Padayon: Stories of Social Welfare Workers in the Delivery of Services During Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the plight of social welfare workers, including the challenges they faced in delivering services amidst the pandemic. The research questions focused on the experiences of social welfare workers as they provided social services, how they coped with challenging situations while performing their roles, and what insights they could share from those experiences. This research utilized a phenomenological design, with data gathered through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Twelve (12) participants were selected to take part in the study. The themes were classified according to the study's objectives. The first objective focused on the experiences of social welfare workers in delivering services during the COVID-19 pandemic, with identified themes including Community Collaboration and Partnerships, Resource Limitations and Optimization of Alternatives, Increased Workload and Stress, and Fear of Infection. The second objective addressed the coping mechanisms of social workers in overcoming challenges, with themes such as Self-Care Practices, Flexibility and Adaptability, Emotional Resilience, and Team Support and Collaboration. Finally, insights drawn from their experiences include Resilience and Adaptability, Digital Transformation of Transactions, and Vulnerability and Equality. The study's findings suggest that, despite recognizing systemic and technical issues that affected workers' well-being, welfare, and performance, the social welfare workforce was generally happy and fulfilled.

Keywords: Social worker, Covid-19 pandemic, Service delivery

INTRODUCTION

The roles of social welfare workers on the frontlines of the battle against COVID-19 have become increasingly significant and complex over time, with the evolving needs of their clients (Ashcroft, R.et al., 2021). Amid the pandemic, the surge in COVID-19 cases during 2020 and 2021 strained the healthcare system, government agencies, and frontline workers, including social welfare workers. Despite stringent regulations from the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID), the Philippines faced an overwhelming increase in cases, placing additional pressure on social welfare workers. As a result, these professionals have become essential in mitigating the social and economic impact of the pandemic by assuming roles in response, prevention, and recovery efforts (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020). The multifaceted nature of their work has brought forth various challenges, including exposure to the virus, emotional and mental health risks, resource limitations, and balancing ethical responsibilities in unprecedented circumstances (Banks,S.et.al 2020).

Furthermore, this study aimed to address the gap in understanding the challenges and coping mechanisms

of Filipino social welfare workers during the pandemic. Despite limited research on this particular group, the experiences of social welfare workers are crucial in comprehending the systemic difficulties they faced, their strategies for coping with heightened stress, and the insights they have gained throughout the pandemic. Understanding the personal and professional struggles of social welfare workers will not only contribute to academic discourse but also inform future policies aimed at improving service delivery and worker welfare in times of crisis. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the value of these workers' roles in building community resilience during emergencies, which is often underappreciated in the broader public health discourse.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the experiences of social welfare workers in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study will examine the challenges they faced in delivering services, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the insights they gained throughout their roles. The research will delve into the evolving legal and societal frameworks that influenced their work and provide a comprehensive analysis of their personal and professional responses to the unprecedented pressures of the pandemic. The study will also seek to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of social welfare workers, focusing on their mental health, job satisfaction, and strategies for navigating the emotional toll of their work. By shedding light on these aspects, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique challenges social welfare workers faced during the pandemic and offer actionable recommendations for improving support and policies in future crises.

This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Systems Theory (Adams. et al.2013, Bertalanffy,L.1972). Stress and Coping Theory (Lazaru,R.S. et.al 1984), and the Ethical Theory of Aristotle (William. 2022). These theories provide a comprehensive lens for examining how social welfare workers interact within interconnected systems and the psychological toll of working under immense stress. Systems Theory helps to understand the complex network of health systems, governmental policies, and community dynamics that shaped the experiences of social workers, while Stress and Coping Theory illuminates how workers manage the psychological strain brought on by the pandemic. Additionally, Aristotle's Ethical Theory offers a framework for understanding the moral dilemmas social welfare workers encountered as they navigated their responsibilities during this challenging time.

The significance of this study extends across various levels, both globally and locally. On a global scale, the findings can inform best practices and policies for integrating social welfare services into public health emergency responses. This research will contribute to the broader literature on disaster response, specifically regarding frontline workers' roles in social service delivery amid resource constraints, as highlighted by (Padriagao, M.J.M.2024). It will also shed light on effective crisis management strategies adaptable to diverse contexts, aligning with the observations of (Necel, R.2023) on the essential role of social workers during pandemics.

