students' Communication and How They Deal with It?" that students all over the world have faced academic struggles ever since the shift of educational set-up ensued, as it was discovered that the students find it challenging to concentrate during online classes because they still prefer studying in a traditional classroom setting where there is a teacher and chalkboard in front of them. In addition, one of the most remarkable challenges brought by studying online is that students are somehow unable to grasp the lessons taught online. Furthermore, many could still not deny the struggles they faced as they adjust to the unfamiliar ways of learning in the new normal.

Home confinement or stay-at-home orders is the most prominent type of restriction that affects the social relationships of people. This coincides with the study of Ammar et al. (2020), in which they found out that life satisfaction and social participation have been reduced due to home confinement guidelines. In particular, the findings indicated a 71.15% reduction in the social relationships of the respondents due to decreased family visits while the lockdown was ongoing. Whereas social participation through entertainment activities, neighbors/friend visits, religious practices, and other social groups recorded a decrease ranging from 45% to 47% as well, specifying detrimental results to the said variable. Therefore, the study concluded that home confinement has unfavorable effects since it restricts individuals from social activities which weakens the quality of their social relationships. Furthermore, there is a clear correlation between home confinement and life satisfaction. Since staying at home prevents the population sample from physically communicating with people close to them, they feel unsatisfied with their lives.

Philpot et al. (2020) also conducted a study on the changes in social relationships during the onset of

social distancing and stay-at-home orders to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The study administered a longitudinal type of survey toolkit (the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Adult Social Relationship Scales) to 1996 individuals via email during two time periods. The first assessment was administered in February 2018 where everything was still normal, while the other one was done during the time where lockdown measures were implemented in May 2020. Henceforward, the study discovered that due to the insufficiency of participation and exposure to meaningful daily life activities, such as accomplishing vigorous errands and work routines, the individuals experienced decreased emotional well-being and social support. Since they no longer socialize outside their house premises, discrepancies between actual and desired levels of social interaction occurred, which eventually led to increased loneliness (Campbell, 2020).

The garnered results of a survey conducted by Fey (2021) revealed that 27% of people felt a decrease in relationship satisfaction; 45% of people stopped dating altogether during the lockdown; and divorce application rose from 40% to 45% in just a span of few months. The findings showed how social relationships and dating evolved under the pressure of a worldwide pandemic, especially the lockdown associated with it.

On the contrary, the researchers of this study did not only focus on the negative impact, but also on the positive impact to prevent subjective bias. Hence, it also discussed several studies related to the notion that COVID-19 lockdown measures *positively* affected the quality of social relationships among different populations.

To begin with, as previously reported in the study of Naser et al. (2020), social relationships between family members are strengthened during the lockdown period. Since they are forced to stay in their homes for their safety, they become closer to one another. They spend much of their time together through communicating, comforting, and supporting one another during these challenging times. Therefore, the lockdown has enhanced their communication which fortified the resiliency among the family. It was also mentioned that greater acceptance of parental authority which follows relationship satisfaction was achieved by engaging in constant everyday conversations with each other (Schrodt, 2016). Kemp (2018) also contended that individuals will likely have less stressful, more streamlined encounters in both personal and professional life once they understand how to properly communicate with others. This implies that

communication is one of the key centers for a relationship to grow, and lockdown made it possible for that progress to be achieved.

The social relationship within the family, specifically between a parent and a child, has increased in quality amidst COVID-19 lockdown. According to Gambin et al. (2020), 459 parents determined the quality of their social relationships during the lockdown, and it showed that such circumstance created opportunities such as playing, cooking, eating meals, cuddling, making jokes, and talking about emotions within the realm of the household. These activities gave way for different families to spend more time together and enhance emotional closeness and warmth towards each other.

Clayton et al. (2020) showed how differently the implementation of the lockdown affected the families. Due to the said measures, family bonds have strengthened because of the restrictions that forbid them from going outside for work and school. This is especially true if they used to spend most of their time at work or school and now have time to hang out and build a stronger connection. The increased time together improved the family dynamics and feelings of connectedness as well. Additionally, some of the parents used the lockdown period to reflect and consider spending more time with their family. Moreover, one of the positive impacts of lockdown is the development of family resilience which leads to cooperation and close relationships (Sabo, 2020). Likewise, the lockdown has allowed families to have family conversations in which they could talk with each member. Having longer conversations with family would help them understand each other's feelings, and avoid any disagreements that could lead to arguments. Therefore, family relationships serve as a source of strength and become a safe space for the children to let out their emotions caused by the COVID-19 lockdown (Salin et al., 2020). Furthermore, according to the study of Ayuso et al. (2020), 49% of the family recognized that their relationship with their family members was improved, and 60% of younger people under 24 years old have a more optimistic outlook toward their family relationship during the lockdown.

In connection to the claim that home confinement and social distancing have adverse effects on the social relationships of people, the findings of the study by Philpot et al. (2020) also disclosed that aside from negative, the stay-at-home and social distancing protocols have a positive effect on the quality of social relationships among the respondents. They revealed

that the advantage of COVID-19 lockdown measures is that the respondents were reported to have improved social support at this point in time. Because of high stress levels, individuals indeed look for intentional seeking behaviors to obtain emotional and instrumental support, or may become more conscious of the emotional and instrumental support they are receiving even before. Thus, they now give importance to it more than ever (Paykani et al., 2020). In a similar way, according to the study of Bowen et al. (2021), dogs serve as replacement to humans because face to face interaction was restricted during COVID-19 confinement. They emphasized that social support from dogs during the COVID-19 restriction has increased and participants stated how their dogs supported and helped them to cope during the pandemic. Having pets, particularly dogs, clearly aids people in coping with stress during times of crisis because of the unconditional love and support they provide. This suggests that a social support system, which is essential for a greater quality of social relationship, is not limited to human connection only, but also transcends to other living things as well such as dogs.

Social media play a vital role in emerging adults' resiliency against the negative repercussions of lockdown measures. This is supported by the study of Gregersen et al. (2020), in which it was stated that emerging adults have come up to terms with living with the coronavirus. In a time where the usual social relationship is impossible and is challenged by the demands of the imposed lockdown measures, the emerging adults were able to find solutions to connect with others through various online platforms. In line with this, they were able to turn the challenging situation upside down to strengthen their close relationships with their family and friends, keeping them from being socially deprived and lonely. For this reason, the lockdown has turned into a positive experience for some of the emerging adults since they are in frequent contact with their friends. It is because emerging adults are more inclined with online platforms than other age groups that they were able to maintain their social relationships and communication strongly. Furthermore, Goodwin et al. (2020) mentioned that despite the home confinement restrictions and prohibition of mass gatherings, social support could still be acquired through the use of social media, such as WeChat and Weibo, which play a vital role in providing emotional and informational support. This study's evidence was gathered through a cross-sectional survey which was administered to 214 individuals from the lands of Hubei Province, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong in China.

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Frankel (2020) also stated that people were able to minimize the health consequences brought by COVID-19 since they had the opportunity to be well-informed and equipped against the invisible enemy. It was made possible because they use online platforms to help them familiarize themselves with the implemented lockdown measures, not only for themselves, but for their loved ones as well. Similarly, lockdown also led to information exchange, with younger generations seeking advice from older generations, and the latter relying on younger generations' knowledge in technology (McCarthy & Stone, 2020). This result indicated that technology played a big role in strengthening people's social relationship, even with generational differences put in between, as lockdown made way for people to rely on them in order to stay connected and informed.

