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# Difficulties Encountered by Selected Restaurant Staff in Tayabas City During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

The Philippine economy has fallen due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it undeniably affected the food service industry and hospitality industry – one of the largest workforce sectors in the Philippines. The study determined the difficulties of restaurant staff in Tayabas City, Philippines in terms of Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours, and Employment Status. The aim of this quantitative study was to determine the challenges encountered by restaurant staff in Tayabas City during Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers used a self-made survey questionnaire which they administered to the 115 selected restaurant staff who were chosen through convenience sampling and had served as the respondents of the study. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Chi-Square, and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used as statistical tools in determining the result of the study. Based on the results, it was found that the majority of the respondents were aged 18-25, males, college level, and had a monthly income between Php5001- Php 10,000. The difficulties were determined among the respondents in terms of: Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours, and Employment Status, and a majority of them agreed that they encountered these kinds of situations.

Keywords: Covid-19, Restaurant staff, Difficulties

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## 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is considered the first global health hazard as well as one of the greatest health outbreaks in human history (Cranfield, 2020; Peeri et al., 2020), that were experienced around the world simultaneously. (Jamal & Budke, 2020). On March 11, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) declared coronavirus as an epidemic that spreads and resulted in negative effects in almost all parts of the world. The said Covid-19 outbreak has been felt in the restaurant sectors where human movement is extreme (Yang et al., 2020), hence, it was projected that the restaurant operations will paint a rather devastating period. Additionally, pandemics can alter behavior, such as a fear-induced aversion to public spaces or places of employment, which is a major factor in the detrimental effect on economic growth both during and after an outbreak (Madhav et al., 2017).

In terms of reporting COVID-19 cases, the Philippines got off to a poor start. On January 30, 2020, the Philippines' Department of Health (DOH) confirmed the first country which had the COVID-19 case. On February 2nd, the first country with COVID-19 death was registered. It was not until March 7th that the coronavirus illness was first reported locally. The safety and health of front-line workers in Tayabas City, as well as the problems they have encountered before and during their working hours in

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this pandemic, particularly individual employees working in the hospitality industry providing food and beverages in the food establishments to which they are assigned, comes to mind. It primarily affected people all around the world, particularly those in the hospitality and tourism industries who supply and serve people to assist the economy to recover. This gave rise to the concept of researching the issues faced by employees in the hospitality business to develop an alternative solution to the problem. The Philippine economy was suffering as a result of the outbreak. It had a significant impact on businesses, resulting in reduced manpower and staffing, shortened working hours due to the implementation of curfew hours from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., and, in the worst-case scenario, the complete closure of the business due to massive losses and management's inability to cope.

People might still be reluctant to eat out even when it becomes acceptable. Additionally, social distance will necessitate a great distance between tables, which will result in the same rentals and utilities but a much smaller capacity for clients at a time. Restaurants may need to alter their menus, cutlery, crockery, seating arrangements, etc. due to the new paradigm. To draw clients, it is necessary to innovate inside already established businesses. The operating costs of restaurants rise as more disposable items and sanitizers are utilized in the industry. While revenues are anticipated to decline, the enhanced hygiene standards, greater use of disinfectants, and general overheads will surge. As such, it is also vital to consider the condition of the restaurant staff who served as the front liners in the restaurant operations as they are also greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The researchers came up with this study to determine the challenges encountered by restaurant staff in their workplace during the Covid19 pandemic as well as the possible strategies that could alleviate such instances.

## *1.2. Background of the Study*

In the Philippines and around the world, the restaurant industry has been one of Covid-19's worst-hit sectors. Some of the restaurants managed to survive, but only with limited operations. Many of the eateries were on the verge of closing. A higher percentage of restaurant proprietors reported lower sales compared to the same period in 2019 and the prior years, despite it being consistently recorded and proven that COVID-19 instances increased in February and March 2020. Hence, most of the restaurant staff were greatly affected as well. Restaurants and other small companies must modify their operations to meet the new standards (Bartik et al., 2020). Now is the perfect time for restaurants to consider changing their current business strategy (Bakers et al., 2020; Richards & Rickard, 2020; Seetharaman, 2020), in order for their staff to lessen if cannot be totally avoided facing any difficulties.