Nationally, the study offers insights into enhancing support for social welfare workers in future public health emergencies. The challenges faced by social workers in implementing programs like the Social Amelioration Program during the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the need for improved policies and support systems (Magalang,J.P.B. et.al, 2022). Locally, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations for improving the coordination, training, and resources available to frontline social welfare workers. Understanding the experiences of Filipino social welfare workers, as discussed by (Kahambing, J.2021), will contribute to strengthening community responses to ongoing and future challenges. By addressing the issues faced by social workers in disaster response, as explored by (Padriagao, M.J.M.2024), the study seeks to improve their well-being and effectiveness in times of crisis,

ensuring their sustained capacity to serve vulnerable populations.

Method

This study explores the experiences of social welfare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a qualitative phenomenological approach to analyze the data. Purposive non-probability sampling was employed, which enables the researcher to select participants based on specific traits, offering autonomy to choose individuals whose perspectives align with the study's goals (Sharma & Lovely Professional University, 2017). This approach contrasts with probability sampling, as it relies on subjective judgment and allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). By selecting participants based on their relevance to the research topic, the study ensures a diverse range of perspectives, shedding light on the challenges faced by social welfare workers in the context of a public health crisis.

The study involved 12 participants, 75% of whom were single. This demographic choice ensured that familial impacts and related experiences were accounted for. According to qualitative research guidelines, a minimum of 12 participants is recommended to achieve data saturation (Brain & Clarke, 2016; Fugard & Potts, 2015). This sample size was deemed sufficient for the qualitative analysis. The participants represented a variety of demographics, including different ages, job roles, employment statuses, and years of service. Approximately 42% of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years old, while 34% were between 41 and 50. The study included plantilla employees, job order workers, and contract service personnel, with years of service ranging from 4 months to over 12 years. Their roles included administrative functions, junior welfare officers, and social workers, all working at the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Field Office XI. Participation was voluntary, with consent obtained from each participant. This ensured that their involvement was based on free will, allowing them to share their experiences openly. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, risks, and benefits through a consent document. Each participant signed the consent form, which served as evidence of the study's veracity.

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were used, allowing for both structured and open-ended questions. This interview format minimizes researcher bias by giving participants the freedom to elaborate on their responses (DeJonckheere,M. et.al 2019). The interview questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first gathered profile information to ensure demographic diversity, and the second consisted of open-ended questions designed to allow participants to express their experiences in depth. The questionnaire was validated by experts and rated 8-9, confirming its reliability and validity.

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative design, which aims to understand individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Ayton, D. 2023). Phenomenology is particularly suited for this research because it seeks to uncover how individuals interpret their experiences, including the emotions, beliefs, and attitudes that shape their perspectives. The aim was to explore the challenges faced by social welfare workers and how these experiences influenced their ability to deliver services during the pandemic.

Data collection occurred through in-depth interviews; a flexible method widely used in social sciences for qualitative data gathering. This approach enables participants to express their perceptions and understandings of their experiences, providing valuable insights into their worldviews (Knott, E.et.al.,2022). Before the interviews began, participants were given informed consent forms to ensure they understood the purpose of the study. The researcher worked to build rapport with participants, encouraging them to share their thoughts openly. Probing questions were used to gain deeper insights and clarify

responses. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, ensuring accuracy and enabling the researcher to focus on the interaction. The recorded data was transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes that aligned with the study's objectives.

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data. This method is effective for understanding individuals' views, opinions, and experiences (Majumdar, A. 2021). Thematic analysis involves identifying key themes within the data and interpreting them in the context of the research questions. A deductive approach was employed, where existing knowledge and prior research informed the analysis. This approach ensured that the data interpretation was grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks and literature.

