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## Metro Roxas Water District Frontliners' Experiences and Coping Mechanisms amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: Insights for Policy Directions

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### ABSTRACT

The Metro Roxas Water District (MRWD), as a service provider of basic commodity in Roxas City, has to consider the frontliners' experiences amidst the epidemic in improving its organizational and operational systems. This study determined the MRWD frontliners' experiences and their coping mechanisms during COVID-19 pandemic, which included 153 MRWD frontliners of the 247 population. A validated researcher-made questionnaire was used. The collected data were examined using percentage, frequency, mean, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson r. Results revealed that respondents perceived their experiences as highly experienced and coping mechanisms were highly applicable. There were significant differences in their experiences and coping mechanisms when grouped according to age, nature of work assignment, and employment status, while no significant differences when grouped according to gender, civil status, and number of years in service. A significant relationship was found between their experiences and coping mechanisms. MRWD management provided necessary responses in addressing the pandemic's effects based on respondents' perception. Job roles and assignments were changed in coping with the demand of flexible schedules, additional work and infection prevention among MRWD frontliners and their clients. Result on the experiences and coping mechanisms employed by frontliners as outcome of management intervention and frontliners' own personal judgment in time of duty in compliance with health protocols and protecting themselves served as insights for the management to set the policies that will help employees and clients to respond, comply, and adjust with more ease should the same situation arises in the future.

**Keywords:** Insights, COVID-19 pandemic, Metro Roxas water district, and Coping mechanisms.

### INTRODUCTION:

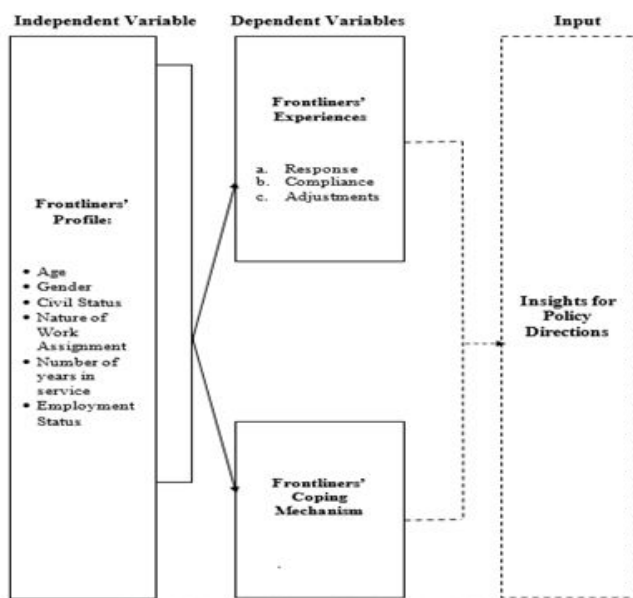
The Department of Health (DOH), as Zahar, (2020) asserted, reported the first incident of local COVID-19 infection on March 7, 2020, and the president declared it a threat to the country's security the following day. To avoid contracting COVID-19, people were urged to wear individual defensive tools. As an upshot, the World Health Organization (WHO) released preven-

tive guidelines that include frequently performing sanitation on the hands using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap, avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth, adhering to good respiratory hygiene by sneezing or coughing through an elbow that is bent or a tissue, wearing masks if respiratory issues are observed, and maintaining a minimum one-meter distance from

someone else who is experiencing respiratory indications while being monitored.

Many employees are still compelled to report to work despite all the risks associated with this outbreak. The majority of them are frontline workers, such as members of the skeletal labor, the military, the police, and other allied health personnel. As they continue to show up for work, they encounter a number of difficulties, like the difficulty of transportation, the danger of contracting an infection, and the lack of Protective Personal Equipment. One that is greatly impacted by pandemic is the Metro Roxas Water District (MRWD). The Front liners hurdle the challenges brought by COVID-19 pandemic, knowing that water is very important, especially in battling COVID-19. Washing hands frequently and drinking/ using potable water to wipe the virus out is the only defense of the people against invisible enemies. In fact, Department of Trade and Industry labels water as Category 1, which means that those involved in providing water supply, including Local Water District are front liners, thus, operate in full capacity during Enhance Community Quarantine (ECQ) and General Community Quarantine (GCQ).

