

# The Modern-Day Heroes of the Tri- Bureaus of the Province of Ilocos Norte in the Covid19 Health Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

Jonah B. Badua

College of Criminal Justice Education, Northwestern University, Laoag City, Philippines  
jonah.badua@nwu.edu.ph

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**Abstract**— *The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the life of the law enforcement sector. This study explored the experiences of modern-day heroes from the Tri-Bureaus of Ilocos Norte during the health pandemic. It involved 19 participants composed of police officers, jail officers and fire officers who rendered duty during the total lockdown, Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine and General Community Quarantine. Qualitative-phenomenology, five major themes are identified as the feeling of distress, struggles amidst the challenges of the pandemic, motivational drives, life realizations and wellness as a priority. This study implies a need to revisit organizational policies to ensure the health and safety of personnel in the Tri-Bureaus.*

**Keywords**— *experiences, modern-day heroes, pandemic, tri-bureaus, Ilocos Norte*

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Stay At Home! – A frontliners call.”

The Corona Virus 19 (COVID 19) made a remarkable change in the world, resulting in socio-economic transitions and a life-changing condition for every human being. The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic threatens societies' mental health (Teeab, 2020). This health pandemic's widespread and disastrous effect triggered every government to mitigate its impact. Several Executive Orders, Resolutions, Ordinances were created and implemented to establish protocols in response to this problem. The various government sectors made a task force to ensure its implementation.

In the United States, it ensures essential public safety services and maintains public order amidst a pandemic outbreak. It mandates all stakeholders in State and local law enforcement and public safety agencies responsible for supporting public health efforts and addressing the additional challenges they may face during such an outbreak (Richards et al., 2006).

Public health emergencies pose unique challenges for law enforcement. Policing strategies will vary depending on the cause and level of the threat, as will the potential risk to the responding officers (Richard et al. 2006). Kokane et al. (2020) stated that the police force in the frontline is responsible for monitoring social distancing, which helps a lot in the containment of the pandemic as a means of interrupting the transmission of the virus. Police officials work in highly challenging conditions for long hours and carry a significant burden of coronavirus. They are tasked with refraining from non-essential use of public transport and avoiding large and small gatherings during a lockdown. Law enforcers performed many responsibilities during the pandemic (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

Law enforcement officers are responsible in the coordination on local shutdowns, encouragement on the observance of social distancing, and enforcement of the stay-at-home mandates. They experienced increased stress risk due to the prolonged threat of virus exposure and stay-at-home ordinance compliance enforcement Stogner et al. (2020).

Consequently frontliners remain resilient amidst this pandemic. Msc et al. (2020) revealed that psychological experience has negative emotions present early: fatigue, discomfort, and helplessness caused by high-intensity work, fear and anxiety, and concern for patients and family members. They observed self-copying styles like psychological and life adjustment, charitable acts, team support, and rational cognition. Growth under pressure included increased affection and gratefulness, development of professional responsibility, and self-reflection. Munawar and Riaz (2020) disclosed frontliners coped by limiting media exposure, sharing Covid-19 duty details, and religious coping. They experienced challenges like psychological response and noncompliance of public/denial by a religious scholar.

The Philippines has been dramatically affected by the tremendous effect of the virus, which led to several deaths and significant increases in active cases. The country is known as one of the topnotch COVID cases in Asia, pushing the government to come up with its initiatives. Accordingly, the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases headed the prevention and control of COVID-19.

The Tri-Bureaus under the Department of Interior and Local Government like the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Fire Protection and Bureau of Jail Management and Penology were directed to do its essential responsibility in mitigating the spread of the virus in their field of work as "Frontliners." In the performance of their duties and responsibilities are the challenges that may put their lives at risk. Records have shown that active COVID cases and even death from the Tri-Bureaus were recorded.

The PNP recorded 92 new recoveries as of September 29, 2020, which is added to those who recovered from COVID-19 to 4,701. The confirmed COVID-19 cases are 5,929, with 1,211 active cases and 17 deaths (PNP Website, 2020). In Buan's (2020) article, some jails had been affected by the COVID-19, wherein personnel was tested positive. There was 229 personnel, and prisoners were positively tested, and four personnel have recovered, as confirmed by the BJMP. It also noted that Cebu jails are the most critical, with 186 prisoners and 24 jail staff infected for COVID-19. According to the DILG, an article also highlighted that the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) has 78 active COVID-19 cases among its personnel. Most of the confirmed cases have mild symptoms, but two deaths were recorded (Bajo, 2020).