Before dwelling on the main pandemic that this study focuses on, other nationwide crises can also have an adverse impact on the social relationships of individuals. The Philippines is commonly known as a country prone to natural calamities and pandemics; ranging from typhoons, earthquakes, bird flu, and HIV/AIDS, among others. For instance, aside from natural and economic changes, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991, and Mount Taal last January 2020, triggered social changes. This idea is expounded by the case analysis of Shan (2020) wherein he mentioned that these calamities encouraged Filipinos to strengthen their social bonds towards each other in the form of *Bayanihan*—a Filipino expression that depicts the act of unity and cooperation. Even when they were surrounded by darkness and ashes, residents in each area managed to lend a helping hand to one another. Even without clearer sight to their surroundings, that did not stop them from helping each other build new homes and lives from scratch. In addition, *Bayanihan* was also observed during the recent outburst of Mt. Taal, in which people could have just stayed indoors or go to evacuation centers while the ash fall is pouring, but they still chose to splash water on the windshields of other people's cars since the accumulating debris made it harder for drivers to clearly see and navigate the already slick road (Duran, 2020).

The concept of *Damayan*—the community's solidarity and camaraderie through compassion—is subsequently seen to fortify the quality of social relationships among Filipinos. In connection to this, Barrameda and Barrameda (2011) proved in their study that through *damayan*, a person's families, friends, and neighbors extend emotional support in times of calamities and unfortunate events. Furthermore, both men and women utilized the spirit of *damayan* through "group talk," in which they speak out their feelings and experiences to unload their emotional burden, anxiety, and grief brought about by the disasters. These two concepts (*Bayanihan* and *Damayan*) serve as a symbol of hope and support system that individuals can use to build up the quality of their social relationships with others.

Aside from natural calamities and epidemics, man-made conflicts also contributed a major change in the lives of Filipinos, and this is the man-made crisis called 'armed conflict', especially in the land of Mindanao. For instance, those living in conflict areas in Marawi City have suffered not only loss of life and property, but also loss of access to basic services and missed opportunities. Since then, they are forced to flee their homes for their own safety and has so far remained internally displaced persons (IDPs) for quite some time. Considering the lack of support from the government officials, they have to deal with the scarcity of food, inadequate accommodation, and lack of access to public utilities such as water and electricity (Collado, 2019). On the contrary, the researchers of this study contested that even from the pit of despair, humans have the tendency to be resilient in order to survive. And family, friends, and even neighbors play an essential role in a person's resiliency, thus, improving one's social relationships. This is related to the study of Collado (2019) with the IDPs mentioned beforehand. In the narrative statements of the IDPs, the experience with conflict improved their relationships with their family and friends. In such circumstances, people had no choice but to change their perception and rely on the people in their community in order to survive. In addition, they give more importance to their community since, at the end of the day, they can only rely on each other to survive this ordeal. Indeed, negative circumstances will sometimes cause a positive impact to an individual.

Subsequently, as this research paper emphasizes, the COVID-19 lockdown measures have affected the quality of social relationships of Filipinos. In accordance with this, Cleofas (2020) eloquently stated in his study of "Life Interruptions, Learnings and Hopes among Filipino College Students during COVID-19 Pandemic" that the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the government among Filipinos have caused greater interruptions, especially on the life of emerging adults. Thereby, through narrative analysis, the researcher gathered profound stories from five students enrolled in different colleges in Manila, which explained how their lives, specifically their social relationships, have been affected by this pandemic. Firstly, negative effects were identified such as the

experience of 'Moncy' who fell out with his girlfriend. He tried to fix it, but since lockdown measures were implemented, they restricted him to do some efforts and that eventually led to their break up. On the other hand, 'Karleen' who is a nursing student, assumed 2020 was meant to be the year for reconciliation with everyone. But since the pandemic happened, she has no choice but to cancel summer vacation plans with her families and friends. Furthermore, as travel restrictions were implemented, anniversary celebration plans with her boyfriend who's living in a different country were also put on hold. As a result, she is anxious that their relationship will be strained, and the love and affection they have for each other will be gradually gone. She also added that as a type of person who finds comfort in physical interaction and proximity with the people she has deep affection with, talking to them virtually was not good enough. Subsequently, another participant named 'John', expressed negative implications on his home life because of the lockdown. He cited that even though his father already recovered from the infectious disease, his family still implements health and safety protocols inside their home. Thus, it hindered the bonds within his family which made him feel lonely and sad. He also added that although virtual communication helps in sustaining bonds with his family and peers, it still does not equate to the quality of their social relationships pre-lockdown.

However, participants of this study also shared the learnings and positive impacts of staying-at-home orders during COVID-19 lockdown. For instance, online classes enable them to develop closer and stronger social ties with their classmates, since they are more open to help and assist one another in order to survive this new educational medium. Playing mobile online games (i.e., mobile legends) was also a way for them to maintain their social interaction with each other. They also develop empathy and increased sense of awareness by appreciating the people within their social network, and value the new life given to them. Lack of awareness adds to unfavorable attitudes and behaviors, which could result in detrimental consequences for COVID-19 management (Alahdal et al., 2020). Lastly, they developed deeper respect and importance to their social relationships that they have taken for granted before lockdown shuts down their lives (Cleofas, 2020).

Aside from lockdown making positive effects on someone's relationships with others, it also affected them in a personal level. This relates to the study of Hadzipetrova et al. (2020), where it was mentioned that due to being in lockdown for a very long time,

individuals have realized how important it is to take good care of themselves, regardless of how stressful situations they were in. This is because while they comply with different lockdown measures, especially stay-at-home, many have realized in the four corners of their home that taking care of oneself is one source of happiness, as well as it is a primary key to one's effort to be available for everyone in times of need.

Other local authors also argued that the lockdown measures, especially the social distancing, should have positive effects rather than negative ones. For instance, according to the critical journal of Bernardo and Gonzales (2020), the negative implications of social distancing are misconstrued. Social distancing does not deprive the quality of social relationships, but instead, it enhances it. For the reason that in the context of empathy, the mental connection that helps in lifting one's spirit remains strong amidst the physical disconnection to each other. They contested that now more than ever, empathy is felt even from a far-off distance. For example, in which volunteers abound, a good number of government officials are more empathetic than before, several businessmen have turned their establishments into temporary shelters, and more teachers care about their students' learning and their welfare. Furthermore, social distancing does not mean a lack of intimacy. Although the term intimacy is associated with the nearness and connectivity with others, nevertheless, the recent pandemic has helped many individuals build stronger relationships despite not seeing one another in person. Friends who have not seen each other now have a longer time to converse via social media platforms. And people seem to be more caring now that they are apart. Moreover, social distancing does not mean to shut one's doors and to be disconnected. It does not mean to live on an island alone. In fact, social distancing may be looked at as an opportunity to care for others. Front liners, for example, would rather self-isolate and bear the struggle of living far from their loved ones just to protect them from acquiring the virus. All in all, the authors argued that social distancing is only a mere standard unit of measurement (meters or feet), it should not be the absence of empathy, reduced intimacy, living in isolation, and promoting inequalities.