This study determined the experiences and coping mechanisms of MRWD frontliners amidst COVID-19 pandemic towards policy directions.



**Fig. 1:** Schematic diagram showing the variables of the study.

**METHODOLOGY:**

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design. The researcher used the quantitative data collected and analyzed them to find out a cause-effect relationship in the MRWD frontliners’ experiences and their coping mechanisms. The study was conducted in MRWD, Roxas City, Capiz. The frontline employees in different departments of MRWD in Roxas City were chosen as the respondents of this study. Of the two hundred forty-seven (247) employees, the sample size calculated using the Cochran formula was one hundred fifty-three (153). The respondents consisted of regular and job order employees of MRWD, Roxas City. The validated and reliability tested researcher-made questionnaire was used as the research instrument to gather the necessary data from the respondents. In examining the collected data, statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, and mean were used as descriptive statistics. The researcher also employed t-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Pearson product-moment correlation as inferential and correlational statistics set at .05 alpha level of significance.

For this purpose, the researcher upheld the privacy of the data. The researcher asked the Metro Roxas Water District (MRWD) manager for permission to carry out the survey. In general, the communication was done in an open and sincere manner. The respondents' privacy was maintained, and their opinions were respected.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

The result revealed that the respondents perceived their experiences as highly experienced as a whole when it comes to responses, compliance, and adjustments. The result also indicates that MRWD frontline employees feel protected during pandemic since the management of MRWD was able to come up with policies and guidelines, and implemented protocols for employees and their clients to follow to keep themselves safe while doing their daily tasks and transactions. The result supports Dodd *et al.* (2022) findings that amid workers’ fears, they engage in self-care practices and feel supported by a caring organization that implemented safety protocols and provided material support. Trainings on PPE usage were provided, regular tests were conducted and adherence to local public health restrictions was strictly observed. In this study also

agrees with the result of Sundiam *et al.* (2023) on the adherence to COVID-19 health protocols, which was found to be highly practiced in the form of social distancing. Their results further showed that Filipinos, in general, adhered to health and safety protocols. Experience is not something that people keep to themselves; rather, it extends beyond people and settings in course of temporally developing societal relations, which are also infused with affect (Glassman, 2001). Experience, according to Dewey, is a functional transaction that, via actual effort, both constitutes and transforms persons and their environments (Garrison, 2001).

**Table 1:** Front liners’ experiences in the COVID-19 epidemic as a whole.

Component	Grand Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Responses	4.58	Highly Experienced
Compliance	4.65	Highly Experienced
Adjustments	4.45	Highly Experienced
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>Highly Experienced</b>

Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	Highly Experienced
3.41 – 4.20	Experienced
2.61 – 3.40	Less Experienced
1.81 – 2.60	Least Experienced
1.00 – 1.80	Almost Not Experienced

The result also revealed that the coping mechanism as a whole was highly applicable. This means that MRWD front liners were able to cope well with the difficulties brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. The result infers that MRWD frontline employees coped with the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic by adopting practices like using of alcohol and other disinfectant to keep themselves and their clients safe. They also coped with mental stress by looking at the brighter side of things and being positive believing that the pandemic will be over soon. Additionally, they should even during pandemics, converse with the concessionaires with confidence at work as a component of their duty. However, the pandemic caused a heavy toll on them when it cost them financially since life was hard already even before the pandemic. Finlay *et al.* (2021) posited that the pandemic may cause older people to experience stress and other difficulties in their daily lives. However, they could also use be-

havioral and emotional coping mechanisms. From the viewpoints of senior citizens in the United States, their study suggested strategies for managing concerns and strain in the epidemic. Exercise and being out-doors were often stated strategies, as were modifying behaviors, following public health recommendations, altering attitudes, and maintaining social connections. Moreover, significant differences were found in the experiences and coping mechanisms of the MRWD frontliners when grouped according age, nature of work assignment, and employment status, while no significant differences were found when grouped conferring to gender, number of years in service, and civil status.

