Effects Of Different Quarantine Safety Protocols in Different Workplaces in The Philippines

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Abstract: - This paper examines the efficacy of the Safety Protocol or Health Guidelines implemented in the Philippines during Covid 19 Pandemic and it focuses on workplace settings. The research is based on the test results of Covid 19 testing of employees from the Nueva Ecija University of Science Technology, Philippine Sports Commission, and Nueva Ecija Electric Cooperative Inc. I was during the Pandemic. The study recommends further studies, coordination with different agencies, and strict implementation of the government quarantine safety protocol may help mitigate the problem. The key objective of this study is to learn when the Alert Classification will be stringent to lessen the number of cases of transmission of the virus. Key findings of this study are – it is critical during the holiday season to have a lenient quarantine safety protocol, for the season requires more gatherings and is conducive to cold virus incubation.

Key Words— ***Covid 19, IATF, Corona-virus, Quarantine.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent years were redefined by the Corona-virus Disease 19 (COVID-19) pandemic as the global health crisis it caused had left various impacts on everyone's health and safety. Originated in Wuhan City in Hubei Province, China in early December 2019, COVID-19 caused by the novel corona-virus SARS-CoV-2 (previously known as 2019-nCoV) is known to affect people of all ages, especially those who are most vulnerable such as adults, children, and people with underlying medical conditions. In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the COVID-19 disease to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and two months later, on March 11, 2020, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. The pandemic has far-reaching and very serious consequences since it spread across all countries making the governments implement different safety and health protocols to contain the virus. The actions to address the pandemic carry out a direct impact on markets, supply (production of goods and services), demand (consumption and investment), and most importantly the world of work.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, many industries in the Philippines were directly impacted. This has caused an increased scale of unemployment as most business activities have been halted. In a survey conducted by the national government, the highest unemployment rate was registered at

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17.6% in April 2020, throughout the first implementation of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Nonetheless, the unemployment rate in August of this year has decreased as reported by Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This is because the majority of enterprises that were shut down during the early years of the pandemic are now opening and operating again, giving Filipinos greater employment options.

As companies reopen their workplaces during and after COVID-19, it is crucial to have a comprehensive plan to ensure employees will securely return to their offices, maintain a healthy workplace, and enforce safety and health standards. However, despite vaccination efforts and more extensive testing, the virus is expected to be around for years to come, affecting how people work, gather, and communicate. Government agencies and businesses have also provided guidelines and suggestions for developing reopening strategies, but every business leader should consider the unique needs of their employees and offices. These guidelines are based on Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF – EID) which allows them to develop the processes necessary to ensure employee well-being and continue to thrive.

As of November 19, 2022, the Philippines is ranked 38 in total COVID-19 cases. Also, from January 3, 2020, to November 19, 2022, there have been 4,024,956 confirmed cases with 64,468 deaths, reported to WHO. Also, as of 9 November 2022, a total of 168,356,070 vaccine doses have been administered. Local Government Units (LGU), employers, workers, and different organizations still face significant obstacles to safeguarding workplace health and safety. Safety protocols in workplaces are still lacking in development to ensure everyone's safety. Developing a quick, coordinated, and effective response and practical ways to reduce the risk of worker exposure to the disease in the workplace is necessary to reduce the possible impacts on workers' performance and capability.

Hence, with the possible presence of growing health and safety concerns inside the workplace, the researchers aim to conduct a study to assess the effectiveness of safety and health protocols at work in the Philippines. This study implemented the safe use of data. No personal information of patients was mentioned to protect their privacy.

II. Background Of The Study

The researchers conducted a prospective cohort study on workers from three different sorts of organizations and workplaces, where we might consider that they perform front-line work or work closely with the public. The Philippine Sports Commission, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, and Nueva Ecija Electric Cooperative I (NEECO I) are distinct sorts of workplaces and organizations that experienced the impact of the pandemic that begins in the final quarter of 2019. The multigenerational workforce at this institution is affected by the various quarantine categories and infection alert levels put in place around the nation. Department of Health imposed the alert level classification to guide the Local Government Units in their #COVID19 response. This new classification provides clearer courses of action to take in addressing situations in their respective areas. Alert levels are classified through the following guidelines listed below:

Alert Level 1 covers areas where case transmission is low and decreasing and total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate are low. All establishments, persons, or activities are allowed to operate, work, or be undertaken at full on-site or venue/seating capacity provided they are consistent with minimum public health standards.

Alert Level 2 covers areas where case transmission is low and decreasing health care utilization is low, or case counts are low but increasing, or case counts are low and decreasing but total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate is increasing. Business establishments are allowed to operate at a maximum of 50 percent capacity an additional 10 percent will be allowed for those with the Safety Seal Certification.

