



# COVID 19: Impetus for “Community Spirits” among Filipinos

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## ABSTRACT

Virus is a borderline between living and non-living things, not capable of reproduction but only do this process utilizing the machineries of a living cell. For most ordinary people in the Philippines, the corona virus that caused Corona Virus Disease in December 2019 (COVID 19) was not of big importance. The Philippine government was just observing the usual measure such as installing thermal screening in the airports to detect arriving passengers with flu. The virus continued to spread to the whole world. The continuous spread of the virus is the reason why mass media in print, in television, and other forms were used to educate people on how to prevent the spread of the virus. The Philippines positive cases were increasing almost exponentially. The Philippines government was getting more serious on the corona virus problem. President Rodrigo Duterte announced in the evening of March 12, 2020 of the month-long lock down of the whole [Metro Manila from March 15 to April 14, 2020](#) as the country looks forward to contain the COVID 19. Land, domestic air and domestic sea to and from Metro Manila were suspended within the period. Social and religious activities that involved mass gathering were banned. Conferences, seminars and like activities were postponed and people were advised to stay at home. The lock down has brought about both negative and positive things to the government and to the people which can be observed commonly in every place. The negative things could fall into economic, social and psychological aspects. If corona virus brings negative and undesirable things in the community and in the Philippines, there are also positive things that sprouted. It is true indeed that a misfortune or a disaster to a place or persons can be an opportunity to others. Lots of things which are favorable and beneficial to many people and to the nature during the lock down which include economic, social and ecological aspects. The current situation brought by the corona virus that resulted to lock down implemented by the government of the Philippines gives an opportunity to learn the value of compassion and empathy in times of crisis. COVID 19 is bad, but people can also see the good effect of it. In the Philippines, people always boost the morale of our fellow Filipinos to unite in this battle to overcome this crisis and “together, we heal as one”.

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## 1. PERSONAL ACCOUNTS ON THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC:

Virus is a borderline between living and non-living things, not capable of reproduction but only do this process utilizing the machineries of a living cell. Most ordinary people including those educated but without scientific inclination do not know what a virus is. However, virus infections are often experienced by most people regardless of status in life such as viruses that cause chicken pox, mumps, sore eyes, and many other illnesses. Some viral infections just last for a short period of time like less than a week while some are serious that have also serious effect on the individual such as the poliomyelitis virus and many others. Health agency in every country are implementing program to combat the spread of these diseases to safeguard the health of the people. International Health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) is also exerting effort to somehow end the spread of these viral infections. Vaccines were being developed, medicines and antiviral agents became available. On the other hand, this can also be an opportunity for the private drug companies to make money by funding researches to develop vaccine and potent drugs against these feared viral infections.

It was not fond of listening to world news before, but it is just remembering one feared virus in 2009. This was the H1N1 (influenza virus) which became world pandemic. When we listened to news on TV, airports were equipped with thermal scanner to detect arriving passengers with flu and were advised for quarantine if detected. People travelling from countries with the H1N1 cases were advised also to do home quarantine to avoid spread of the virus. It is unforgettable moment because people were so anxious during flight from Manila, Philippines to Osaka, Japan. People can still remember wearing the mask uncomfortably when people were disembarked in Kansai Interna-

tional Airport in Osaka. Again, most ordinary people in the Philippines were not particular in the H1N1 pandemic during that period.