Home confinement and restriction of mass gathering as part of the COVID-19 lockdown measures have brought positive impact on the quality of social relationships among emerging adults. This statement relates to the study of Labrague et al. (2020) wherein their findings from 303 Filipino college students indicated that 56.7% experienced moderate levels of

loneliness during the mandatory lockdown period. However, this isolated feeling allowed them to constantly seek and consult information and social support from others. Therefore, these behaviors increase an individual's ability to endure the burden of the pandemic, and reinforce the quality of their social relationships, as they have acquired support from different association groups (family and friends). In relation, emerging adults are way more resilient in fighting against the negative implications of lockdown than older adults. As stated by the aforementioned study, even though the lockdown prevented them from going out, which resulted in losing interaction with their peers and development of social isolation, emerging adults are more flexible in combating these negative psychological consequences by coping up through the emotional and mental linkages they have built with their friends as compared to older adults since an adequate social support system from friends is more prevalent on young adults compared to others (Matthews et al., 2016).

Contrariwise, even though this paper's focus is on young adults, it did not turn a blind eye to the tremendous effects of COVID-19 on the relationship of older people. Besides, they are also the most vulnerable group to acquire the disease. This idea coincides with the study of Buenaventura et al. (2020) wherein the findings have shown that every individual is at risk of getting infected by COVID-19, and older people are also more vulnerable to this current crisis. Although they constitute less number in the Philippines' total population, a total of one-third of the cases related to COVID-19 belong to older Filipino adults. In line with that, it impacts a different aspect of a person's well-being, especially their social well-being. Filipino adults also suffer socially from the pandemic because they are not allowed to go out and to attend events that they usually attend before the lockdown, which causes a lot of unmet needs. Furthermore, older Filipino adults are known to be deeply religious (Esteban, 2015), but they could not go out due to the lockdown restrictions forcing them to attend virtual mass. Henceforth, these older Filipinos have lost their connection with their peer groups, including their churchmates and church leaders. Additionally, the lockdown restrictions keep them from meeting their family and friends, making them feel isolated. Aside from not being able to meet them physically, some elders have no access or are illiterate to technology which prevents them from connecting with other people. Social connections matter throughout the life of an individual. It is essential to a person's overall being, especially when faced with a crisis. Thus, it is essential to check up on everyone,

especially those who are vulnerable, especially both young and older adults.

On the other hand, romantic relationships have been positively impacted by this pandemic. This could connect to the study of Chalmers (2020) in which it was stated that couples who were living together and residing in the Philippines did not go through any problems with their relationship since they talked about their issues and remained respectful towards another. Furthermore, it was found out in the study of Williamson (2020) that on average, people's satisfaction with their current relationship did not change, but they have become more forgiving with their partners during these times.

The importance of staying connected amidst the pandemic will improve the sense of respect and closeness of people with one another. According to Toquero and Talidong (2020), digital technology took place and has been highly vital for the widespread use of information and guidelines that can help deal with the pandemic. Furthermore, these technologies have fulfilled the social needs of the people as they helped them establish virtual relationships and they have become a way of getting through in this uncertain time. In addition, these technologies helped in a way that emerging adults felt that they are not alone and that there is someone that they can always go and talk to. Also, these emerging technologies served as a platform for support groups and rapid dissemination of information regarding the pandemic (Antonucci et al., 2017). Hence, digital technologies and the internet made way for the continuity of social relations.

The aforementioned relevant studies and literature does not only help the researchers situate their work in relation to the existing knowledge, but also enable them to build a clear, significant, and in-depth framework for their study. Furthermore, they also help prove or disprove the findings, as well as arguments of the different authors cited above, in order to conceptualize and draw understanding on the entire research process.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers utilized the exploratory qualitative research design in exploring the phenomenon in this study. This design is used in order to obtain in-depth information since the phenomenon is new and not much is known yet about it. Thus, this research design

is used to gain additional insights and better understand the participants' lived experiences and perceptions, which served as valuable inputs and guides in understanding how their social relationships had been affected by COVID-19 lockdown measures.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Our Lady of Fatima University-Pampanga Campus. The researchers chose the aforementioned site as the main locale because it was accessible and was a convenient setting for conducting online interviews. The university has been able to adapt quickly in the online class setting and it offers access to major resources relevant to the study. In line with this, the excellent credibility of the university gave access to the researchers to collect accurate information regarding the quality of social relationships among emerging adults. The findings of the study could serve as a valuable resource for the university in creating an intervention or activities with an aim of strengthening the quality of social relationships of the students.

Population and Sampling

This study focuses primarily on exploring whether COVID-19 lockdown has a negative or positive effect on the quality of social relationships. It was administered to emerging adults of Our Lady of Fatima University-Pampanga Campus whose ages range from 18 to 25 years old, enrolled at the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022. A total of thirteen (13) participants were chosen to join the study. This was grounded on Whitehead and Whitehead's (2016) view that the common range of participants in phenomenological qualitative research is between 8 to 20 participants. Thus, the 13 participants that the researchers had selected are within the criteria.

In the process of selection, purposive sampling technique was employed to choose the most suitable emerging adults. This technique provided an opportunity to the researchers to have a diverse method of getting participants in line with the needs and purpose of the research (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In such a way wherein to qualify a person as an emerging adult, the five distinctive features, such as age of possibilities, identity explorations, self-focus, instability, and feeling-in- between were used as an inclusion criteria. Whereas those who did not perceived themselves with those features, especially the feeling-in-between, were automatically excluded from the study.

Research Instrument

In order to elicit information on how COVID-19 lockdown measures affect the quality of social relationships among emerging adults, the researchers administered a semi-structured interview to gather in-depth and concrete data. The interview has 18 questions, excluding rapport- related questions and follow-up questions, geared towards the attainment of the objectives of the study. The first 5 questions are aligned to the statement of the problem (SOP) 1. The said questions aim to know the perceptions and feelings of the participants about the lockdown measures that were implemented in their area. The succeeding 5 questions which investigate the lived experiences of emerging adults during the lockdown period are related to SOP 2. While SOP 3 also has 5 questions which seek to determine how lockdown measures affected their social relationships with their primary groups. Moreover, the last 3 questions focus on the emerging adults' ways on how to enhance the quality of social relationships. Results of this interview were then be compiled and analyzed to understand the phenomenon and form a wellness program to help improve the quality of social relationships disrupted by COVID-19 lockdown measures.

The interview questions that were designed for this study was subjected to a validation process for content validity. Experts validated the items or questions crafted by the researchers to ascertain the appropriateness and adequacy of the instrument. Afterwards, the researchers took into consideration useful observations and suggestions by the experts to get concise and organized research instrument. In line with this, the interview questions prepared by the researchers were validated by three experts who are either registered psychometricians or have a master's degree in psychology or research.