Alert Level 3 covers areas case counts are high and/or increasing, with total bed utilization and intensive care unit utilization at increasing rates. Business establishments are allowed to Operate at a maximum of 30 percent capacity. An additional 10 percent will be allowed for those with the Safety Seal Certification. Indoor entertainment venues, however, will remain prohibited.

Alert Level 4 covers areas where case counts are high and/or increasing, with total bed utilization and intensive care unit utilization at high rates. Alfresco and indoor dine-in services are allowed at a maximum of 30 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

In-person religious gatherings are allowed at 30 percent capacity, as well as indoor barber shops. Salons, hair spas, and nail salons are also at 30 percent capacity. Indoor venues for meetings, social events, and indoor sports are not allowed.

Alert level 5 covers areas where case counts are alarming, with total bed utilization at critical rates. Guidelines implicated in the Enhance Community Quarantine shall be observed.

The Philippine Sports Commission, which is in the National Capital Region, is subject to different quarantine classifications and infection alert levels with a population of Three Hundred, forty-five (345) personnel, forced to adapt to the change put forward by the nationwide fight against the virus. Additionally, various work environments are modified to accommodate the shifting demands imposed by the situation. The agency has embraced a multitude of work settings, including work-from-home settings, a skeleton workforce, and a percentage of employees reporting for duty based on the allowed-by-health alert level categories.

The Inter-Agency Task Force's (IATF) stringent requirements are followed by Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology and Nueva Ecija Electric Cooperative I, a public university located in the city's heart and an electric utility serving the majority of the province. In addition to adopting the CHED Guidelines on work settings, NEUST, which has a campus community of 650 people, including faculty and non-teaching staff, has also established hybrid work settings, work-from-home policies, and limited workplace reporting.

Additionally, the Nueva Ecija Electric Cooperative is a private utility distribution corporation with Two Hundred sixty-one (261) employees this includes engineers, office staff, and linemen who also change the usual work set-up to comply with the changing normal caused by the pandemic. To stop the spread of the virus, the company has implemented restrictions such as no loitering, the requirement to always wear a facemask and face shield, the transfer of hard copies of documents handled by a designated officer for easy contact tracing, carpooling, and avoiding using public transportation, social distancing but the number of employees reporting on the office are not limited for the services rendered by the company is utilities and considered essential, are few of the many company health guidelines implemented within the company's vicinity.

III. Results And Discussion

3.1 Quarantine Protocols

Quarantines are tools used by governments to control the spread of infectious illnesses. For those who have no symptoms but have been exposed to the illness, quarantines are used.

The quarantine methods were defined and designated as Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ), General Community Quarantine (GCQ), and Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) at the beginning of the pandemic by the year 2020. It was in effect until 2021. The quarantine indicators in a region were upgraded by the Philippine Government to Alert Levels 1 to 5 by October 2021, as was mentioned in the section before. The Philippine government continues to use the Alert Level as a gauge for the many Health and Safety Protocols that must be put in place. As a result of the epidemic, the Philippines is currently on nationwide Alert Level 1.

At the workplace, the bare minimum of health protocols was nevertheless followed. These include using protective clothing, washing hands, sanitizing, and keeping a physical distance. All establishments must conduct contact tracing, and a health officer must ensure that the minimum health standards are rigorously followed.

3.2 WHO and DOH Protocols at Workplace

During the height of the pandemic, the World Health Organization has established minimal workplace safety and health measures. The Department of Health (DOH) and several regional health bodies accepted it. The epidemic had a major impact on all sectors of the economy. Depending on the circumstance and the number of COVID patients, gradual and regular modifications were made. Almost all industries were shut down for a few months at the beginning of the pandemic, except for those that produced food, energy, water, medical supplies, and other necessities for human consumption. For a few months, all activities related to recreation, tourism, education, and transportation were suspended. The transportation industry had very few opportunities to operate. Even using a private vehicle was forbidden. All of this was done to slow down and stop the virus's spread.

The three institutions The Philippine Sports Commission, Nueva Ecija II Electric Cooperative Inc., Area 1 (NEECO II Area 1), and Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST), which is an academic institution, shall be the center of this case study.

Figure 01 depicts the various quarantine measures put into place between October 2021 and October 2022 at the various workplaces indicated above. Due to an increase in patients who tested positive for COVID, Metro Manila was placed under Alert Level 3 from October to November 2021. The Alert Level was dropped to 2 in December 2021 due to a decrease in patients who tested positive for COVID and to allow for greater economic growth during the peak holiday seasons. The number of COVID-positive patients, however, considerably increased as a result of lax safety and health rules throughout the holiday season, raising the Alert level to 3 by the month of January 2022.

By November 2021, the province of Nueva Ecija has embraced the Alert Level. Due to their shared provincial location, NEECO II Area 1 and NEUST both used the same quarantine procedures. Nueva Ecija was relegated to Alert Level 2 until December 2021 by November 2021. The holiday season peaked for the same reason as above. As more individuals socialize and congregate, the number of Covid cases rises. causing the Alert Level to be increased to 3.