In the province of Ilocos Norte, problems have been encountered in these difficult times, like the increasing active cases and the misunderstanding of frontliners with the community on implementing

quarantine protocols. With the worldwide health pandemic, the word "Frontliners" became famous and recognized as the modern heroes of today. This study uses the experiences of frontliners as a basis in strengthening organizational policies and tribute to the Tri-Bureaus.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### **Public Service Motivation Theory**

As cited in the study of Kim (2016), Public Service Motivation Theory assumed a persuasive proposition that individuals self-select into government jobs due to their interest in the public service, which is prevalent in the public sector. (Brewer and Selden, 1998; Houston, 2006; Lewis and Frank, 2002; Steijn, 2008). A persuasive proposition is that individuals self-select into government jobs due to their interest in public service (Lewis and Frank, 2002; Naff and Crum, 1999; Perry and Wise, 1990). However, "becoming a public sector employee involves not only making a choice to work in the public sector, but also having the opportunity to do so" (Steen, 2008: 204).

#### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study explored the experiences of the frontliners of the Tri-Bureaus.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The study used qualitative phenomenology to investigate the lived experiences of the so-called modern-day heroes or known as frontliners from the Tri-Bureaus. The province of Ilocos Norte was considered the environment for this study where the frontliners have rendered their duty in implementing total lockdown, Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) and General Community Quarantine (GCQ). The participants are 19 frontliners from the Tri-Bureaus like the Philippine National Police (PNP), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) and Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) who were selected using purposive sampling.

An interview guide (IG) was used to obtain data through an In-Depth Interview (IDI) through video conferencing and diary method. Letter request was forwarded to the proper authority and appointment with the participants was made upon approval. Thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the data. Ethical considerations were also observed in the course of this study.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The experiences of the modern-day heroes in the tri-bureaus of Ilocos Norte, are in thematic presentation with its corresponding sub-themes.

Table 1  
Lived Experiences of the Frontliners During the Pandemic

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
Feelings of Distress	Fear of getting infected
	Fear for safety of family
	Separation of family/loved ones
	Lack of cooperation/respect
Struggles amidst the challenges of the pandemic	Panic buying
	Multi-tasking
	Immediate work adjustment
	Financial burden
Motivational Drives	Increased Work Commitment
	Public Service
	Love for Work
Life Realization	Stronger Spiritual Attachment
	Stronger Family Bond
	Possession of a good job
	Rewarding income
Wellness as a priority	Adherence to health and safety protocols
	Extreme health consciousness
	Engage in Recreational Activities

#### Feelings of Distress

Due to the pandemic, people are distressed having painful emotions and sufferings. The pandemic had brought them a feeling of distress because of fear, anxiety, sleepless nights, and being tired due to their duty situation. Results revealed that many have suffered from financial, physical, emotional and psychological problems. With the stressful situations encountered, they have sleepless nights. It signifies that their work during the pandemic is like a survival game that affected their well-being and family. The risk of infection and poor communication emerged as main stressors (Frenkel et al., 2021). Working hours contribute to police officers' health risk perception, psychological distress, and work stress (Huang, Bodla & Chen, 2021). Msc et al. (2020) disclosed that psychological experience has negative emotions present in the early stage consisting of fatigue, discomfort, and helplessness was caused by high-intensity work, fear and anxiety, and concern for patients and family members. In firefighters, frequent and repeated exposure to traumatic events through their day-to-day work has been shown to impact mental health and lead to post-traumatic disorder symptoms (Jahnke et al., 2012; Sawhney et al., 2017).

Under this significant theme, sub-themes were identified: fear of getting infected, fear of family safety,

separation of family/loved ones, and lack of cooperation/respect.