Research Ethics

This study adhered to the Psychology Code of Ethics provided by the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP, 2017). The researchers followed the ethical guidelines by obtaining the accomplished informed consent forms from the participants after explaining relevant facts and implications of the study. According to this practice, informed consent intends to ensure that participants have the freedom to either take part or withdraw from the study at any time (PAP, 2017, Section 3). Furthermore, the instrument used for this research was administered through the use of an online platform (Google Meet) instead of a face-to-face interview to avoid the possible risk of acquiring

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or spreading the COVID-19 virus. Moreover, under the *Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples*, the researchers made sure that each interview question had no offensive and biased content, as the researchers are obliged to always give respect to the participants' dignity and feelings (PAP, 2017, Principle 1). In addition, under the section of confidentiality, the researchers are expected to carry out their duty of protecting any data gathered from the participants. This means that the identity, beliefs, and personal opinions of participants should all be kept safe and used solely for the research study (PAP, 2017, Section 4). Hence, all of the information shared by the participants were never and would never be used for other purposes. Furthermore, the researchers ensured not to cause any problems on the participants' duties and studies. PAP's ethical practices were also observed throughout the research process.

Data Collection

The researchers personally conducted the administration of semi-structured interview. Henceforth, the following step by step procedures were strictly followed:

1. The researchers provided a letter of request addressed to the institutional heads humbly seeking permission to conduct the research undertaking.
2. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique to get the representative subset of the population that provided the best information and primary data to support this paper.
3. The participants were recruited through an online publication with detailed specifications on the criteria that reflected eligibility for participation; also, a Google form link, along with a QR code, was attached for anonymous registration means.
4. The publication was posted on a social media platform, particularly, on Facebook.
5. After reaching the target number of participants, the researcher provided informed consent in order to gain their approval to participate in the study. Likewise, the participants were informed that their participation would be completely voluntary, and withdrawing in the middle of the research process would not be prohibited.
6. Subsequently, the researchers conducted the actual interview through Google Meet, guided by the questions that were validated by the experts. This was done in consideration of the restrictions under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
7. Correspondingly, the interview was administered based on the respective schedules of the participants to avoid getting rushed responses, for sufficient data for the study is vital. Hence, a 40-minute to 1 hour timeframe had been allotted per interview.
8. To ensure accuracy and completeness of their answers, the researchers asked permission from the participants for the interview to be recorded.
9. Afterwards, the researchers transcribed the answers of the participants, which later on were arranged and analyzed through thematic analysis to answer all the research problems of the study.

Data Analysis

The study delved into the occurrences understood and experienced by the participants on how COVID-19 lockdown measures affected the quality of their social relationships. In analyzing the collected data, the researchers used a *thematic analysis* in order to organize a large amount of qualitative data into themes related to the study. By doing so, the researchers were able to extract all key information in a well-structured approach, helping to produce a clear and organized final report that satisfies the research objectives.

Result

Participants' Perception to Covid-19 Lockdown Measures

Based on the data gathered, participants who underwent interviews shared their perception towards the implemented lockdown measures. Perception plays a vital role in a person's behavior for the reason that it allows people to gather important cues from their surroundings and apply them to understand the attitudes and behaviors that they experience internally (Dico, 2018). Moreover, participants' perception towards the lockdown measures played a major role in their compliance.

Theme 1: Safety

Participants ascribed the implemented lockdown measures as protection and safety for themselves and the people around them. Thus, these reports:

"Parang pag naririnig ko po kasi yan, yung mga tao po is kumbaga naririnig ko po is safety po yung unang

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pumapasok po sa isip ko, kasi po kumbaga po yung mga yan po yung, mga lockdown measures implemented in the Philippines po parang sila po yung mga safety measurement para po hindi kumalat yung COVID, kumbaga para hindi na po dumami yung case ganun po." Participant 8

"Naging lesson na rin po sakin siguro, na once hindi ko sinunod yung lockdown measure na yun, parang pwede mong ikapahamak." Participant 2

These lockdown measures were mainly interpreted to help mitigate the rapid spread of the virus in order to prevent people from acquiring it. Furthermore, compliance with these lockdown measures was essentially viewed as protection, in which if one did not follow, more people would be put at risk. This coincides with the study of Kharroubi and Saleh (2020), which stated that it is important for these measures to remain in place as they were proven to have a critical and major influence, as well as being extremely effective in protecting the public's health. In the local setting, perceived effectiveness of Filipinos to lockdown measures was reported in the investigation of Pajaron and Vasquez (2021), wherein the stricter the implementation of such measures, the more COVID-19 incidence and death are reduced effectively, thereby resulting to more Filipinos complying since they are for their own safety.

Therefore, this theme consists of the participants' views about the implemented lockdown measures. They are interpreted as a safety and protection of the Filipino people. Things happened abruptly, but the participants' have a positive outlook about these implemented lockdown measures as they view them as a way of minimizing the cases and preventing the widespread of the disease. It suggests that it is extremely important that Filipinos must help in the battle against the pandemic adding to the government's effort to lessen its effect amongst individuals and to the economy.

Participants' Lived Experiences During Lockdown

Findings show that the lockdown both positively and negatively affected the participants' lived experiences during the lockdown. The positive effect shows that the participants could spend more time with their families, resulting in realizations on how important it is to always prioritize their social relationships with their loved ones in this uncertain time of the pandemic. On the other hand, lockdown undeniably made people experience challenges and hindrances in their daily lives while complying with the measures implemented

with it. In line with this, three main themes emerged to further explain the lived experiences of the participants during the lockdown period.

Theme 2: Challenging Emotions

The sudden surge of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought rough and challenging times. Many of those living their normal lives had experienced an unexpected change to their emotions, and they felt different negative feelings about what might happen to them during the lockdown period. To further understand this theme, the following statements are thus reported:

"Yung pinaka-una natakot kami kasi first, first ever ko ma experience yun so hindi ko alam kung anong ini-expect ko, hindi ko alam kung anong mangyayari sa lockdown na yun." Participant 3

"Pero nung tumagal na, nandon na po yung parang nafi-feel mo na parang ang boring na sa bahay ganon, nakakalungkot na po. Don na po nakaka-ano na parang "ih baket ganon hindi na ako nakakalabas" sobrang ano, hindi mo na nakikita yung mga kaibigan mo. Hindi naman lahat laging online ganon, so yun po." Participant 13

These findings are similar to the findings in the study of Brooks et al. (2020), in which it was shown that the lockdown disrupted routines which reduced the people's ability to engage in various activities, and prohibited social and physical contact with friends or relatives. This, in turn, caused boredom, frustration, distress, and a sense of self-isolation (as cited in Courtet et al., 2020). It was shown how the lockdown period affected the participants' emotions as they went through a time of uncertainty. On the contrary, the findings opposed the study of Matthews et al. (2016), wherein even though the implementation of lockdown measures hindered the respondents from going outside and making the most out of their lives, emerging adults were reported to be more flexible and efficient in combating negative psychological consequences because of their resourcefulness in doing activities suitable for the lockdown.

Further results showed that the participants have experienced sadness and worry as initial reactions to the sudden announcement of the lockdown because despite being confined within the safe space of their homes, there were times that they felt anxious and doubtful towards the uncertainties of the lockdown which they might run into. Moreover, the sense of

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being separated from the loud and busy outdoors created a repetitive pattern of daily activities causing feelings of boredom; and reminiscing the good old days is one way to ease these emotions for the time being. With that, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the way they think, and life in lockdown indeed had a significant impact on the individuals' emotions.