At this point, the majority of hospitals have higher occupancy rates. There are hardly any hospital beds accessible for Covid patients in Metro Manila and Nueva Ecija. The rise in virus dissemination was also a result of the cold weather. Considering that the season is making more people sick.

The Metro Manila Area's Alert Level was reduced to 2 by February 2021, but Nueva Ecija remained at Alert Level 3 until the middle of that month. Greater numbers of Covid cases were reported in Metro Manila than in Nueva Ecija. Metro Manila, however, relaxed the quarantine rules to allow the industry to flourish due to reduced hospital occupancy and the need for an economic boost.

Due to a sharp decline in Covid cases, both Nueva Ecija and Metro Manila were placed under Alert Level 2 by the middle of February 2021. By limiting the travel of those who are not immunized, the government has by this month made vaccinations for the public mandatory. Although it caused some people great distress, it may have contributed to the abrupt reduction in Covid cases. By March 2021, both regions were put on Alert Level 1. As of now, the entire nation is still on Alert Level 1.

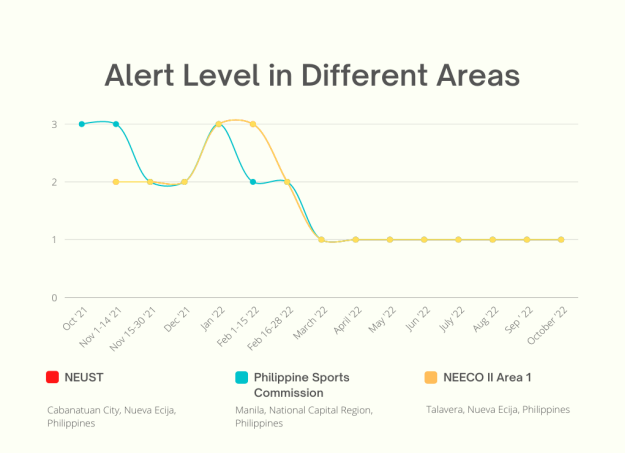

Fig.1. Alert Level in Different Areas

3.3 Covid Cases at Workplace

The Covid cases in PSC, NEUST, and NEECO II Area 1 from October 2021 to October 2022 are depicted in figure 02.

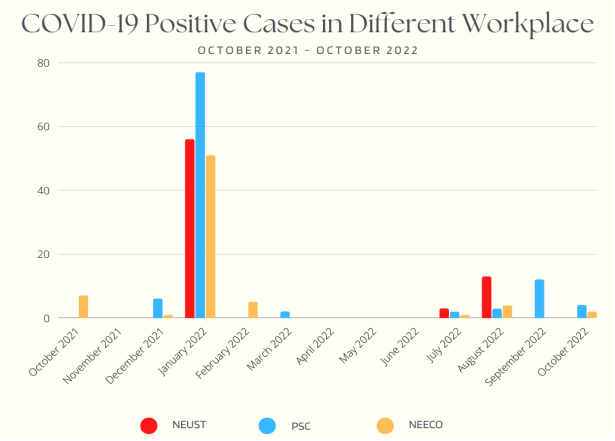

Fig.2. Covid-19 Positive Cases in Different Workplaces (October 2021- October 2022)

While PSC and NEUST begin in December 2021, NEECO II Area 1 data begins in October 2021. The graph indicates that Covid cases were present at the three institutions by the month of December 2021. Quarantine guidelines had already loosened by that point. Covid instances peak in the Philippines by January 2021, the same month as the rest of the country. This is because of the previous month's loosened limit, which coincided with the height of the national holiday season, more social events, and cold weather. Nearly all of Luzon's hospitals have reached their capacity. Due to the unmanageable Covid cases across the country, the restrictions in both areas

were both increased. Those numbers only including only those documented Covid patients.

Many people have chosen not to report their cases and instead treat themselves at home, especially those with mild to moderate symptoms who do not belong to the vulnerable demographic (pregnant, children, senior citizens, and with comorbidities).

By the month of February 2022, there will be no more than five cases of Covid in any of the companies under observation. In all places, Alert Level 1 remained consistent during the ensuing months. Additionally, basic safety and health measures were put in place. Additionally, vaccination rates rose. resulting in the virus's propagation is stopped. Several Covid instances were reported from July 2022 to October 2022, but they weren't enough to warrant tighter quarantine rules.

Figure 03 displays the percentage of Covid cases in each company when taking into account the entire workforce.