#### Fear of getting infected

Since the pandemic became an issue, exposure to infections has been critical. The exposure of frontliners to their daily routine during this pandemic made them vulnerable to getting infected with COVID 19. Frontliners have direct contact with people as they perform their work. With this, many of them had been treated and isolated by having quarantine for a certain period. In this setup, they often fear getting infected, which adds to their distress.

Frontliners are easily infected by the virus because of the nature of their work wherein they will contact different kinds of people at their work, movement from different places. In addition, due to their lack of PPE and the situation at the workplace, they get tired, which affects their immune system. The participants had experienced being infected with the virus that causes trauma on their part. This finding is related to the result of Jennings and Perez (2020) because they were tasked to contain the spread of the virus and serve the local community and maintain public order. They are at a heightened risk of exposure due to their close contact with public members. Frontline workers at the field were ill-informed and equipped with obsolete equipment (Kokane et al., 2020).

#### Fear for safety of family

The family is noted to be the center of one's life which plays a significant role to every human being. The frontliners being prone to covid 19 virus exposure, as a consequence, their own family may also be affected, and this is noted as one of their fears.

Participants cared so much for their families. They always think of their safety since the pandemic began because of its threatening impact. It is one of the reasons why the frontliners have their protocols before they can get into their home and hug their family members. In this pandemic, it is often observed in social media that some of them have a video call with family. They monitor them, the so-called air hug and symbolic way of sending love to their family members because they cannot immediately contact them.

#### Separation of family/loved ones

Every person is always longing to be with their families during difficult times, and it is where they draw strengths; however, in the case of frontliners, they have to work and be with the people they serve instead of staying with their family loved ones. Being away with family is distressful, as manifested by the participants.

The participants had shown importance to their call of duty in this pandemic. Being separated and far from their family and loved ones for a long time is a great sacrifice that ignites their distress because of lockdown duty for one month or more and quarantine protocols where there is a need for isolation. Families of frontliners were unprepared for their setup, and adjustment was not easy. Law enforcement officers are likely to experience increased high-stress encounters with individuals suffering from mental health problems, which are aggravated by fear of contagion, economic uncertainty, resource shortages, and isolation (Stogner et al., 2020).

### **Lack of cooperation/respect**

The responsibility of law enforcers as frontliners during this pandemic is more complex since they are not only into crime prevention and control but also on the implementation of health protocols that many people mostly violate. The enforcement of policies in this pandemic is not easy. Arguments and contradictions occurred, which caused distress to the law enforcers.

The participants disclosed a lack of cooperation and respect from civilians as they enforced the health and safety protocols. They are being questioned and criticized by the community, contributing to their suffering. Heated arguments took place and received derogatory remarks, but they firmly stood to their principles as a public servant. It is mainly experienced by the police and fire officers since they work in the field wherein conflict arises between the frontliners and the community members. The participants adhered with maximum tolerance and resilience in the implementation of protocols. Frontliners experienced psychological responses and noncompliance of public/denial by religious scholars (Munawar & Riaz, 2020).

### **Struggles amidst the challenges of the pandemic**

The pandemic created a complicated life situation and, at most, resulted in adverse effects. Indeed the frontliner police officers have encountered various struggles during this health emergency.

The sub-themes like panic buying, multi-tasking, immediate work adjustment and financial burden were identified based on the participants' answers.

### **Panic buying**

Panic buying emerged as one of the practices of the people due to the concerns on the supply chain. The reaction to avoid shortage of supply and the limitations of people's movements also happens to some participants. This experienced was encountered by jail personnel because they have been on lockdown duty for one month.

Participants claimed that they had panic buying to prepare for the needs of their family and make sure that they had enough supplies while they were away from them. Family needs are a priority for the participants—panic buying is often a response to environmental stressors (Cooper & Gordon, 2021).

### **Multi-tasking**

Due to the pandemic's demand, the law enforcement agencies with it lead to multi-tasking. Concerns about work overload became an issue of frontliners, which was proven based on the sharing of the participants from the tri-bureau.