The relation of this particular theme in this study is that when talking about social relationships, emotions undoubtedly play a significant role. Emotions can define a person's relationship with another person, but they can also separate the two persons. To begin with, relationships become more stable when people are experiencing great emotions internally, as they are the driving force in building positive emotional connection with others. Furthermore, emotions and their expressions inform others about one's sentiments, goals, thoughts, as well as communicating the nature of interpersonal relationships since they have this communicative signal value. However, if lockdown has brought challenging emotions to people, they might also experience difficulty in building high quality social relationships with others. This coincides with the study of Fardis (2011), which stated that even the emotions formed outside of a specific relationship are frequently carried into romantic relationships, and are capable of causing problems to the nature of partner's social connection. In conclusion, when one's emotions successfully influence the course of communication vital for a relationship, a high quality of relations would prevail and eventually flourish, but then again, lockdown inhibits this process.

With that being said, managing emotions is very important thing to do during this time. As it was stated that it allows someone to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. Moreover, it plays a vital role in one's daily life, and it is an important thing when it comes to social relationship because emotions affect how someone interacts with the people around them. It is for this reason that individuals can better understand others and make the most out of their relationships if they know how to manage their emotions, as uncontrolled emotions can take a toll on their social relationships. Furthermore, when asked what ways the participants could give to manage challenging emotions, some came up with things to do during the lockdown, in which a participant shared that he or she took a moment to reflect and list down his or her thoughts at the end of the day. Listing down thoughts seemed effective as it helped in making them improve and feel better. Another activity was setting a specific

day wherein they could do all the things they want to do. Having time for one's self is suitable for establishing a healthy routine, which is particularly important when some aspects of life are uncertain, especially during the pandemic. Doing these activities that resonated with them helped the participants to maximize the management of their emotions on every level possible.

Theme 3: Changes and Struggles

The nationwide lockdown is considered to have wreaked havoc to individuals worldwide due to its consequences that have caused a reorganization in people's daily lives (Sakshi, 2020). Furthermore, as participants shared the struggles that they have encountered, it was evident that this lockdown period indeed caused many troubles. Based on the interview, the participants shared such struggles, specifically participants 2 and 5:

"Yung po yung isa po sigurong naging pasakit din po samin, saken. Sa establishment po may business po kami then napasara din po yun." Participant 2

The closure of borders and different establishments brought evident changes to people's lives, most specifically in business activities. After the Philippines implemented ECQ, many business industries, either big or small, have experienced difficulties in terms of their source of income (Shinozaki & Rao, 2021). It was also stated by some of the participants that this lockdown caused a huge toll on them because it has greatly affected their basis of living. However, aside from the disruption of businesses, participants also expressed the challenges of having limited ways to handle various things that they wanted to do; such as social distancing in particular which hinders them from expressing their love, for it prevents them to hug, hold, and get near their loved ones. Moreover, because of stay-at-home and travel ban lockdown measures, some of the participants reported that they experienced deprivation of sincere enjoyment as they could not go to places as easy as before, and worst, loss of family members, friends, or any individuals whom they have close relations with was also encountered. This has caused devastation on the part of the participants as they grieved at the sudden passing of loved ones. On the other hand, the onset of COVID-19 lockdown has also brought challenges to the students. The abrupt shift of educational setup from face-to-face to online classes has left the students struggling. To better understand, the following statements from the participants highlights the academic struggles that they experienced during this time:

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"Online class na talaga yung gap parang sobrang layo kase tayo used tayo sa traditional, I think yung most parang pinaka masayang part sa face-to-face is yung socialization." Participant 5

"Pag dito, kahit nag-e-exam ako, kahit anong explain ko na "Ma hindi ako pwedeng umalis sa quiz, ma-e-exit ako ganyan. Hindi pwede, kapag tinawag ako dapat lalabas talaga ako. Minsan nag-di-discuss, nasa palengke ako, ganyan. So, hindi ako maka focus nang maayos." Participant 3

These findings revealed that the lockdown has certainly affected students' education due to the closure of schools. In addition, there has been a disruption of communication between classmates and teachers. In the study of Singh (2021), it discussed that students have faced academic struggles ever since the shift of the new educational setup has ensued. Similarly, the participants reported that online schooling has greatly affected their learning abilities, for the reason that they do not have access to an actual laboratory or training ground to hone their skills as future professionals. Furthermore, students found it challenging to concentrate during online classes because they still prefer studying in a traditional classroom setting where there is a teacher and board in front of them, thereby students are somehow unable to grasp the lessons effectively. Moreover, studying at home is collided with household responsibilities. Since their parents have this thinking that they no longer need to go and attend an actual class at school, they were more obliged to continue with the chores even while studying. This caused greater difficulty to some as everyone is not good at multitasking. With that, most of the participants' academic performance turned poor because of the adjustments that they had to deal with in order to adapt to the virtual approach of learning.

Although lockdown was implemented mainly for the sake of everyone's safety and welfare, it was evidently proved that the participants went through changes and struggles during the lockdown. In addition, since many have already lost lives due to the onset of the pandemic, the participants no longer get to enjoy life that much because of the possibility of putting themselves and other people's lives in danger. All in all, lockdown made life struggles double than usual because of the limitations brought by the lockdown that the participants have experienced.

Theme 4: Realizations

In times of hardships, individuals were known to be more reflective of the decisions they make in their daily lives. Through this kind of mindset, participants were able to know themselves more because of the plenty of time they have to observe and identify who they are, and how they value people surrounding them during the lockdown period. In connection, the lockdown has taught many people to consider the pandemic as a gateway of gaining new life lessons that can help improve their thoughts and learn not to take advantage of their life opportunities (Gill, 2020). Hence, participant 8 testified:

"Number one realization ko po diyan is yung self-love, kumbaga po people always come and go po. Hindi po pwede yung 'ay gusto ko andyan ka lang… diyan ka lang!' Kumbaga aalis at aalis po sila kung gusto po nilang umalis ganon po. And parang mas pinaniwalaan ko po yung sarili ko na mas may i-i-improve pa po ako ganon, na through self-love po natutunan ko po na parang may ano pa po ako… potential to overcome po lahat ng mga difficulties na nararanasan ko ngayon. And dito rin po na sa lockdown rin po na-realize ko po na na mas naging importante po yung health, kumbaga… mapa-physically, emotionally, and mental po talagang importante po sila equally. Walang lamang. Kumbaga they are all important po ganon po. And syempre po, naging importante rin po sakin yung ngayong lockdown yung social relationship ko po with my family kasi po naisip ko po na iiwan lang po ako ng ibang tao pero yung family ko po, hindi po gagawin sakin yon. Kumbaga sila po nandyan lang po sila sakin pero yung ibang tao kahit umalis na pero yung family ko po hinding-hindi po ako iiwan." Participant 8

Findings showed that by going through deep and helpful reflections during the lockdown period, participants were able to form competent realizations about life during COVID-19—and this specific theme is also the positive indication of lived experiences of the participants after encountering lockdown measures. This relates to the study of Hadzipetrova et al. (2020), wherein being in lockdown for a very long time, individuals have realized how important it is to take good care of themselves, regardless of how stressful situations they were in. This is because while they comply with different lockdown measures, especially stay-at-home, many have realized in the four corners of their home that taking care of oneself is a source of happiness, as well as it is a primary key to one's effort to be available for everyone in times of need.