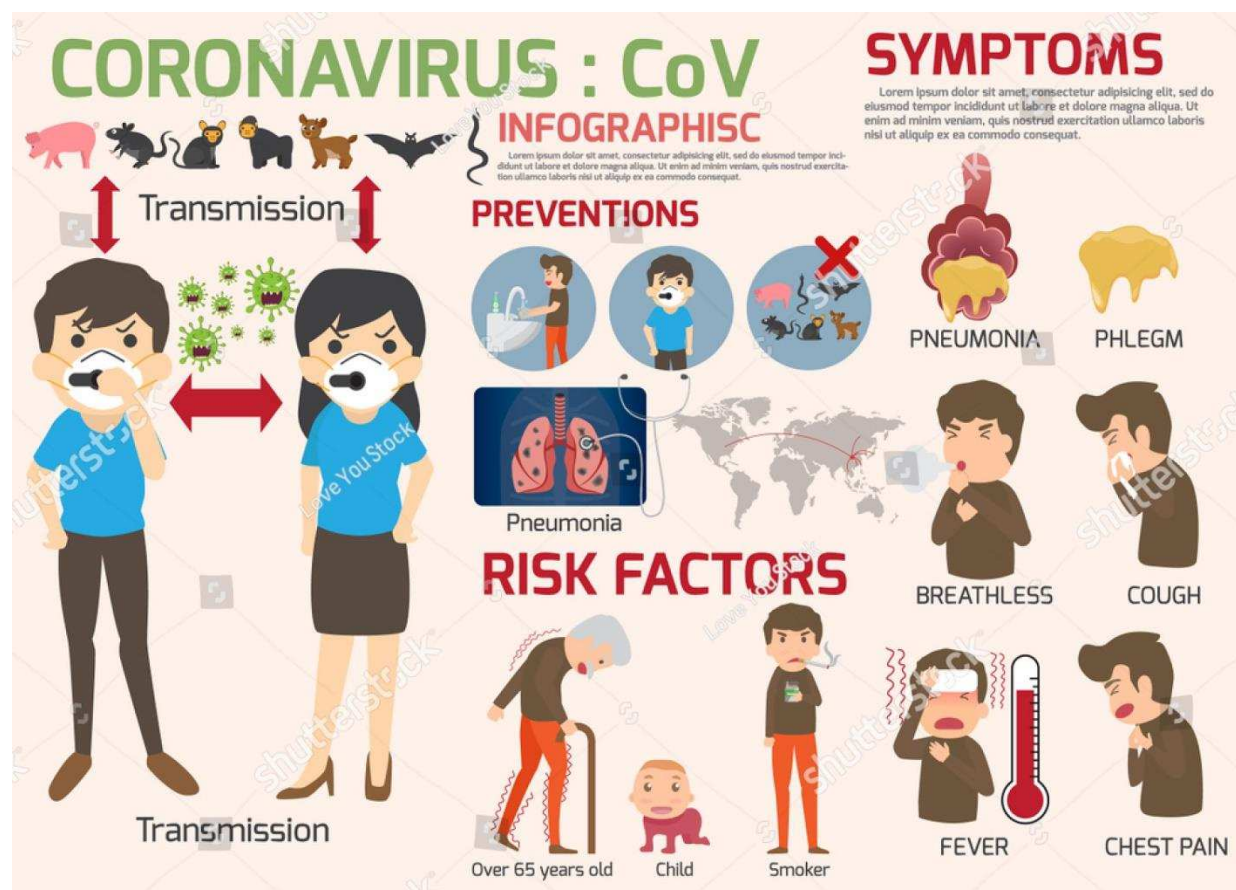
For most ordinary people in the Philippines, the corona virus that caused Corona Virus Disease in December 2019 (COVID 19) was just similar to those previously known viruses and was not of big importance. The virus originated from China as we can hear from news. News on the continuous spread of COVID 19 outside China can be heard in both local and international television networks. Governments of different country started the usual preventive measures to avoid entry of this virus to their respective countries.

The Philippine government was also observing the usual measure such as installing thermal screening in the airports to detect arriving passengers with flu which is similar to what it did during the H1N1 pandemic. It was not a big deal for many at the start. It made the place of Wuhan, China known to many and part of the consequence is the discrimination of the Chinese nationals. In the research conference in the northern part of the Philippines, the Chinese researcher who supposed to be one of the plenary speakers backed out of the engagement for fear of creating panic to the participants. People in the Philippines encountered Chinese-speaking tourists wearing mask in the plaza and indeed, philippinos refrain from getting near to them. This was the start where the face masks were out of stock in the drug stores it was very hard to find one. This may also partly contributed to the recently demand of the volume of masks for use of people affected by the eruption of Taal Volcano in Batangas, Philippines. Although it is not a usual scenario in the Philippines as Philipinos ordinarily observed among the Japanese during winter and spring season, Filipinos were already wearing masks in public places.