The frontliners have performed various tasks and assignments in this pandemic state. It also happens because there is a lack of staffing. They engaged in a diverse task different from their work as law enforcers before the covid19 and are considered the jack of all trade. The participants became the counterpart of health workers in containing the virus. Law enforcers performed many responsibilities during the pandemic. The reassigning personnel to high-traffic areas, suspending training, roll calls, and community outreach initiatives, only issuing citations for low-level crimes, implementing safety precautions for officers, and limiting access to department facilities (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

### **Immediate work adjustment**

Law enforcement is indeed a demanding job, and since the pandemic began, there was a shifting or work transition that happened. Because of the impact of the virus, organizational policies had changed in terms of duty schemes.

Most of the participants encountered changes in their duty scheme, and adjustment is somewhat difficult for them to adapt immediately. It is a mandate by their respective agencies in response to the health pandemic. The jail personnel had encountered lockdown duty. Vacation leaves were canceled. Long hours of duty were experienced by the participants, which it is hard for them to make adjustments.

Based on their testimonies, they are assigned in the field, particularly in the different borders, instead of staying in their stations and under lockdown duty which made them render one-month duty or more before they can go home, which is true to the jail and fire officers. On the other hand, the police officers have shifted for every eight hours for duty. The red alert status has been sustained.

They had shown readiness with the new typical duty setup directed by their respective agencies, but still, it is not easy to go with the adjustments. These participants' experiences were in agreement with the findings of



Nicomedes et al. (2020), wherein frontliners had undergone a process of adjustment to the new work conditions as a consequence of this COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Kokane et al. (2020) also disclosed that the police officers had significantly worked in challenging conditions due to long duty hours (Jennings & Perez, 2020). Working hours contribute to police officers' health risk perception, psychological distress, and work stress (Huang et al., 2021).

### **Financial burden**

The existence of the pandemic had also affected the financial status of many individuals. Existing protocols like the testing before entry or travel significantly contributed to the burden of the people. It also happened on the part of the frontliners.

The conduct of testing like antigen and rt PCR gave additional financial burden to some participants. It is so because they often travel as part of their work, so there is a need to undergo a swab test and another medical requirement they are going to pay for it. Palmor et al (2020) income loss and financial strain were associated with more significant depressive symptoms above and beyond, anxiety, worries about health, and pre-COVID-19 income. Worsening income loss was associated with worsening depressions. Worsening of subjective financial strain was associated with worsening of depression.

### **Motivational Drives**

Every person has their motivations in life, which depend on their situation. As the pandemic became critical, the life of frontliners was also at risk; hence, they drew strengths and inspiration to be motivated to perform their duties and responsibilities.

According to the interview, the participants have various motivational drives based on the sub-themes created like increased work commitment, public service, and love for work.

### **Increased Work Commitment**

Commitment to work is essential in any organization, and this is one of the ingredients of effectiveness and efficiency in the performance of tasks. The participants are indeed a fighter in this pandemic. They increased work commitment and had shown loyalty to their sworn duty to the people and the government. Through thick and thin, they showed commitment to their work as law enforcers in these challenging times. Their commitment made them high morale being a public servants. At the coronavirus outbreak, the healthcare workers had very positive and high organizational and social commitments (Aghalari et al., 2021).

### **Public Service**

The tri-bureaus members are called public servants and are duty-bound to do public service at all times. People engaged in public service because of their principles of selfless service, and of course, it is their sworn duty. The essence of public service became one of the motivational drives of the participants.

It is noticeable from the participants' answers that they are doing their best to serve the public during the pandemic. It is one way of fulfilling their sworn duties and responsibilities. This motivational drive enables them to become more resilient in protecting people's lives. The state of pandemic transformed the work and workplaces of the public sector, of which the public servants are playing a leading role (oecd.org, 2020). The public servants, military service members, volunteers, and national service members were battling to stem the spread of the virus and safeguard public health (Hill, 2020).

### **Love for Work**

A worker will always be at work through good times and bad times. The tricky situation brought by the pandemic did not stop the frontliners from working. In this situation, they had shown more of their passion and love for work, as evident in their testimonies.

The love for work played an essential role in the participants' performance as public servants. The virtue of dedication and passion are their secrets to remaining resilient in these most difficult times. They had cultivated the value of their work and their organization's mission. Loving your work is a fulfillment of your dreams as an employee. People work for various reasons. One is for their love of the work; for some, they work for personal and professional fulfillment. People have personal missions they accomplish through meaningful work (Heathfield, 2020).