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Moreover, this pandemic also taught individuals to love themselves and live the moment without thinking of the past or the future, as it was explained that it is important to stay positive, and love and appreciate the good things even when facing unending life challenges. Subsequently, these realizations made by the participants served as a way to build a strong quality of social relationships with their loved ones, due to the fact that having realizations leads to a better attitude and fellowship of an individual. The realization of appreciating the presence of the family or any loved ones during COVID-19 made the participants value and prioritize them even more because they are the ones who will never leave them in this time of pandemic.

Effect of Lockdown on the Quality of Social Relationships

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an influence on people all across the world. Governments around the world have tried to prevent its spread by implementing public health initiatives such as the nationwide restriction of social movements through lockdowns. Although lockdowns evidently slow the transmission of the virus, they also limit people's in-person social encounters. Moreover, this limitation brought varying impacts on the quality of social relationships among the emerging adults in this particular study—either it got strengthened, maintained, or it reduced their sense of social connectedness.

Among the types of relationships, this study focused on emerging adults' primary groups: family, friendships, and romantic relationships. In accordance with this, the general findings of the interview and data analysis indicated that when it comes to family, the quality of social relationships both strengthened and weakened. However, there were more accounts that testified that their relationships were positively affected by the lockdown. On the other hand, for friendships, data analysis showed that no relationships were strengthened during the lockdown instead, they were either maintained or weakened. Lastly, for those who have romantic partners, relationships were unfortunately weakened or led to break-ups.

In line with this, the subsequent paragraphs are the themes derived from the testimonies of the informants which would explain why the quality of social relationships with their different primary groups attained such diverse findings.

Theme 5: Communication

Communication is considered as a mechanism through which people establish and maintain relationships in the study of human relations. For many participants, the lockdown, alongside its associated measures, affected the communication process with their primary groups, both positively and negatively.

Two out of the six sub-themes highlighted that the quality of their social relationships was strengthened because they have good communication with each other. Thus, the reports:

"Yung sa family po, dati po kumbaga hindi po kami nakakapag open sa isa't-isa or hindi po kami nakakapag-usap talaga pero nung nag lockdown po, nasa lowest din po ako so parang natuto po kaming mag open sa isa't-isa and parang dahil sa news po nakikita po namin na may mga nagsu-suicide po ganon dahil sa hirap ng lockdown. So, yung mother ko po ine-encourage po kami na mag open po lagi sa kanya ganon." Participant 8

"Ayun po parang mas na-strengthen na lang din po yung relationship namin together dahil po sama-sama kami, walang ibang ginagawa kasi 'di ba po parang nag

academic break din po nun, ilan months din po tayong hindi nagkaroon ng klase." Participant 10

According to the study of Schrodt (2016), greater acceptance of parental authority which follows relationship satisfaction was achieved by engaging in constant everyday conversations with each other. In this regard, it came into attention that everyday conversations, either casual or in a deeper sense, during stay-at-home periods are symbolic forces in creating and sustaining social relationships. Such discourse serves as an indicator of the relationship quality. Furthermore, the closure of schools made students to stop thinking about school work. Thus, allowing them to focus their attention only to their family, relatively strengthened their relationship. This result was in contrast with the findings in the study of Clayton et al. (2020), wherein school demands created more tension, causing parent-child relationship to be developed undesirably.

On the contrary, negative communication resulting in decreased social relationship quality was also observed. This relates to the statement of participant 13:

"Mas lalo pong 'di nakapag open. Kasi po ano parang

hindi importante yung ano mo yung sinasabi mo, yung problem mo ganon. 'Pag nagshi-share kayo ganon parang 'mas inuuna mo pa yan may mas malaking problema, bakit uunahin mo pa yan?' so, instead na mag-open ka hindi ka na mag-o-open." Participant 13

Family is the basic unit to which people of all ages initially come for information, assistance, and pleasant interaction. Hence, it is worth noting that having good communication with family would help its members to understand each other's feelings, and avoid any disagreements that could lead to arguments (Salin et al., 2020). However, being dismissive, especially within the context of lockdown where concerns and issues are highly increasing, was one of the main reasons why social relationships have been affected negatively during these times. Furthermore, occasional conversations (i.e., catching up or messaging others only during special occasions) were more apparent because of the distance the lockdown has put in between. With that being said, people who seldom communicate could experience problems with intimacy and relational growth. This specific finding implies that true connection could be acquired when individuals have comprehended other's inner world, and vice versa; but if they communicate less, relationships could not advance, resulting to people growing apart over time.

COVID-19 has undeniably hampered this multifaceted process as it restricts physical interactions, which are essential for opening a substantial conversation with others. However, it is also a unique asset for every individual because it presents them an opportunity to reverse a complex situation and turn it to their favor. And to do that, having family, friends, or anyone to talk to and listen to life struggles is very helpful. Now that the lockdown period hampers physical and social interactions, open communication is one thing that should be considered in order to save people from loneliness and difficulties, and most importantly, the importance of communication cannot be overstated because it is one of the most important components in maintaining a healthy relationship throughout time.

Theme 6: Quality Time

Quality time is the time spent in giving one's undivided attention to loved ones, in such a way that it deepens the relationship (Milek, 2015). Quality time could be achieved by making connection a daily priority with loved ones through different activities to strengthen the bond. In this regard, different participants stated that:

"Ta's nung ano nung nag lockdown nga po, na-implement yung lockdown, sabi niya samin (mother) na parang ang saya niya kasi hindi na siya ganun mag-isa, kasi dati every afternoon or uwian lang namin siya nakakasama po, yun po. Ngayon mas nakakapag-gather po kami and nagiging mas close po kami sa isa't-isa as family po dahil simula breakfast hanggang dinner nagkakasama na po." Participant 6

"Every day po talagang dahil sabay sabay na pong kumakain nagkaroon po talaga ng bonding moments. Kumbaga yung mga stories na gusto kong i-share nasi-share ko na unlike before. Parang nakakatawa nga po e parang hindi mo pa pala talaga sila kakilala before, unlike ngayon nagkaroon po kayo ng mas maraming time together so parang with that mas nakilala po namin yung isa't-isa" Participant 10

Social connectedness by spending time together can assist parents and children in reducing stress, increasing productivity, and creating meaningful family moments amidst the coronavirus crisis. These accounts are affirmed in the study of Gambin et al. (2020), where 459 parents determined the quality of their social relationships through different activities such as playing, cooking, eating meals, cuddling, making jokes, and talking about emotions within the realm of the household, thus creating opportunities to spend more time together and enhance emotional closeness and warmth with one another. In addition, closing of schools and establishments created an opportunity for emerging adults to bond and spend quality time with their family and other social relations since they are forced to live closer for a long period of time. They got to know, learn, and be more open to each other because of lockdown (Ellis et al., 2020).

When no effort is taken to ensure that time is set aside to actually enjoy each other's company, a relationship of any kind is likely to slip away. In some cases, one may misinterpret a lack of quality time as a sign that the other is no longer committed to the partnership, resulting to a total breakup. As a result, making time for your relationships is one of the most effective ways to strengthen and maintain them, and quality time was easily achieved during the lockdown period since people were forced to stay at home. They somehow reversed this complex situation into something productive with their loved ones, strengthening their relationship with one another.