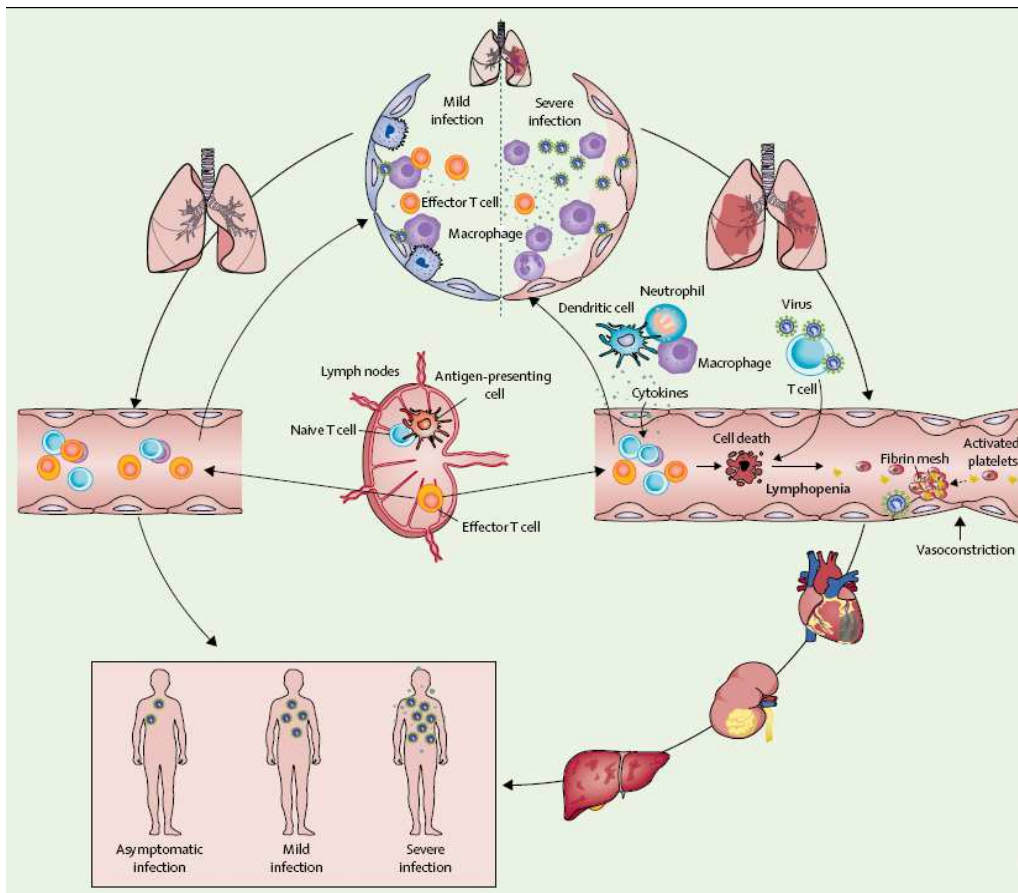
The continuous spread of the virus is the reason why mass media are also disseminating information through print, television and other forms to educate people on the proper way of handwashing, the proper manner in sneezing in public and many other proper hygiene practices to prevent the wide spread of the corona virus. Cases of confirmed positive for corona virus continued to increased almost exponentially. Philippine cases were also increasing. Some students from the Philippine Science High School in Korondal City, Philippines were commenting verbally on the slow action of president of the Philippines to close the air-

port from flights coming from countries which have high and increasing COVID 19 positive cases. Some Filipino people started to fear of the virus since death cases were also increasing as it continued to spread. People did not think that this virus will have a serious effect in the Philippines.