The purpose of this study was to provide descriptive information about the difficulties encountered by the restaurant staff in Tayabas City during Covid-19 pandemic and to seek an answer to such a problem. The researchers considered the safety protocols implemented by the management to its customers and staff, the travel restrictions they face before and after their duty, as well as the issues they have encountered before and during their working hours during this pandemic. The respondents of the study were the individual staff working in the different restaurants in Tayabas City. This then led to the concept of researching the issues faced by restaurant staff in their work to develop an alternative solution to the said problem.

The researchers observed that most of the food establishments came to an end especially the restaurants in Tayabas City because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Closure of those food establishments had brought several economic problems to its people specifically, the staff and employees. It has affected the

lives of the people and even the Philippine Economy. With this in mind, the researchers came to the conclusion that there is a need to determine the difficulties encountered by the restaurant staff in Tayabas City during Covid-19 pandemic. For locally owned or operated restaurants (aside from well-known fast-food chains that already have alternatives in place) to diversify their business operations in accordance with the current situation in order to support and improve ((Vertudes, Musa, Cosilet, Salagubang & Balaria, 2020) the standard of living for its displaced workers. Likewise, it would help the researchers to find out the problems that could be encountered in their industry in the near future. This study sought to identify the difficulties faced by restaurant staff in their workplace as hospitality laborers and front liners during the Covid-19 pandemic. They will benefit from this research because they will be able to identify the challenges and consider what would be the best solution to the situation.

### *1.3. Objectives of the Study*

The research aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by the restaurant staff in Tayabas City during the covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study sought to accomplish the following: 1. Determine the profile of the respondents in terms of: age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, monthly income, work status. 2. Determine the challenges encountered by the respondents in the workplace during the Covid19 pandemic in terms of: safety protocols, travel restrictions, working hours, employment status; 3. Find out the significant difference between the respondents' challenges encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic when grouped according to their demographic profile. 4. To design a proposed seminar on Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours, and Employment Status.

### *1.4. Hypothesis*

There is no significant relationship between the respondents' profiles and the difficulties encountered by restaurant workers in Tayabas City during Covid-19 Pandemic.

## **2. Methodology**

The research design utilized in the study was a quantitative descriptive study, the method was used in interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing the data gathered in a numerical sense that shows the statistical treatment of data as well as to identify the challenges of restaurant workers in Tayabas City during the Covid-19 pandemic. The researchers conducted the study in Tayabas City, particularly the different restaurants located around the city. Those staff working in the restaurants in Tayabas, City are the key informants of the study. The researchers used Slovin's formula where:  $n$  is the size of the sample  $N$  is the size of the population and  $e$  is the error which is 5 percent margin of error to compute the sample. The total sample size for restaurant employees is 115, who were chosen using convenience sampling from the selected restaurants in Tayabas City. The researchers did not include the restaurant's name due to confidentiality. The primary instrument used to gather pertinent information in this research was a survey questionnaire to determine the respondents' experiences during the pandemic in their workplace to support and strengthen the study. The questionnaire is stated in the Likert Scale format. The results were tallied, tabulated, analyzed statistically, and interpreted using statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Chi-Square, and Kruskal-Wallis tests. With the use of these measures, it was able to define or categorized the results of the answered survey questionnaires.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The majority of the respondents have ages between 18-25 years old constituting 58.5% of the total respondents. However, only 1.9% of the respondents were represented by ages 36-40, 41-45, and 46 and above. Moreover, the majority of the respondents in terms of sex were represented by males with 71.7%, while female respondents represented 28.3% of the respondents. Also, the majority of respondents in terms of civil status were single with 71.7%, while married respondents represented 26.4 % of the respondents. In terms of educational attainment, the majority of the respondents were in college-level with 22.6% and senior high school graduates with 13.2% of the total respondents. In terms of monthly income, the majority of the respondents earn a Php 5,001 to 10,000 monthly income with a percentage of 45.3%. It is followed by Php 10,001 – 15,000 with 34 % of the total respondents. Lastly, in terms of work status, the majority of the respondents were full-time/permanent with 66% of the total respondents followed by part-time employee with 24.5% of the total respondents.