Ethical considerations were rigorously followed throughout the study. The researcher submitted the study to the University of Mindanao Ethics Research Committee (UMERC) for approval, receiving the compliance certificate (UMERC Protocol Number UMERC-2024-424). This ensured adherence to ethical standards, including protecting participants' rights and welfare. The study underwent a plagiarism check using Turnitin, ensuring the originality of the work. The researcher ensured transparency and integrity throughout the study, avoiding any deception or misrepresentation of data. Only the researcher and the advisor were authorized to publish or present the study's findings, ensuring that the results were disseminated in accordance with ethical guidelines.

This study aimed to understand the experiences of social welfare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic through a qualitative phenomenological approach. By selecting participants based on specific characteristics and employing semi-structured interviews, the study captured diverse perspectives on the challenges faced by social welfare workers. The findings contribute valuable insights into the role of social welfare workers in public health emergencies and provide recommendations for improving service delivery and support for frontline workers in future crises.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study with themes emerged during the analysis. The study involves the social welfare workers who engaged in the delivery of essential services during the pandemic.

1. **Experiences of Social Welfare Workers in the Delivery of Services Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic**

This section outlines the interviews conducted with social welfare workers, focusing on their experiences in delivering services during the COVID-19 pandemic. These interviews reveal key insights into the challenges and strategies that social welfare workers employed to continue providing essential services despite the many obstacles posed by the crisis. The following themes emerged from the data: community collaboration and partnerships, resource limitations and optimization of alternatives, increased workload and stress, and fear of getting infected.

1.1 Community Collaboration and Partnerships

Social welfare workers emphasized the importance of community collaboration in their role during the pandemic. The need to engage with multiple stakeholders, including barangay officials, private hospitals, volunteers, businesses, and academic organizations, was essential to ensuring comprehensive service delivery. Participants expressed the challenges of continuing their duties, such as identifying families at risk and distributing aid, but recognized that working together with these various sectors was crucial to meeting the heightened needs of the community. As one participant noted, "We need to go to the barangay to identify who are those family members mingled with infected patients." These partnerships echo

findings by (Abrams, L.S.,et al 2020) and (Ashcroft, R. et al. 2021), which highlight the vital role of collaboration between social workers and community organizations during the pandemic to ensure continuity of care and resource distribution.

1.2 Resource Limitation and Optimization of Alternatives

Participants reported significant challenges due to resource shortages and movement restrictions, which limited their ability to deliver services effectively. The scarcity of staff and physical resources, compounded by the additional health and safety protocols, created a difficult environment for service delivery. To overcome these limitations, social welfare workers leveraged technology, such as telephones, computers, and online platforms, to maintain communication, coordination, and service provision. As one participant shared, "Sometimes we are under-staffed in doing payouts because some are absent, and some are infected with Covid-19." Despite these obstacles, workers adapted by using digital tools and flexible work arrangements, as discussed by (Banks,S.et al. 2020), who explored the necessity of using digital tools and maintaining ethical standards amid the pandemic's constraints.

1.3 Increased Workload and Stress

The increase in workload and stress was a pervasive theme in the interviews. Social welfare workers described longer working hours, often exceeding the typical 8-hour workday, as they scrambled to meet the growing demand for services. With many colleagues absent due to illness or quarantine, the remaining staff had to take on additional responsibilities. Tasks such as food distribution and financial assistance became more time-consuming, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. One participant remarked, "I'm exhausted physically but I love serving the people." This increase in workload and stress is consistent with studies by (Deering,M. 2020), which documented the significant rise in workload and stress levels among social workers, ultimately contributing to burnout and highlighting the need for mental health support.

1.4 Fear of Getting Infected

The fear of contracting the virus was a significant emotional burden for social welfare workers during the pandemic. Many expressed concerns about exposing themselves and their families to the virus while performing their duties, especially in high-risk situations such as contact tracing or delivering aid to affected communities. Health protocols, including wearing masks, regular testing, and maintaining social distancing, were incorporated into their daily routines. One participant shared, "My role is very risky because I will deliver the staff who may be infected to the swab center, and I can accompany them in the vehicle, but I'm so lucky that I am negative for the virus." This fear of infection also led to personal sacrifices, such as limiting social interactions to avoid spreading the virus. (Devlieghere,J.,et.al 2020) highlighted that social workers faced a dual burden: maintaining professional responsibilities while safeguarding their personal health and well-being, further adding to their emotional strain.