The main reason for this vast and rapid spread for this virus is because of its simple transmission. Due to its simple transmission, countries are making simple illustration for making people understanding what it will get this virus, how to get preventions, and what it will happen or symptoms when get COVID 19 (see **Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** Example illustration for COVID 19. Figure was adopted from <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/coronavirus-cov-infographics-elements-human-showing-1623598366VOSviewer> using overlay visualization



**Figure 2.** How the COVID spreads inside human body (Li et al., 2020)

**Figure 2** shows how the COVID spreads inside human body. This shows the reasons why people are aware for COVID since it can attack several organs in human body.

One of the impacts of the COVID can be found in many sectors. For example, as part of the functions of the University Instructor which is to conduct research aside from instruction, some schedules must be reconstructed. I am part of a research team conducting research project funded by the Philippine Department of Science and Technology. With our Team Leader in a person of Ms. Cudera, the group were determined to keep with our calendar of activities in the field works for data gathering and data validation activities of the two research projects. People also have hectic schedules such as meetings and seminars to be held in the capital Metro Manila. Research conferences were also scheduled on March 21, 2020 in

Penang, Malaysia and in the month of April in Batanes, Philippines.

In the first week of March, our government was getting more serious on the corona virus problem. Seminars, conferences, and like activities were cancelled. People experienced travelling at 8 o'clock in the morning of March 8, 2020 from their hometown in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat for a two-hours travel by bus to the airport in General Santos City for a conference in Manila the next day. People received notice through SMS text that the next day conference in Manila was cancelled. According to the interview with some researchers in the Philippines that get this message, many researchers said

*“thank God I did not put my phone in a flight mode yet!”*

*"I was in a hurry calling the attention of the flight attendant if I can still go out from the plane."*

*"Thank God! the pilot announced that the flight was delayed for five (5) minutes. The front door of the airplane was still open that time and again, thank God! I had no checked-in luggage so it was easy for me to just go down the plane and I went back home."*

Many tasks were also started to delay and stop. For example, in Sultan Kudarat University, doing designated works in addition to primary function as University Instructor was also started to delay. Although people were in the field work doing data validation of research work together with research leader and group members. It was in the evening of March 12 when The Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte announced a month-long lock down of the whole Metro Manila from March 15 to April 14, 2020 as the country looks forward to contain the COVID 19. Land, domestic air and domestic sea to and from Metro Manila were suspended within the period. Social activities that involved mass gathering were also banned. Philipinos still considered pushing through with the preparation for the research conference in Malaysia because people only learned a suspended domestic travel and Malaysia did not yet lock from the COVID 19. Eventually, local governments in the Philippines followed the lock down and some neighboring countries are also doing the same preventive measures. As a result, research conferences in Batanes, Philippines and in Penang, Malaysia were cancelled. The university also cancelled classes and in a few days, the faculty members were also advised to do work at home. Local governments including municipality also implemented the lock down.

Starting from March 21, 2020, people were advised to stay at home. This is the effect of the lockdown announced by

President Rodrigo Duterte on March 11, 2020 night, live in ABS CBN TV and reported by [Martin Petty and Karen Lema](https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-03-12/philippines-duterte-announces-lockdown-of-manila-to-fight-coronavirus) (<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-03-12/philippines-duterte-announces-lockdown-of-manila-to-fight-coronavirus>). Television and social media are the way of the government and private individuals and organizations to cheer up the people and encouraged them to stay at home if they want to help the government contain the COVID 19. There was serious information dissemination and continuous education to the people on the "dos" and "don'ts" while fighting on the eradication of the COVID 19. However, things are not usual and not easy for many. In spite of the good intention of the government, there were still who cannot bear the situation. Chaos are common in most of the checkpoints as we can hear from the news. But the government is firm on its effort to prevent the pandemic. As an ordinary citizen, one just need to obey what the government says. Wearing mask, proper handwashing with soap and water and the use of hand sanitizers and social distancing are some of the few common language this time. Still part of the effort in educating people.