### **Life Realization**

Life is full of tricks, and sometimes it is going well and behind those are demanding situations that lead a person to realize. The difficulties suffered by the participants gave them the chance to reflect and learn from the lessons of life.

Sub-themes were noted like stronger spiritual attachment, stronger family bond and possession of a good job and rewarding income.

### **Strong Spiritual Attachment**

Amid pandemics, many were traumatized and feared getting infected. People had drawn strength and hoped with their faith in God. The participants made revelations about their strong spiritual attachment, of

which they became prayerful for good health and safety. God became the center of everything in their lives.

The participants highlighted the importance of strengthening their faith through prayers. They became prayer warriors for their protection, their family and the people they served. It manifests that God is the center of everything through thick and thin. It gave them the courage to stay firm and not give up on their sworn duty as public servants. Their solid spiritual attachment made them hopeful of overcoming the challenges of this pandemic, being prayerful was noted. A Pew Research Center survey (2021) reveals that more Americans than people in other economically developed countries say the outbreak has bolstered their religious faith and the faith of their compatriots.

### **Stronger Family Bond**

Frontliners are public servants, and most of the time, they are focused on their daily duties and responsibilities, complicating this pandemic. They are away with their families most of the time, so they realize the value of bonding with their family members in the present situation.

The participants have realized the importance of family bonds in this pandemic because they are far from their family and loved ones and sometimes separated because they underwent isolation for many days. They considered their family bonding a priority and made a way to get in touch with them using the technology. The covid 19 pandemic provides positive benefits and meaning to some wherein they have opportunities to strengthen relationships, find new hobbies, and develop positive characteristics such as appreciation, gratitude, and tolerance (Evans et al., 2020).

### **Possession of a Good Job and Rewarding Income**

Many had suffered from financial difficulties due to lockdown and even stopped working due to non-operations of businesses.

With the participants' experience from the Tri-Bureaus, they are very fortunate that they still have a stable job and income has been sustained even there is a pandemic of which this is part of their realization.

### **Wellness as a priority**

The mindset of people changed with the surge of the COVID19 virus. It gives a notion to prioritize health and wellness in all aspects. Everybody aims to have a healthy lifestyle to boost the immune system that enables an individual to fight the virus.

Sub-themes were established based on the participants' responses, which include the following,

adherence to health and safety protocols, extreme health consciousness and engagement in recreational activities.

### **Adherence to Health and Safety Protocols**

Frontliners implement health and safety protocols anytime and anywhere. It is a must to follow for the safety of everybody. The frontliner's duty is critical; therefore, they are mandated to strictly adhere to the health and safety protocols. They abide by the rules to effectively enforce them to the people, which is evident from their responses.

To ensure their safety, the participants religiously followed the rules and regulations imposed by the higher authority. The observance of wearing face masks, social distancing, wearing of PPEs, and quarantine protocols became their routine as they performed their job as frontliners. Adherence to the health and safety protocols is helpful in the performance of their duty which reduces their exposure to the virus.

### **Extreme Health Consciousness**

With the covid 19 outbreak, people always think of their health which made them realize that health is wealth. Every individual has a healthy routine to sustain a robust immune system. Health consciousness became the common goal, and the participants also observed this. They prioritize health, physical fitness, mental health engagement, and vitamin and healthy food intake.

### **Engage in recreational activities**

The work complexities during this pandemic gave the organization to boost their health and mental wellness. Various recreation activities are being implemented as part of their daily activities. The participants' engagement in recreational activities in their respective agencies lightens their burden on this pandemic. It is in this way to remove their boredom while having a long hour and exhausting duty. They had film viewing, webinars, socialization among themselves and fitness activities. This activity enables them to cope up and overcome the challenges of their new work setup..

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

The researcher concludes that the life of the frontliners during this pandemic became difficult, and the nature of their work is full of complexities. They had proven themselves as a committed public servant through thick and thin and by being responsive to the present situation. Conflict arises between the frontliners and the community members. Despite the struggles encountered, they have various initiatives to overcome the negativity

brought by this health pandemic. The frontliners are resilient.

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