2. Coping Mechanisms of Social Workers in Overcoming the Challenges in the Delivery of Services

The coping mechanism of social workers in overcoming the challenges in the delivery of services. This shows how they thrive despite the challenges they faced. The first theme which is Self-care practices emphasizes the important role of maintaining holistic well-being to serve the clients effectively. Flexibility and adaptability on the other hand show how they adjust to the situation. Emotional resilience proves how they carry out the role to sustain their own commitment not just in work but also as a social welfare worker. Thus, team support and collaboration proves the significance of working together as one in achieving collective success.

2.1 Self-Care Practice. The respondents describe on this theme that amid the pandemic, self-care practices appeared as necessary tools for safeguarding themselves against COVID-19 infection. Social welfare workers took these practices seriously, recognizing their role in minimizing the risk of contracting the virus and being a frontline worker in the delivery of Social Amelioration Program (SAP). Social welfare workers have shown that they are in adherence to health protocols and consider self-care practices as effective preventive measures against the potentially fatal infection.

It is presented on this theme, the actual experience of the staff how they performed their functions vis a vis self-care practices while doing frontline services. Mentioning crucial points that helps a lot for the successful delivery of social interventions during Pandemic. Workers said that before going to work "I meditate, I pray before going to the office, I pray to be blessed with enlightenment at work and to be blessed with patience. Before I talk, I do a deep breath especially if the client is angry."

Moreover, workers adopted various self-care practices to protect themselves and manage stress, including rigorous hygiene routines, wearing PPE, and taking supplements to boost their immune systems. They also engaged in activities such as physical exercise, meditation, and hobbies to maintain their mental health. Self-care practices are crucial for frontline workers to mitigate stress and maintain well-being. Studies by (Walsh,L. 2020) emphasize the importance of self-care routines in preventing burnout and promoting resilience among healthcare and social work professionals. Effective self-care strategies can enhance personal health and improve job performance during crises (Rupert,P.A.,et.al 2019).

2.2 Flexibility and adaptability. The theme focused on the sharing about flexibility and adaptability in the performance of duty amidst the tasks demand brought about by the pandemic. In the face of the extraordinary circumstances, the regular programs and projects typically undertaken by the agency were not prioritized, with tasks and functions changed towards the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). This shift compelled significant changes in roles as workers tried to meet the massive demands of highly affected families and communities of Davao Region. This situation emphasized the crucial need for flexibility and adaptability among the workers, as they navigated the daily undertakings to address evolving challenges of Pandemic.

Amidst these situations, various experiences were shared, highlighting the various ways in which workers adapted and coped with the demands placed upon them. These shared experiences serve as valued insights into the resilience of the social welfare workers, showcasing their ability to confront adversity and adapt accordingly to the recent demands and needs of the community people. The participant said "I was assigned at the Operation Center that answered calls to clients, I feel of being a frontline worker, I try to satisfy and answer what their concerns are. Some people get angry but I really increase my patience even though I am on the phone to entertain. We are provided of laptop computers and landlines so we can access filed grievances. Everything."

Adapting to new work environments and processes, social welfare workers demonstrated remarkable flexibility. They modified service delivery methods, extended duty hours, and embraced remote transaction technologies. Flexibility and adaptability are essential traits for frontline workers during emergencies, enabling them to respond effectively to rapidly changing conditions. (Boin, A. et.al 2020) highlight the importance of organizational support and training in enhancing these capabilities, ensuring resilient service delivery. (McLoughlin,C.A. et al. 2020) also underscore the role of adaptability in crisis management.

2.3 Emotional Resilience. The emotional resilience of workers during the pandemic has been a critical phase of their capability to cope with the challenges they encountered. The drive to meet the huge demand

of work were present even they were not adequately prepared. However, amidst the difficulties, support from family and friends surfaced as a significant source of strength.