#### 3.2. The challenges encountered by the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic in the workplace

Table 1. Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Workplace in terms of Safety Protocol

Safety Protocol	Weighted Mean	Description
1. The management requires the workers to undergo a risk assessment before doing actual jobs such as taking their temperature.	4.66	Strongly Agree
2. Mandatory cleaning and disinfecting of kitchens and dining areas to a higher standard for the safety of the staff.	4.85	Strongly Agree
3. Use of facemask, wipes, and hand sanitizer is always available.	4.79	Strongly Agree
4. The management assures the health and safety of their employees by implementing safety protocols within the workplace.	4.83	Strongly Agree
5. The management provides all the necessary benefits for their employees who are suspected of COVID19 and are paid during quarantine days.	4.45	Strongly Agree
6. The management provides free use of disinfecting aids.	4.77	Strongly Agree
7. I can select an appropriate PPE at no cost.	4.26	Strongly Agree
8. I will clean every day the surfaces in our work such as tables, chairs, etc.	4.70	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.66	Strongly Agree

The table above shows the difficulties encountered by the respondents during the COVID19 pandemic in terms of safety protocol. The highest mean score of 4.83 indicates that respondents strongly agree that by establishing workplace safety standards, the management ensures the health and safety of their employees. On the other hand, the lowest mean score of 4.26 implies that employees strongly agree that they are entitled to free personal protective equipment. Overall, the average weighted mean of 4.66 implied that respondents strongly agreed that the management where they work follows the safety protocol to ensure the welfare of their employees hence, there was really not much of a difficulty encountered. Hotels and institutions, like other industries (Hecker, 2020), have a responsibility to provide a safe working environment for their employees by like providing free access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which includes taking precautions to avoid the spread of infectious diseases.

*Table 2. Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Workplace in terms of Travel Restrictions*

Travel Restrictions	Weighted	
	Mean	Description
1. I am experiencing shifting in working hours, scheduling of work, and remote work schedules.	4.47	Strongly Agree
2. I am going to work using public transportation during off-peak, less congested hours reducing the danger in commuting.	4.17	Agree
3. I do not stay at the restaurant, and I prefer to go home after work.	4.58	Strongly Agree
4. I encountered fear or refusal to return to work when I always take public transportation.	3.92	Agree
5. I stayed in the restaurant for one (1) week while on duty to avoid frequent exposure to the public.	3.26	Neutral
6. Management offers benefits like free use of a vehicle to prevent contact with people.	4.45	Strongly Agree
7. The management shared about the Center for Disease and Prevention guidance on how to protect me while traveling.	4.68	Strongly Agree
8. The management allows me to shift my working hours so I can commute during less busy times.	4.42	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.25	Strongly Agree

The table above exhibits the difficulties encountered by the respondents during the COVID19 pandemic in their workplace as to travel restrictions. The highest mean score of 4.68 indicates that respondents strongly agree that the management offered information about how to be safe while traveling from the CDC. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score of 3.26 implies that employees are neutral on staying in the restaurant for one (1) week while on duty to avoid frequent exposure to the public. The average weighted mean of 4.25 implies that respondents strongly agreed that the management of their workplace provided them ease in terms of traveling hence, not much difficulty was experienced. This data was supported by International Labour Organization, (2020) and OECD (2018a), that the employees should be distant from crowds or many people to prevent the virus and impose a working schedule. This was partly the cause of transport restrictions because of the lockdown. (Vigilia, et.al, 2021)

*Table 3. Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Workplace in terms of Working Hours*

Working Hours	Weighted	
	Mean	Description
1. The management imposed a 4-hour shift for all staff.	2.75	Neutral
2. I am required to work overtime due to a lack of staff	3.85	Agree
3. The salary I received is based on the number of hours I worked during the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.85	Agree
4. I spent more than forty hours each week or eight hours each day at work	4.51	Strongly Agree
5. The number of working hours was cut short due to COVID-19 pandemic.	3.75	Agree
6. The management implements flexible work hours (e.g., rotate or stagger shifts to limit the number of employees in the workplace at the same time).	4.53	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean	3.87	Agree

Table above demonstrates the difficulties encountered by the respondents in their workplace during the COVID19 pandemic in terms of working hours. Respondents strongly agree that management adopts flexible work hours, with the highest mean score of 4.53. The lowest mean score of 2.75, on the other hand, indicates that employees feel ambivalent about management implementing a 4-hour shift for all staff. The average weighted mean of 3.87 reflected that respondents agreed that the management of their workplace agreed to set working hours however, few difficulties were encountered as not all the management considered the idea. Working hours lost as a result of COVID-19 include those workers who stayed employed but struggled to cut their hours as a result of the pandemic, as well as those who lost their jobs and moved into either economic inactivity or unemployment. Similarly, Golden (2015) found that a mutual problem recognized in all the existing research literature is that there was no lucid

theory of precisely how different working time managements influence employee productivity, directly or indirectly, Managing the working hours of employees is important for them to complete their tasks in the workplace thus shifting employee duties instead of laying them off is also a great option.