The result further shows that when age is considered, the difference lies between the age groups below 25 years old, 36 to 45 years old, and 56 years old and above group. This can be attributed to the younger group being new to their job and may still welcome viable changes in employment, while 36 to 45 years old had more settled roles, and 56 years old and above may already be considering retirement. The disparity in age may affect the respondents’ view of their experiences in the pandemic. This can also be inferred that the respondents’ perception of the experiences encountered amidst COVID-19 pandemic is not the same depending on their work assignment, which may also be brought by their employment status. Assignments for regular employees differ in nature with that of job order employees, thus, experiences will also be different.

The study of Tuchen *et al.* (2023) presents similar results with this study, particularly in the aspect of age. Although their study focused on cultural, political and duration, they established differences when taking age into account. The issue of job security was also pointed out. In the profiles of their respondents, Lara and Atutubo's study in 2021 found differences. They took into account criteria including occupation, civil status, age, and sex, much like this study did. They came to the conclusion that workers differ depending on their profiles, their study's participants were overworked, stressed out, and had safety difficulties. The outcome also showed that their primary coping techniques were prayer and positive thinking.

**Table 2:** Differences in respondents’ experiences when grouped according to profile.

Variables	t-value/F-value	p-value	Remarks
Age	2.524	0.043	<i>s</i>
Gender	3.659	0.058	<i>ns</i>
Civil Status	1.187	0.317	<i>ns</i>
Work Assignment	4.082	0.001	<i>s</i>
Number of Years in Service	0.956	0.433	<i>ns</i>
Employment Status	7.791	0.006	<i>s</i>

p-value >0.05 = not significant

p-value <0.05 = significant

**Table 3:** Differences in coping mechanisms of the respondents when grouped according to profile.

Variables	t-value/F value	p-value	Remarks
Age	2.876	0.025	<i>s</i>
Gender	3.166	0.077	<i>ns</i>
Civil Status	0.454	0.715	<i>ns</i>
Nature of Work Assignment	3.325	0.004	<i>s</i>
Number of Years in Service	0.285	0.887	<i>ns</i>
Employment Status	5.499	0.020	<i>s</i>

p-value >0.05 = not significant

p-value <0.05 = significant

Furthermore, a significant relationship was established between front liners’ experiences and their coping mechanism. This result indicates that when experiences were unpleasant, there is more demand to apply for stringent coping mechanisms in improving the situation within the MRWD frontline services. The quick response of the management in following and complying with government’s health protocols helped cope the COVID-19 negative effects. Likewise, when experiences were lighter and pleasant operation is running smoothly, coping mechanisms also relax although needed to be in place to serve as reference. Moreover, the experiences and coping mechanisms of frontline personnel significantly correlate as they adhere to health protocols and policies of MRWD. The study's findings concur with those of Munawar & Choudhry, (2021) who came to the conclusion that their respondents used a variety of coping techniques

in managing strain and unease brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic. Their shared primary sources of fortitude for overcoming the COVID-19 bad effects and maintaining their mental health were their shared religious faith and their drive to help humankind and their nation. In the study by White *et al.* (2020) the respondents described that the persistent testing restrictions and a continued reliance on crisis requirements for prolonged use and reuse of PPE. The guidance provided by numerous municipal, state, and federal agencies was occasionally not only unclear but also conflicting. They gave the example of the time and focus needed to monitor a large number of messages and consistently update internal policies, procedures, and operations to maintain compliance. The direct-care personnel indicated genuine fear and worries of contracting the disease for themselves, families, and neighbors. Their capacity to function under difficult conditions is significantly influenced by the absence of company’s communications and cooperation.

