

# Physical Exercise as Rehabilitation Alternative to Preserve Positive Mental Health of Graduate Students during COVID-19 Pandemic

Randy Joy M. Ventayen<sup>1</sup>Lemuel M. Ventayen<sup>2</sup>Timothy Joshua M. Ventayen<sup>3</sup>  
Caren C. Orlanda-Ventayen<sup>4</sup>Justine Rose A. Senting-Ventayen<sup>5</sup>Noemi C. Orlanda<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Director, Public Relations, Publication and Information Office, Pangasinan State University

<sup>2</sup>Program Chair, Business Administration, Pangasinan State University, Alaminos City Campus

<sup>3</sup>Faculty, Business Administration, Pangasinan State University, Bayambang Campus

<sup>4</sup>Coordinator, Planning, Pangasinan State University, Alaminos City Campus

<sup>5</sup>Primary School Teacher, Mother Goose Special Science High School, Dagupan City

<sup>6</sup>Student, Pangasinan State University, School for Advanced Studies

**Abstract** –COVID-19 Pandemic changed the way we live, which we call a new normal. People around the world need to adopt these changes to continue their daily activities. This study aims to determine the physical exercise benefits as a rehabilitation alternative to preserve positive mental health as perceived by the participants. The researcher initiated a focus group discussion that involves the graduate students of one institution in the Philippines. Each participant shared their practices and challenges to maintain a positive attitude during the lockdown. The study results show that those who actively engage in physical activities are most likely to maintain positive mental health during the Pandemic. While these safety protocols such as staying at home are vital and necessary, our bodies and minds do need physical exercise and the many benefits it provides. It is advised that students engage in programs that encourage physical health, which has been shown to have a beneficial impact on the student's mental wellbeing.

**Keywords** – physical exercise, mental health

## INTRODUCTION

The Pandemic, which the Coronavirus COVID-19 caused, was affecting operations all over the world.<sup>1,2</sup> Teachers were among the most affected as no lectures were being held due to the disruption of classes. In the Philippines, Luzon has undergone extreme community quarantine throughout the area, causing significant changes to the institutions. The majority of teachers, along with their relatives, are unprepared for the crisis, and it serves as a wake-up call for organizations to increase global preparedness for any pandemics<sup>3</sup>.

The disease's consequences have been felt in Luzon, including the cessation of schools, the partial shutdown of companies, limited activities, a curfew, and delays in logistics operations. The Pangasinan State University, Open University Systems (OUS) launched a survey to assess the graduate students' behaviors and interests in dealing with mental and psychological disruptions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They were questioned regarding the impact of the chosen practice on their mental health, focusing on physical activities.

As with previous pandemics, the coronavirus can cause psychosocial disorders in people, which is difficult to distinguish from more mild illnesses. The absence of a vaccine can enable us to continue non-pharmaceutical treatments to deter illnesses. However, it may also result in group quarantine or lockout, preventing students from attending school.

Other graduate students can experience particular stressors, such as boredom resulting from being out of the public, and their isolation may worsen. As a behavioral health environment, there is a need for universal and selective mitigation of COVID-19's psychosocial effects.

Mental health is described as a state of wellbeing in which each person recognizes his or her total capacity, capable of coping with everyday life stresses. Emotional wellbeing encompasses all aspects of life; for example, maintaining a positive interaction with peers and the capacity to express emotions. Additionally, it is essential to maintain a balanced lifestyle that requires healthy behaviors and the ability to accomplish certain life goals.

Exercise is an evidence-based therapy for patients who are experiencing mental health difficulties. Physical therapists may help patients who may be experiencing mental health difficulties and their long-term health problems. Several studies support the evidence that exercises contribute to a good wellbeing<sup>4-6</sup>.

Due to the effects of COVID-19 Pandemic, including lockdown and quarantine, mental issues became one of the health concern. The primary objective of this study is to determine if physical exercise may be used as a rehabilitation alternative to maintain positive mental health during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## METHODOLOGIES

The method of this study is qualitative, and A focus group discussion was initiated by the researchers for the graduate students in the Philippines and Filipino teachers working abroad. There are 16 participants for the focus group discussion. Each participant shared their practices and challenges during the first few months of lockdown.

This research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed method). An open-ended query was generated with Google Forms for other participants who would like to add more information about their experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interview result with 19 participants, all of them admitted the enormous adjustments during the Pandemic. Globally, the COVID-19 Pandemic is exceptional, limiting people's everyday movements, and policymakers across the globe are pleading for people to remain healthy and stay at home. This ensures that most citizens would spend the majority of their time (if not all of their time) at home.