*Table 4. Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Workplace in terms of Employment Status*

Employment Status	Weighted	
	Mean	Description
1. I am one who experienced lay off during Covid-19 pandemic.	2.79	Neutral
2. I am receiving incentives, bonuses, job training, and job enrichment in order to achieve individual and organizational goals.	4.09	Agree
3. I stayed in the restaurants if the rules allowed.	2.68	Neutral
4. I am an emergency staff who performs the activities needed to do by the absent employee.	4.49	Strongly Agree
5. The management was forced to laid-off workers to inform us about the reduction of staff during the covid-19 pandemic.	4.28	Strongly Agree
6. I received early notice or 8 weeks before the layoff action takes place as requested effective date.	3.17	Neutral
Average Weighted Mean	3.58	Agree

The table presents the difficulties encountered by the respondents in the workplace during the COVID19 pandemic in terms of employment status. Respondents strongly agree that they had early warning of the layoff action, with the highest mean score of 4.49. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score of 2.79 shows that employees are neutral about the possibility of being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic. The average weighted mean of 3.58 indicated that respondents agreed that the management of their workplace conducted necessary measures to keep the employment status of its workers however, a few problems still arise especially in terms of being laid off. According to Lund, et. al (202) employers in the restaurant and hospitality industries may find themselves with substantially reduced labor demands as state and local governments continue to issue orders forcing the temporary shutdown of certain non-essential companies. Many firms are putting employees on unpaid furloughs, which allowed them to stay on the company's benefit plans if the rules of the plan allow it. Because of this, Tayabas City restaurant staff believe that the Covid-19 epidemic has caused a number of issues with their employment status in the workplace. (Vigilia, et. al, 2021)

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings, the researchers came up with the following conclusions. It was concluded that most of the restaurant workers were male ages 18-25. They earned 5001-10,000 a month- 250-300 pesos a day much higher compared to the 200 pesos provincial rate. Workers received higher-paid due to flexible working hours. Because of the pandemic, businesses cut off staff, and the staff working overload than usual. Businesses hire males to perform faster and stay on duty even at night. Similar to other businesses, there were a lot of challenges that employees may encounter. In the study, the major

challenges faced by restaurant staff in Tayabas City during the COVID-19 pandemic were specified as Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours, and Employment Status. Employees were concerned about the safety standards implemented by their management during the pandemic. Likewise, transportation fares posed a problem for the employees especially those who do not own a vehicle. Moreover, it was a great concern for the employees to adapt to the flexible working hours specifically for those who were used to working full time. Because of the pandemic, lessens the number of customers and also the workers. People need to stay at home to lessen and stop the spreading of the virus. This results in low income and decreasing number of employees and labor. All the variables investigated for the measurement of significance difference between background characteristics and challenges encountered were less than 0.05, hence the null hypothesis indicating no significant relationship between the challenges encountered in Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours and Employment Status was accepted. This means that the age, gender, educational attainment, etc., do not affect the challenges encountered by the restaurant employees. The researchers then came up and proposed a seminar on the Safety Protocol, Travel Restrictions, Working Hours, and Employment Status for the employees to have an awareness regarding the things that need they need to do while in the workplace during a pandemic. As a result, the following was recommended: The researchers recommend for this study to be broader and wider as well as to increase the number of respondents for the data to be more valid and effective. Adding more related studies and literature can improve the reliability of the study as well. Another is, future researchers can conduct a related study regarding the difficulties of restaurant workers to contribute more knowledge and information on the other food and beverage industry. And, the researchers also recommend looking at the perspective of employers on how they dealt with their employees during the pandemic using the 4 parameters mentioned.

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