Additionally, many workers cited their faith as a guiding power that helped them navigate the hesitations and stresses of their work. In essence, the emotional resilience of workers during the pandemic was stimulated by the support of their loved ones and their unwavering faith. These sources of strength helped sustain them through challenging circumstances, the fear of getting infected, be isolated and be away from their family. This enables them to continue their vital work with determination and perseverance. One shared that, "reflecting on my journey, I realize that the essence of service knows no bounds. Whether formally affiliated with social welfare institutions or operating independently, the call to serve remains steadfast. My experiences during the pandemic have instilled in me a profound sense of humility and resilience, reinforcing my commitment to the noble profession of social work and the pursuit of collective well-being".

Emotional resilience among workers was evident as they sought ways to maintain their mental health through family connections, faith, and leisure activities. They showed strong dedication despite the challenging circumstances. Emotional resilience is a critical factor in coping with the stresses of frontline work during crises. Support systems, including family, community, and organizational backing, play a crucial role in fostering resilience. (Southwick ,S.et al. 2014) found that resilience can be developed through positive relationships, a sense of purpose, and adaptive coping strategies.

2.4 Team Support and Collaboration. The theme highlights the importance of teamwork and collaboration among participants in delivering services and assistance during the pandemic. Both private and government institutions played essential roles, supporting each other through the sharing of resources and expertise. With the sharing, this collaboration proved to be a significant factor in effectively responding to the urgent needs of the community. The DSWD were able to maximize their impact and reach a wider segment of the population in need. The collective effort facilitated the rapid deployment of assistance and services to those most affected by the pandemic, demonstrating the power of collaboration in times of crisis.

Apart from the collaboration between private and government entities, the internal assistance from top management played a crucial role in facilitating pandemic response efforts. This support covered various aspects such as provision of technical assistance, logistics support, personal protective equipment (PPE), and necessary supplements.

The top management ensured that frontline workers had the necessary resources and guidance to carry out their duties effectively and safely. Logistics support guaranteed the smooth flow of supplies and equipment to where they were needed most.

The importance of team support and collaboration was highlighted, with workers emphasizing the need for regular communication, technical assistance, and inter-agency cooperation to manage the increased workload effectively. Effective team support and collaboration are fundamental in enhancing the performance and well-being of frontline workers during emergencies. (Salas,E. et al. 2015) note that regular consultations, technical assistance, and clear communication channels are essential components of a supportive work environment. Collaborative efforts can reduce stress and improve efficiency in handling crisis situations.

3. Insights of Social workers from their experiences

The themes here are the insights of social welfare workers from their experiences. Social workers,

especially those who deliver frontline services during the pandemic, face diverse challenges, and this kind of challenge broadens our understanding of their experiences. Resilience and adaptability as one of the themes shows how adaptive they are to continue their mission despite the situation. Digital transformation highlights the important role of technology in making the services more efficient both to them and to the clients. At the same time, the theme of Vulnerability and equality emphasized the effect of social disparities on individuals and communities.

3.1 Resilience and Adaptability. This theme delves into the adaptation and resilience disclosed by the participants amidst the challenges of the new normal, characterized by rigorous health protocols. The unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 situation was unimaginable for the community. Despite exhaustion from the overwhelming workload, participants rely on the support of their families, colleagues, and friends. Keeping their religious faith able to surpass obstacles and foster adaptability and resilience. Here are the few key points shared by the participants." Helping and talking to people in the community has a positive impact for me because I was able to impart help to them and self- fulfillment for me."

Resilience and adaptability are recurring themes, reflecting the ability of social welfare workers to persevere and remain flexible in the face of ongoing challenges. They adapted their strategies to the evolving situation, demonstrating both personal and professional resilience. Resilience and adaptability are critical for sustaining long-term effectiveness in crisis management. (Williams,T.A. et al 2016), resilience involves not only bouncing back from adversity but also adapting to new realities and maintaining a positive outlook. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances is vital for frontline workers to continue providing essential services under pressure.