However, despite the lockdown's effects to bringing people close together, each and every one has a different lifestyle and living conditions, especially if

distance hinders such relations. Hence, negative experiences towards one's social relationships, especially romantic ones, are inevitable. Participant 2 and 8 stated:

"Before the lockdown po I had... nagkaroon po ako ng girlfriend ng four years. Nag-break kami ng December... na parang because of [lockdown], hindi kami nagkikita ng ilang buwan, so meron sumuko talaga." Participant 2

"Ang nadistract lang po talaga yung relasyon. Yun po siguro po hindi lang po kami... dahil dun sa relationship na yun hindi lang siguro sanay na hindi parang every week or every three times a week nagkikita." Particpant 6

The presence of physical intimacy in people's lives has a significant impact on their overall well-being since a mere touch corresponds to a strong sense of being accepted and cared for. Implementing lockdown measures, especially stay-at-home and travel ban, reduces such emotional benefits which could lead to a deficient relationship quality. Similarly, Sweet (2021) mentioned that couples struggled, and their relationship became worse due to the pandemic, because despite the foundation of love and respect for each other, being unable to go on dates personally made them feel that their relationships were stagnant. This has also been previously assessed in the survey conducted by Fey (2021), where 45% of respondents stopped dating altogether during the lockdown, and divorce applications increased from 40% to 45% in just a few months. The data shed light on how social interactions and dating evolved in the face of a global pandemic, particularly the ensuing lockdown. These findings suggest that the distance caused by lockdown could result to a feeling wherein social relationship would not develop because physical interaction, which is essential in building deeper sense of connection, is decreased.

With the statements of the informants, it can be concluded that quality time in which by also doing different activities daily such as bonding over food or watching movies are vital to one's social relationships. Furthermore, other activities that the participants have done are using personal hobbies to bond with others (i.e., mobile gaming). This suggests that being able to do their hobbies with their primary groups helped them feel connected and release stress. Consequently, all these activities may appear simple, yet they are undoubtedly helpful to the participants as they have helped them manage relationship with their loved ones.

Theme 7: Low Maintenance Type of Friendship

Aside from a strengthened and weakened quality of social relationship during lockdown, other participants have maintained their connections with their friends. One of the main reasons for this result is the practice of a low maintenance type of relationship way before COVID-19 struck the world. In fact, five (5) out of thirteen (13) participants testified that the more undemanding the relationship is, the more it will stay and flourish. For instance:

"Walang nagbago sa best friend ko. Kami kasi low maintenance like kami yung klase na mag-iwan ng chat sa isa't-isa kahit isang linggong 'di magreply walang magagalit samin. So, maintain lang kami basta ang ano namin kapag gusto mag vent out mag-aano kami voice note." Participant 4

"Yes. One thing I love about my friends is just that mawawalan kami ng connection, ng communication, pero when we meet each other, the bond, the vibe is still there. Parang walang nagbago." Participant 12

Expectations to some sort of what a relationship ought to be drive individuals to provide standards for how current and future social relationships are judged. Initially, in relation to the theme "quality time" above, extending daily connections to others is essential in order to have a greater sense of relationships, but contrary to this specific belief, low-maintenance friendships exist. According to Hall et al. (2011), higher expectations lead to more disappointment. Therefore, individuals who have friends who require a high maintenance type of relationship (i.e., daily conversation, upset over late reply, unreciprocated effort from others) report more disappointment and unhappiness than those with lesser standards.

This explains that the social relationship between friends during lockdown was maintained due to the fact they built a deeper sense of connection even way before social interactions were hampered. They have this kind of friendship in which they do not have to call each other every day to keep up with their activities, and despite the shifting connection, they still remember how important they are to each other. This also indicates that distance has nothing to do with the quality of their relationship as they did not rely much on the physical aspect of the relationship, but on the emotional level—meaning, even if they do not see and interact with each other physically, nothing changes towards their treatment to one another. Now that

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borders are closed and the pandemic stretches, distance grows wider with each passing moment, people should also look forward to practicing low-maintenance types of relationships wherein people expect should less from any of their associations, yet still making efforts to give quality time and utmost care to them. That is reaching the point where the so-called lockdown distance vanishes and stops presenting itself as a hindrance to achieving comforting and stress-free relationships.

Theme 8: Virtual Relationship

The ubiquitous presence of advancement of technology today is a significant difference between the present COVID-19 pandemic and the previous epidemics. People can stay in touch with others in new ways because of modern technology. Consequently, all of the major digital platforms and social media platforms have noted a worldwide surge in the use of internet tools during the coronavirus lockdown (Perez, 2020). However, these technology tools can serve as both a social connector and divider. Social connectedness can be attained through online platforms. Thus, few participants stated:

"*Super dami po since ano like sa friends po, stay at home yun ate kaya talagang super… hindi na kami… I mean frequent na lang talaga yung bonding pero by social media na they cheer me up through mga calls, phone calls ganun po.*"Participant 11

"*Sa mga friends ko po ganon, since hindi po kami nagkikita, parang yung pinaka social relationship lang po namin ganon, parang virtual. Pero nagtutulungan kami. Halimbawa yung mga activities mahirap ganon or minsan pag major exam nagrereview po kami via Gmeet. Group study.*"Participant 1

Online platforms such as messenger, Google meet, and the likes play a vital role on why emerging adults have come up to terms with living with the coronavirus. Gregersen et al. (2020) reinforced these findings in which they stated that in a time where the usual social relationship is impossible and is challenged by the demands of the imposed lockdown measures, the emerging adults were able to find solutions to connect with others through various online platforms—keeping them from being socially deprived and lonely. For this reason, the lockdown has turned into a positive experience for some of the participants since they were in frequent contact with their friends through social media. Additionally, these technologies contributed to the sense of feeling of not being alone and it also provided emotional support. In this way, people's social requirements were met, for technologies allowed them to form virtual relationships and they served as a means of coping in this uncertain time (Toquero & Talidong, 2020).

On the contrary, aside from technology being a social connector for some, it could also be a social divider—ranging from miscommunication, flat and inauthentic connection, and unengaged individuals. Consequently, six (6) out of thirteen (13) participants attested that virtual relationships were incomparable to face-to-face interactions as they did not guarantee a deep sense of connection and love. Specifically, participant 2 and 9 stated that:

"*In terms of my friends, I feel like kahit nag-ca-call kami, every once in a while, there's that feeling na… even though… like you can tell that they're there, like there's a connection through social media, ganun, there are times kasi…I'm not sure if this is like a common thing, pero para sa akin, it can get kind of draining. Because it doesn't feel like it's really spending time with anyone. My friends and I talked about this recently na there's like a part of you that can tell, you're staying in a monitor the entire time… even if there are familiar voices, even if there are a lot of them, you're not making any form of memories. Same goes with my boyfriend, I feel like if you ask me to remember like some part or point of our relationship within the last year, I couldn't really give you a solid memory. 'Cause everything is just the same, I'm just talking to someone in front of my screen.*" Participant 9

"*Kunwari po meron po misunderstanding ganyan. Hindi ko po parang ma-explain through chat… yung ano na… yung pino-point out ko po. Minsan po nami-misinterpret po nila. Yung po yung one thing na sigurong dun ako nahirapan.*" Participant 2

It was evident that people became more social as technology advanced, but the style and link towards each other dramatically changed as well— they tend to be weak links, in the sense that people do not feel as personally connected to the individuals on the other end of the virtual conversation. As a result, even though online platforms made it possible for people to communicate easily and efficiently, it may not have formed the best quality a relationship ought to have. This is echoed by the findings of Quaglio and Millar (2020), in which it was mentioned that relationships are more difficult to form because the internet is a poor

environment for communication, particularly emotional communication, due to lack of context or deeper sense of meanings from a mere virtual message. This in turn could result in the difficulty of building and maintaining effective attachments just like in face-to-face. Additionally, Rogers et al. (2020) has a similar study reiterating that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the adolescents from socializing with their family and friends in an outdoor setting; as a result, the adolescents reported that friend support had decreased because they still felt a lack of emotional connection despite having access to electronic communication and interaction.