The majority of the participants experience mild to moderate anxiety. Despite there is no participants who experience a serious mental health problem, the majority of them admitted that they experience a hard time. One participant mentioned that *"Yes - Like I feel so anxious whenever I go outside because the virus is not visible by our naked eye so I get worried that what if I went home with the virus in me and may infect someone"*

**Table 1 Physical Activities from participants**

<i>Cycling, eating, running</i>
<i>Yoga, jumping ropes, ab exercises etc.</i>
<i>Meditation</i>
<i>To preserve my positive mental health, I do running or walking for 3-4 times a week and doing zumba. By doing these activities regularly, it helps me to boost my immune system and to be physically fit. And it helps me to think positive thoughts to understand and process the things that is happening nowadays.</i>
<i>To preserve my positive mental health, I do running or walking for 3-4 times a week and doing zumba. By doing these activities regularly, it helps me to boost my immune system and to be physically fit. And it helps me to think positive thoughts to understand and process the things that is happening nowadays.</i>
<i>Cycling, jogging/walking around the condo with the family and doing zumba with friends has helped us preserve positive mental health especially during the Pandemic.</i>
<i>I usually join a support group/Bible study. I watch series and movies. I usually go for a run to keep my body healthy. Nothing really important, whenever I have anxiety I just keep myself busy.</i>

<i>Reading books and helping my family in gardening</i>
<i>Treadmill exercise</i>
<i>I engage myself in to some hobbies that I really don't do before, I also read books that can help me calm my thoughts like those inspirational and devotional books, I also try cooking different food and explore various recipes, and watch movies and series with my husband. Honestly, this Pandemic is like a blessing in disguise. I got the chance to spend more time with my husband and more time with Jesus.</i>
<i>Acknowledging that you are not mentally okay is the first step to cope with this situation. After that, I tried to indulge myself again with the things that i loved/used to do such as embroidery, drawings, and some art stuff. I also got myself hooked in watching good-feel and good-cry movies - movies that I can relate to and with lessons that are worthy to ponder. Above all, constant reflection, meditation and prayer gave me an avenue to foster positive mental health.</i>
<i>I do physical exercise inside our apartment and just following some video exercise in the youtube. I also watch and joined online mass.</i>
<i>I exercise regularly and do some gardening. Online kumustahan is also done with my students, family and friends.</i>
<i>regular exercise(jogging and walking) and meditation( prayer during morning and night time)</i>
<i>Walking, badminton and jogging</i>
<i>Zumba for 15 min 5 days a week</i>
<i>To preserve a positive mental health during this Pandemic, I always follow social distancing when I am with other people or even with my friends. Wearing a mask is now my fashion and I always maintain washing my hands and use a sanitizer or alcohol. I also stay at home on holidays and do a movie marathon to avoid overthinking about Covid 19 and to avoid catching the virus.</i>
<i>Maintain proper hygiene, and observe social distancing.</i>
<i>As a police officer we are required to have physical exercise. An afternoon jog for an hour will do.</i>

People have much fewer chances to be physically active due to the implementation of different safety protocols. Activities such as walking or riding for commuting or participating in a leisurely exercise are prohibited. Furthermore, these radical steps render it much simpler to remain sedentary at home for extended periods. The consequences of this physical inactivity are likely to be seen in various ways, including wellness and social welfare and the emotional health of these students<sup>7</sup>.

While these safety protocols such as staying at home are vital and necessary, our bodies and minds do need physical exercise and the many benefits it provides.

The link between physical exercise and mental wellbeing is undeniable. Physical exercise is an integral part of managing mental wellbeing. The physiotherapists must encourage all participants and patients

regardless of whether they have a diagnosed mental health disorder or not.. Considering the current global situation of countries in imposed cycles of shutdown and isolation, this may have a massive effect on the mental wellbeing of many citizens, particularly if they do not partake in some physical activity<sup>8,9</sup>.

Physical activity and fitness are beneficial over a lifetime. We are designed to walk, and many of our body's processes function best when we are physically involved on a regular basis.

### Other Cope-up mechanisms by the students

Despite the negativity, most students receive support from families and licensed social workers in the nation who specialize in assisting those experiencing isolation and loneliness. Students are dealing with financial pressures by cutting back on needless expenditures. The majority of them are lowering their aspirations in order to brace themselves for potential adversity. Certain individuals took solace in reading religious scriptures and documents that assisted them in minimizing the negativity. A stronger family bond is one of the most effective strategies for students to alleviate their deteriorating condition<sup>10</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

Graduate student's home exercises to combat social distress are dependent on their own initiative. It is advised that students engage in programs that encourage behavioral health which have been shown to have a beneficial impact on the student's mental wellbeing.

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