3.2 Digital Transformation of Transaction. Participants discussed the insights on the quick transition from manual to digital transaction platforms during the Pandemic. The need for system development became apparent due to the tremendous workload of handling thousands of clients daily. Gadgets such as, computers, laptops, and cellphones were extensively utilized in this transition. Most of the participants have shared their insights and appreciation how they performed efficiently maximizing virtual meetings, orientations, consultation dialogue and many other activities related to Pandemic intervention. Here are some key points shared by participants: "It was also remarkable experience when we improve our system of cash payout. Due to huge demand of work, to efficiently conduct the cash distribution to the qualified clients, we engage the Financial Service Provider. This is on line transaction to be claimed by the clients at the various payment center".

The pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of transactions within social welfare services. Workers increasingly relied on online platforms for meetings, service delivery, and communication with clients and colleagues. The digital transformation in public services has been a significant development during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Lindgren et al. 2019) discuss how digital tools have enabled continued service delivery and increased efficiency in public administration. The transition to digital platforms is seen as a necessary evolution to cope with the pandemic's constraints and demands.

3.4 Vulnerability and Equality. This theme explores the insights of the participants pertaining to vulnerability and equality regarding the provision of assistance and meeting client needs in the community. It highlights the challenges faced by the workers in addressing various issues and concerns while adhering to program guidelines. Many of the community people have doubts in the selection of the beneficiaries. Despite efforts to explain criteria to affected communities, social welfare workers encountered negative reactions and verbal harassment. However, negative reactions were treated as normal due to uncomfortable situations, particularly those that hardly hit by COVID-19. These are the

highlights of the discussion:"My role is more on the response of the internal staff who are infected and taking care of them leading to isolation, swab test and their family. What I am concerned of is not only the poor families but the welfare of the staff who provide services to the community."

The theme of Vulnerability and Equality explores the challenges faced by social workers in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations while adhering to program guidelines. Workers encountered frustrations from community members regarding beneficiary selection and distribution of aid. Despite efforts to explain criteria, negative reactions and verbal harassment were common, particularly in hard-hit communities.

This theme is supported by (Diderichsen, et.al 2018), who emphasize the importance of addressing equity in social welfare services, especially during crises. Ensuring that the most vulnerable populations receive adequate support is a critical challenge that social workers must navigate.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This section presents the implications of the study findings to the practice of social work and future workers. The researcher's journey in writing this paper is also presented here.

Implications

This study provides valuable insights for social welfare practitioners, especially regarding the challenges social workers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. By capturing their experiences, the study sheds light on systemic and technical barriers that hinder effective service delivery and worker well-being. Understanding these challenges will help field practitioners develop strategies to improve the working conditions for social welfare workers, ensuring their long-term effectiveness and resilience in future crises. One significant implication for practice is the urgent need to strengthen organizational frameworks and policies. The narratives revealed several critical gaps, including insufficient resources, inadequate staffing, and the lack of technology training for workers, all of which impeded effective service delivery during the pandemic. These issues underscore the necessity of restructuring support systems to address these gaps. Future crisis response efforts must prioritize the well-being of social welfare workers by offering comprehensive support mechanisms, including mental health services, adequate training, and improved resource allocation. Without addressing these structural issues, the capacity of social welfare workers to respond to future emergencies will remain compromised.

The pandemic also underscored the crucial role social welfare workers play in ensuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable populations. Despite increased workloads, emotional strain, and the fear of infection, these workers remained committed to their mission. This study highlights the importance of community-centered interventions, particularly during times of crisis, and demonstrates the effectiveness of partnerships with local governments, businesses, and faith-based organizations. Given that social workers are often the first line of defense during emergencies, their efforts must be recognized and supported at both organizational and policy levels. Policies must focus on ensuring that social welfare workers are adequately compensated, supported, and recognized for their vital role. Additionally, social welfare services should be designed to be flexible and adaptive, taking into account the evolving needs of communities, as crises like the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate how quickly circumstances can change. Furthermore, this study highlights the adaptability and resilience displayed by social welfare workers. They demonstrated remarkable flexibility, leveraging new technologies and adjusting workflows to maintain service delivery during a time of disruption. This adaptability is essential in preparing for future crises, whether related to public health, climate change, or economic instability. Understanding the ways

in which social workers adapted during the pandemic can inform strategies for enhancing the resilience and responsiveness of social welfare systems in the future. In summary, this study emphasizes the need for structural reforms to better support social welfare workers. The lessons learned from their experiences can inform future practices, ensuring that social services remain effective and that workers are better prepared to handle the demands of future crises.