The effect of COVID 19 is a disaster as it infects not less than 1.9 million people in the world as April 14, 2020 and killing thousands

(<https://www.corona24.news/c/2020/04/14/corona-virus-in-the-world-the-number-of-infected-exceeded-1-9-million-people.html>). In the Philippines, most infected people are those who have history of travel outside the country and it spreads to other people in the provinces who also have travel history to the capital Metro Manila. It is observed that the infection of the corona virus is not common among the poor people. The effect of the lockdown is felt by all regardless of the social status.

## 2. THE OBSERVED EFFECT OF THE LOCKDOWN ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY DUE TO COVID 19 PANDEMIC:

As it infected more than 1.9 million and killed thousands around the world (and still counting...)(<https://www.corona24.news/c/2020/04/14/coronavirus-in-the-world-the-number-of-infected-exceeded-1-9-million-people.html>), this pandemic has brought pain to all people from all walks of life. As an ordinary citizen, people have no clear understanding what a GDP is. However, it is clearly observed by an ordinary people how COVID 19 devastates the livelihood of the people as it interrupts economic activities such as disruption in the sectors of manufacturing, travel, tourism and other works that leads to financial hardship among the people who are on the “no work no pay” status. The lock down of the places as a way to implement community quarantine has brought about both negative and positive things to the government and to the citizenry. Here, I am referring to the commonly observed scenario in my own place. The negative things could fall into economic, social and psychological aspects.

### 2.1. Negative Effects:

*Economic aspect* – While the lock down plan of the government was about to be implemented, people are in the state of “panic buying” for them to stock food in preparation of this lock down period. The most badly affected are the poor people who earn a living in a daily basis because they do not have the budget to buy food and other goods for a week of consumption. They cannot earn a living because they are not allowed to go out from houses. This thing boils down to the responsibility of the government to resort to subsidy so that these people will not be forced to go out from their house to search for food. In countries like the Philippines which poor people accounts for more than 50% of the populations, according to news (<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/understanding-social-class-philippines-class-020037877.html>), this is a big chal-

lenge on the part of the government on how to solve this problem. The government through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has a scheme of providing cash amelioration in the amount of Php 5,000 (about 100 US dollar) to the poor people (<https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/who-may-receive-covid-19-emergency-cash-subsidy-from-govt-dswd-explains/ar-BB12aXae>). Aids in a form of food package consisting of five (5) kilograms rice, three (3) instant noodles and three (3) canned sardines are distributed and People as the recipients of this food pack feel not enough. Few families are planting easy to grow vegetables to somehow augment their needs when the lock down will be extended. COVID 19 contributed to the huge economic cost not only to poor but to the whole country.

*Social aspect* – As reported by the [Philippine National Economic Development Authority on March 19, 2020](http://www.neda.gov.ph/addressing-the-social-economic-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/) (<http://www.neda.gov.ph/addressing-the-social-economic-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>), it appeared that The COVID-19 crisis involve a class dimension: at the onset, the upper- and middle-income classes are the ones directly infected, because they are the ones who travel or are acquainted with ones who have travelled. Currently, the impact on the lower-income classes is mainly through the response measures being undertaken. During the lock-down, domestic transportation of all modes including land, air, and sea are suspended. Residents are not allowed to leave their homes unless for emergencies. Many people were not able to go home and are not able to be with their families during the lock down. Large gatherings, parties and concerts are banned, educational institutions have suspended classes, stringent social distancing is in place and religious activities are also banned. Many human activities that no one would think can be stopped are banned. Drinking liquor outside of the houses during night time as part of socialization of the local people in the community are banned as part of the implemented social distancing. Few people start to discriminate the health professional as the front liners in the hospital and health facili-

ties as people think that they are carriers of the virus. Somehow COVID 19 has affected the social aspects of the lives of the people in the local community and probably the entire of the Philippines.

*Psychological aspect* – The fear of being infected and the worries that the family will be the victims of this corona virus has contributed to the psychological pressure among the local people. Masks, rubbing alcohols and hand sanitizers are running out of stocks. This may indicate that people are buying these items to prevent infection or some may be hoarding supplies (?) for sale at high price later. People who are suffering from other health problems aside from COVID 19 are afraid of go to the hospital for fear of being infected by corona virus. The fear of running out of money and other resources while the lock down is in effect. These fears will somehow contribute the feeling of depression among the people. The negative effects mentioned are observed among the people in the local community.