**Table 4:** Relationship between MRWD front liners’ experiences and their coping mechanisms amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

Variables	N	Mean	Pearson r-value	Degree of Relationship	p-value	Probability
Experiences	153	4.56	0.785			
				High to very high relationship	0.000	<i>s</i>
Coping Mechanisms	153	4.42				

Level of significance at 0.05

**Insights for MRWD Policy Directions**

This is clear that the management of MRWD provided the necessary response in addressing the effects of COVID-19 pandemic as to perception of the respondents of this study. Job roles and assignments were changed in copying the demand of flexible schedules, additional work and prevention of infection among frontliners of MRWD and their clients. The result on the experiences and coping mechanisms employed by the frontliners as outcome of management intervention and the frontliners’ own personal judgment in time

of duty in compliance with health protocols and in protecting themselves too will serve as insights for the management to set policies that will help employees and clients to respond, comply, and adjust with more ease should the same situation arises in the future. The MRWD is guided by the values of providing responsive, accurate and quality customer service; promote high esteem behavior and conduct of District dealings with its consumers, stakeholders, and the communities it is serving; implement effective financial management; provide a health work environment to its employees; and promote environmental responsibility and sustainability.

COVID-19 is still very contagious, and it is still spreading in our country. The new virus is already a disease that we should adjust our behavior to be safe. The epidemic has revealed that the virus will continue to infect populations, remain a global threat until every country has adequate medical countermeasures. The disparity with job and personal life that results from working from home might have a detrimental effect on productivity at work. Home-based workers frequently have challenges between providing for the family and earning a living amid a virus outbreak. Continuous observance of basic health protocols like hand washing or sanitizing and wearing of face mask when symptoms of illness is present should be strictly implemented. A home and the workplace should be inspected to make sure they are free from any hazards, including fire and ventilation issues, and other daily risk factors. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, physical isolation must be used in conjunction with various health precautions such as proper hand and respiratory care, cleanup of the environment, and disinfecting of frequently touched things and surfaces. For the purpose of establishing physical separation policies at work, risk assessment and employee and employer consultation are crucial. Following daily disinfection with a chlorine solution that kills both bacteria and viruses, visual dirt is removed from the surroundings, the equipment, and both using soap and water. Modifying workstations, altering how common areas are used, using transportation vehicles, staggered shifts, and other strategies to reduce social interaction at work, as well as encouraging employees with COVID-19-like symptoms to stay at home and take

advantage of flexible sick leave, may all be taken into account.

Frontliners are not inclined to consult with health professionals such as doctors, psychiatrists or other counselors on how to handle their personal emotion like fear, strain and unease caused by the changes at work brought about by pandemic. The supply of sanitizing materials can be one of their regular requests for supplies to provide employees better protection as well as unburden them of the cost of using these while on duty. Reminders may be posted to continually remind the public for the need to protect themselves and others while being in the vicinity of MRWD so that service will not be interrupted. Employees may also benefit from activities to improve mental and spiritual health. Agencies and organizations concerned may include issues on mental health in the frontliners healthcare program. Employees should be urged to periodically check their own condition and check their temperature at home. Workplace thermal scanners can be thought of as part of a set of precautions against COVID-19.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The respondents respond to the challenges brought by pandemic, adjust from their work environment, and adhere to the compliance to health protocols and policies established by MRWD to mitigate the COVID-19 negative effects and its keep employees, particularly frontline employees safe from the infection as they showed a highly experienced response. The MRWD employees are able to apply effectively their coping mechanisms, which kept them safe and continue to serve their clients every day. Their nature of work assignment, age, and employment status are factors that differentiate the respondents' perception of their experiences and the coping mechanisms they applied. Moreover, the experiences of frontliners of MRWD can less traumatic when coping mechanisms are in place and ready to be implemented should the same nature of disaster happens. Success in mitigating COVID-19 may be attributed to well implement coping mechanisms. The experiences of the respondents and their coping mechanisms are significantly correlated as they adhere to health protocols and policies of MRWD. Continuous observance of basic

health protocols like hand washing or sanitizing and wearing of face mask when symptoms of illness is present should be strictly implemented. The supply of sanitizing materials can be their regular request for supplies to provide employees better protection and unburden them of the cost of using these while on duty.

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#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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