Morever,findings from this study provide a strong foundation for further research into the experiences of social welfare workers, particularly in the context of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Future studies should delve deeper into the long-term effects of the pandemic on social welfare practices, specifically examining how the rapid transition to digital service delivery has influenced the effectiveness of social work. Exploring the mental health and job satisfaction of social welfare workers would also provide crucial insights for developing more robust support systems that cater to their emotional and psychological well-being.

The study also raises questions about the systemic issues faced by social welfare workers. For example, the lack of resources—such as adequate staffing and technology—was a significant barrier to effective service delivery. Future research should explore the root causes of these challenges and propose potential solutions, particularly focusing on how organizational structures and policies can be reformed to better support social workers during times of crisis. Understanding these underlying issues will help to develop more effective strategies for social welfare organizations to operate during emergencies.

Another important area for future research is the long-term impact of pandemic-induced changes on social welfare practices. The rapid adoption of digital tools and new working arrangements during the pandemic may have lasting effects on the way social services are delivered. Research could examine whether these changes will become permanent or if there will be a return to more traditional methods of service delivery. Additionally, investigating how these changes affect the quality of care for vulnerable populations is critical to ensuring that social welfare services remain effective, even as new technologies are incorporated.

The study also underscores the importance of collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders, such as local governments, private organizations, and faith-based groups, during crises. Future research should explore the best practices for building and maintaining these partnerships, especially when dealing with uncertainty and rapid change. Strengthening these collaborations will help improve response strategies and ensure that resources are effectively mobilized during emergencies.

Lastly, supporting the mental health of social welfare workers remains a crucial concern. Future research should continue to explore the emotional and psychological impact of the profession, particularly during high-stress periods like the pandemic. Identifying effective strategies for preventing burnout and improving job satisfaction will be essential for maintaining a strong, capable workforce in the long term. In conclusion, this study lays a solid foundation for future research on the experiences of social welfare workers. The findings can guide future studies and help shape policies and practices that better support social workers, ensuring that they are equipped to face the challenges of future crises. By addressing the systemic issues revealed in this study, researchers can contribute to creating more resilient and effective social welfare systems that are better prepared for any future emergencies.

Concluding Remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges for social welfare workers, exacerbating the already demanding nature of their roles. However, the crisis has also highlighted the critical importance of these workers in safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations. This study

provides a detailed account of their experiences, revealing the resilience and dedication these workers demonstrated despite facing numerous obstacles, including increased workloads, resource shortages, and health risks.

As a researcher, I fully understand the experiences of social welfare workers as essential not only for recognizing their contributions but also for improving the systems and policies that support them. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive support mechanisms, such as mental health services, adequate staffing, and better resource allocation. Moreover, it highlights the importance of community-centered interventions and partnerships, which proved effective during the pandemic in ensuring the continuity of services. Moving forward, it is crucial for policymakers to prioritize the welfare of social welfare workers, ensuring that they have the resources and support they need to continue delivering essential services during future crises.

The insights gained from this study are valuable for policymakers like me, social welfare organizations, and future researchers. By addressing the challenges faced by social welfare workers, steps can be taken to improve the quality and effectiveness of social services. This will ensure that social workers are well-equipped to handle future public health emergencies and continue to provide crucial support to those in need. The study also calls for continued research into the systemic issues that affect social welfare workers and the development of strategies to address these challenges.

In conclusion, the resilience and commitment of social welfare workers, as demonstrated throughout the pandemic, serve as a testament to their dedication to serving society's most vulnerable. This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of their experiences but also underscores the importance of investing in and supporting the social welfare workforce. Through continuous improvements in policies, practices, and support mechanisms, social welfare workers can be better prepared for future crises, ensuring that they can continue to provide essential services to those who need them most.

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