There is no doubt that the online world, brought about by the never-ending advancement of technology, has helped every human to communicate better. People interacted more than ever before, compared to pre-internet times. However, while it helps in building fast connections with individuals on the other side of the world, it also puts them at risk as they could not attain the best quality type of social relationship everyone is deserving of.

Discussion

Participants' perceptions of the lockdown measures influenced their compliance. As a result, the theme of safety has emerged in the study. The majority of participants believed that these lockdown procedures were adopted for the protection of everyone. Lockdown has both beneficial and bad effects on the lives of participants. When the participants saw how much time they had to spend with their loved ones during the lockdown period, they realized just how critical it is during this uncertain time to prioritize their social interactions with those they care about. Contrarily, individuals were also forced to endure hardships and inconveniences of the lockdown and the measures that were put in place. As a result, challenging emotions, changes and struggles, and realizations have emerged which helped understand the experiences of participants throughout the lockdown period. With that, this pandemic was proven to not only give a one side effect to the participant's life, as it is always backed up with two sides, known as the positive and negative experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have an impact on individuals, in which although the fact that lockdowns seem to be slowing the virus' spread, they also restrict people's social interactions. For this research, this constraint had a wide-ranging effect, either strengthening, maintaining, or weakening the social

connectivity among the young people studied. This research had solely concentrated on the major categories of connections for emerging adults: family, friendships, and romantic partnerships.

According to the results of the interview and data analysis, the quality of social interactions, when it comes to family, showed both enhanced and weakened relationships. However, positive quality of social relationships was more evident to family members as they had more time to bond during the lockdown period, which led to a stronger communication and attachment vital for one's relationship quality. Furthermore, data research revealed that no friendships were strengthened during the lockdown; it was only either maintained or weakened, and this is due to the fact that they have already established deeper connections to their friends, and the pandemic failed to easily make them grow apart from one another. Also, technology and the internet have become their essential tools to reconnect, yet while they help in building fast connections with individuals, they also put them at risk as they could not attain the best quality type of social relationship everyone is deserving of. Lastly, many people had romantic relationships which unfortunately ended because of the distance brought about by the lockdown between couples. All in all, communication, quality time, low maintenance friendships, and virtual relationships gleaned from participants' testimonies shed light on why such diverse results were attained when it comes to the quality of social connections across the informants' various major groupings.

The researchers have constantly mentioned that an individual's subjective impression to lockdown measures have a favorable and unfavorable effects on the quality of social relationships, and this is according to Mehrabian and Russell's Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. The S-O-R framework is useful in this research and it proposes a huge relevance since the theory offers a rationale for researching the effects of lockdowns on the surrounding environment. Furthermore, lockdown measure may be examined as a mediator or organism that affects the participants' subjective experience of lockdown measures, thus, the quality of social relationships among emerging adults who have been subjected to lockdown measures were assessed. By showing that people's emotions, behaviors, and interactions with others rely on the meaning and perceptions they give to stimuli in this manner, the research would benefit the area of psychology.

All in all, the implementation of lockdown measures,

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or the lockdown in general, has relatively affected the quality of social relationships—in both positive and negative ways—among the interviewed emerging adults. And through the use of qualitative research method, these results were obtained, described, and explained in a deep and substantial manner, resulting for the literature gap that the researchers have found to be fulfilled.

Conclusion

COVID-19 lockdown measures indeed had a significant effect on the quality of social relationships among emerging adults of Our Lady of Fatima University-Pampanga Campus. This study has established that the COVID-19 lockdown both positively and adversely influenced the targeted population's social connection.

1. Most participants perceived that the lockdown was for everyone's safety.
2. Negative experiences of lockdown were reported because challenging emotions, business failure, limited ways, and loss of loved ones were encountered. However, they also shared ways on how to fight against these aforementioned experiences.
3. Contrarily, positive experiences were felt by the participants as they made efforts to know how lockdowns work in order to successfully comply for the sake of everyone's safety. Through life realizations, they also regarded lockdown as an opportunity to value what they currently have and be grateful for them.
4. Family relationships were both strengthened and weakened. Moreover, the lockdown had a positive effect on the participants' families according to more accounts.
5. On the other hand, data showed that no friendships were strengthened during the lockdown; they were either maintained or weakened. One reason on why friendships maintained is because they are already practicing a low-maintenance type of social relationship.
6. Many romantic relationships were unfortunately ended due to the stretched distance brought by the lockdown.
7. Themes of communication, quality time, low maintenance type of friendship, and virtual relationship were formulated to further explain on why such diverse results were gathered when addressing about the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on the quality of target population's

social relationship.

Due to the study's scope and delimitation, the researchers recommend additional research in this area. The researchers specifically recommend the following:

1. Due to the limitations present in online interviews, if given a chance, future researchers should conduct the interview in a face-to-face setting, since the traditional interview process may significantly improve the amount and quality of information acquired.
2. Diverse research designs on the same subject can also be conducted through quantitative or mixed method studies in order to appeal to a broader range of respondents. Due to the limitations of phenomenological qualitative research, the study included only 13 participants.
3. Instead of simply labelling outcomes as positive and negative effects, using mixed method studies might give specific, detailed, and diverse criteria to study the relationship quality of the selected population.
4. To transcend the limitations of this study, future similar researches must explore other preventive measures such as quarantine and isolation, and participants who have acquired the COVID-19 illness in order to know how their social relationships have been affected within the realm of these periods.
5. After knowing the effects of lockdown on the quality of social relationships; further studies should also highlight the connection of these relationship changes and their importance to the mental health of young people studied.
6. A similar study may also be conducted with a different group of people, such as working students, teachers, university staff, adults who are currently employed, or older adults.
7. It was evident from the findings of this study that the lockdown imposed in the country had made changes to some of the participants' social relationships. Therefore, in order to provide help in nourishing one's relationship, the researchers have proposed a wellness program (See Appendix A). The main purpose of this program is to help emerging adults of Our Lady of Fatima University-Pampanga Campus improve their social relationships and interactions by doing various activities suggested by the researchers. In addition to this, the emerging adults will be given additional homework in which they would

describe their experience in the said program to their respective households to spread awareness as well.

8. On the other hand, in the hopes that everything would go back to normal, and face-to-face interactions can be attained again, the researchers also prepared activities that could be done physically to improve the social relationships of emerging adults that have been disrupted by the implementation of lockdown measures (See Appendix B).

9. The university may consider this study, especially the proposed wellness program, to utilize it as a gateway for promoting good quality of social relationships across the campus.

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