## 2.2. Positive Effects:

If corona virus brings negative and undesirable things in the community and in the Philippines, there are also positive things that sprouted. It is true indeed that a misfortune or a disaster to a place or persons can be opportunity to some. There are actually lots of things which are favorable and beneficial to many people during the lock down although they may fall under economic, social and ecological aspects.

*Economic aspect* – People cannot go out from their house because local public transportation such as tricycle (three-wheeled local taxi) were suspended and only single motorcycle (with only single person) is allowed to travel to the local market. It is hard to go to the market to buy daily needs. This is an opportunity of the people with motorcycle to buy and sell market goods to the houses. People resorts to buy from this “mobile market” (with higher price). This is favorable to the seller because of a bigger return than the usual. Online selling became more popular, also benefiting those with

motorcycles. Government employees are given two (2) months to stop deduction of their loans from the Government System Insurance Service to augment the needs during the lockdown period. People learned to be thrifty. Some valued their small area in their home lot to be planted with vegetables.

*Social aspect* – The Filipino value of “Bayanihan” which means helping out one’s neighbor as a community, and doing a task together, thus lessening the workload and making the job easier, is also called the ‘community spirit’ is commonly observed in times of disaster and hardship. The same thing is observed during this COVID 19 pandemic. People are sharing their resources to those who are in need. Many are showing support to the front liners by providing packed food, water, masks and other PPEs. Gratitude are expressed from the distance by singing encouraging songs to the patients, nurses, doctors and other health workers who are at risk in this battle. Short written notes of encouragement were sent to them to boost their morale. People learned to be grateful to those who are not just doing their job as a profession but doing their work with passion and dedication even risking their own lives. Songs, short videos, spoken poetries that somehow encourages the spirits of the people are composed. Most Filipino families are intact. Through this COVID 19 pandemic, parents have devoted longer time to their loved ones that they could hardly do before thus, giving more time for family bonding. This also promotes health practices like taking balanced diet for a belief that this strengthens the immune system against the virus. Through this, people learned to value their health. Unhealthy practices are reduced and to some extent are stopped, like drinking liquor, smoking and some unhealthy practices. Regardless of their religion, people learned to strengthened their faith and devotion to their Gods as they show more concern to their fellowmen. For some Christians, the corona virus is the will of God for people to repent and make them realize that above all God still is in control.

*Ecological aspect* – Because of the lock down, operations in some manufacturing industries are closed, there is no local and international flights, traffic congestions are solved, streets are silent which resulted to reduced burning of fossil fuels. Air pollution in the metropolitan Manila was remarkably reduced according to the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Garbage are reduced because most stores, shops, resorts, restaurants and hotels and tourist destinations are closed. This gives time for the mother nature to recover from the destruction caused by human activities.

The lock down implemented by the national and local government in the country to prevent further spread of corona virus gives me an opportunity to comply backlog works in the university. The lesson from the current situation is the value of compassion and empathy in times of crisis. COVID 19 is bad, but It can be as the good effect of it. Communities, countries, and the whole world will overcome this crisis. Together, we heal as one.

### 3. CONCLUSION

COVID 19 pandemic has severely devastated human lives and interrupted economic activities in all nations. It gives pain to the families and relatives of the victims. It also caused headaches to world leaders in solving the problem. However, there are also good things evolved from the effect of this pandemic. The lock down in all places in the Philippines has brought unity among family members and among the people in the community. The suspension of transportation and economic activities also cuts emission of greenhouse gasses, thus healing the mother earth. One of the most important effects of this pandemic is its ability to drive the people in the Philippines to strengthen the Filipino value of “bayanihan” or “community spirits” and together they fight this pandemic as one.

### 4. AUTHORS' NOTE

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the data and the paper are free of plagiarism.

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