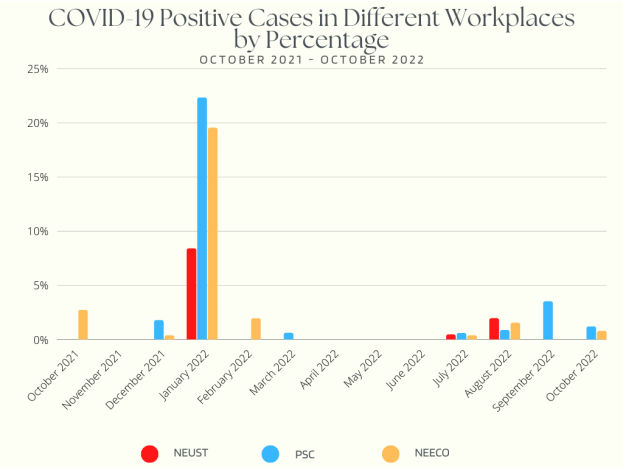

Fig.3. Covid 19 Positive Cases in Different Workplaces by Percentage

(October 2021 - October 2022)

The number of Covid Cases by each workplace is listed in Table 01 along with the matching date and quarantine protocols from July 2020 to October 2022. NEUST and PSC data were recorded by the month of December 2021, while PSC started in July 2022.

It can also be observed the changing quarantine protocols by each month.

Table.1. Number of Covid Patients and Quarantine Protocols in PSC, NEUST and NEECO II Area 1.

	Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) - Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija	**Philippine Sports Commission, National Capital Region**	**Nueva Ecija II Electric Cooperative Inc., - Area 1 (NEECO II Area 1), Talavera, Nueva Ecija**	**Metro Manila Community Quarantine Classifications**	**Nueva Ecija Community Quarantine**
Total Number of Active Employees	650	345	261		
Month					
July, 2020	No data	No data	2	GCQ	MGCQ (15-31)
August 2020	No data	No data	-	MECQ - GCQ	GCQ (16-31)
September, 2020	No data	No data	1	GCQ	MGCQ
October 2020	No data	No data	-	GCQ	MGCQ
November 2020	No data	No data	-	GCQ	MGCQ
December 2020	No data	No data	-	GCQ	MGCQ
January 2021	No data	No data	-	GCQ	MGCQ
February 2021	No data	No data	-	GCQ	MGCQ
March, 2021	No data	No data	1	GCQ - GCQ (with additional restrictions (bubble))	MGCQ
April, 2021	No data	No data	5	ECQ-MECQ	MGCQ
May 2021	No data	No data	5	MECQ-GCQ (W/ heightened restrictions)	MGCQ

June 2021	No data	No data	-	GCQ (W/ heightened restrictions) -GCQ (with some restrictions)	MGCQ
July 2021	No data	No data	-	GCQ (with some restrictions) -GCQ	MGCQ
August 2021	No data	No data	12	GCQ (with some restrictions)	MGCQ
September, 2021	No data	No data	25	MECQ	MGCQ
October, 2021	No data	No data	7	Alert Level 3	MGCQ
November 2021	No data	No data	-	Alert Level 3 (1-14) Alert Level 2 (15-30)	Alert Level 2
December 2021		6	1	Alert Level 2	Alert Level 2
January 2022	56	77	51	Alert Level 3(3-15)	Alert Level 2 (1-15) Alert Level 3 (16-31)
February 2022	-	-	5	Alert Level 2	Alert Level 3 (1-15) Alert Level 2 (16-28)
March 2022	-	2	-	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1 (16-31)
April 2022	-	-	-	Alert Level 1 (16-30)	Alert Level 1 (16-30)
May 2022	-	-	-	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1
June 2022	-	-	-	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1
July 2022	3	2	1	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1
August 2022	13	3	4	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1
September 2022	-	12	-	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1
October 2022	-	4	2	Alert Level 1	Alert Level 1

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers had drawn the following conclusions.

1. The Philippine Government implement various quarantine method to ensure health and safety protocols. The minimum public health standards in workplaces include wearing of facemask, frequent handwashing, physical distancing, and contact tracing.
2. During The holiday season, December, the number of covid cases drastically increased which results in higher Alert Level 3. The majority of hospitals have high occupancy rates, there are hardly any hospital beds accessible for Covid patients in Metro Manila and Nueva Ecija.
3. The relaxed implementation of protocols, holiday season, social events, and cold weather resulted in the peak number of covid 19 cases in January.
4. The NEUST records the highest number of covid 19 cases as compared to PSC and NEECO II – Area 1.

V. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were drawn.

1. The Philippine Government may improve further the quarantine protocols and implement uniform standards so that they will be more understandable to the general public.
2. The DOH and Hospitals may increase their capacity and upgrade their facilities to accommodate more patients, particularly during the holiday seasons.
3. Government agencies in collaboration with various institutions may work together to implement strictly the minimum public health standards to avoid fast transmission of the virus.
4. The employees of the various institution may encourage to follow strictly the public health standards and completely take covid 19 vaccine to prevent its adverse effect on health.

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