

The Impact of Grit to Anxiety Vulnerability Among Dependents of Overseas Filipino Workers During the Pandemic

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Abstract — The challenge brought by the pandemic has impacted individuals' psychological well-being, which increased the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression including the Overseas Filipino workers together with their dependents due to rapid increase of job terminations that led to financial constraints among direct dependents. Despite the odds, it is believed that gritty individuals are indicated to be focused even lack of favorable circumstances. Grit as defined, is the perseverance and passion of an individual for long term goals which can be a factor to associate grit and anxiety among the direct dependents of OFWs to construct further interventions and precautions needed for mental health issues. Furthermore, this study construes that there is a significant negative relationship between grit and anxiety among dependents of OFWs during pandemic with r-value of $-.549$, remarking moderate linear relationship wherein lower grit postulates more vulnerability to anxiety among dependents of OFWs during pandemic.

Keywords — *Grit, Anxiety Vulnerability, Overseas Filipino Workers*

I. Introduction

The pandemic presents enormous challenges to societies and families that affect their safety and well-being. It created a global alarm in all sectors that caused hampered transactions and delayed the distribution of products due to strict health protocols (Luttik et al., 2020). This current challenge affected not only the nation's economy but also the employment of the people. According to Solnit (2020), there are abrupt terminations of jobs due to the manifestation of the pandemic that made a more significant threat to individuals' livelihood. Some business platforms are already closed, and massive layoffs among employees. Moreover, this issue affects thousands of households in the country.

Almost 75% of the households relied on food donations from the government in the Philippines due to strict health restrictions and job layoffs. The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that the country is now on its lowest percentage record on the unemployment rate since the start of the pandemic (PSA, 2022). Accordingly, there are 3.27 million jobless Filipinos as of the moment, even after the level of mobility is slowly getting back to normal (Rivas, 2022).

Unfortunately, this led further problems in the country like, increase crime rates, mental health issues and fluctuating education due to financial adjustments.

The current difficulty affected different localities around the country, including the Zamboanga Peninsula, where many establishments were closed during the first wave of the pandemic. Many OFWs were also laid off from their jobs and decided to go back to their provinces, contaminating some locality areas. Accordingly, there were 124 first batch OFWs sent back to Zamboanga Peninsula at the peak of the pandemic due to this global crisis (Garcia, 2020)

This affects different areas of the economy, including the educational sustainability of students. Since there are vast numbers of Overseas Filipino workers known to be the household providers being sent back to the Philippines due to strict cut-offs of jobs and health threats in different countries, sustainability of education was directly affected. Most of the students in the locality could not withstand their education, especially at the tertiary level, due to financial constraints brought by restrictions and limited mobility. Commonly, dependents of OFWs were identified as the usual students with complaints on financial struggles and job layoffs that affected their household providers, and that hinders them to pursue their education.

Galam (2020) implies that global economic and labor market damages caused by pandemic has led to extensive lay-offs and employment shifts of more than 400,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). IOM Philippines (2021) supports this argument that the Philippines is now on its 75% reduction of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW's), which constitutes the lowest deployment numbers in over three decades. Lately, the number of returning Overseas Filipino workers reached nearly 800,000 by the end of December 2020 (IOM Philippines, 2021). Yet, some of the OFWs are still working amidst the health threat, and according to data, almost all of them had experienced contamination with the said disease (Patinio, 2022).

The documented population of OFWs was affected by the crisis on different aspects and phases of existence and significantly affected the family system (Montauk & Kuhl, 2020). There are three (3) themes identified as factors that affect the experience of OFWs; (1) worry over the conditions and distant family members, (2) disruption in plans and family relationships, (3) monitoring and caring from a distance (Cleofas & Rocha, 2021). These experiences can affect and trigger OFWs' thresholds and connotes further disturbance to their mental health during pandemic. This implication construes that OFWs and family members become vulnerable to mental health problems such as anxiety, adhering to the welfare of each other (Prime et al.,2020).

Anxiety is a normal stress reaction and can be beneficial in some situations. It refers to the anticipation of future concerns and is more associated with muscle tension and avoidance behavior (Damour, 2019). Research suggests that determining factors can contaminate an individual's vulnerability to anxiety. In the triple vulnerability framework, individuals might inherit the tendency to be vulnerable to anxiety, but this will not adequately produce anxiety itself. It goes with the psychological belief that their environment is unsafe and beyond their control, joint with

their previous experiences of threat and danger. (Barlow & Durand, 2013). The current threat on health could postulate triggers on vulnerability to anxiety wherein, according to Huckins et al. (2020), created an impact on individuals' physical and psychological aspects, which leads to possible avoidant behavior towards different stimuli. This avoidant behavior is an outcome of anxiety triggered by unpleasant provocations brought by the pandemic; perhaps, it can be physical, emotional, psychological, or even financial issues that have become a challenge these days.

The challenge brought by the pandemic has impacted individuals' psychological well-being, which increased the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Salgado et al. 2020). Research implies that further knowledge and awareness of the virus has associated with increased anxiety (Lei et al., 2020). In addition to the degree of psychological results on COVID-19, its continuation over time has been noted in formulating the term "coronaphobia" to designate those long-term mental illnesses associated with the pandemic, in which fear, emotional and social tension towards COVID-19 predominate individuals' coping mechanisms (Savary, 2020). Some findings affirmed that quarantining can also trigger a sense of shame and stigmatization (Desclaux et al. 2017 and Xiang, 2020) which can likewise cause stress and anxiety. This issue can be further troubled by the lack of financial sustenance, no access to information, and prolonged isolation (Brooks et al. 2020).

These factors have been created distress for almost all categories in the general population. It can be individuals who are employed, unemployed, and even students. According to a recent study, nearly 25-35% of the general population of students nowadays suffer from anxiety symptoms and psychological stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The predetermined factors that triggered students' anxiety were health threats and adjustments to the new platform of learning financial constraints (Xiang et al. 2020 & Saguin, 2020). On this end, this construes that students who depend on revenues from OFW providers are at high risk of anxiety during the pandemic.

It has been reported that anxiety and depression have become a public concern during the pandemic affecting people's mental health, including high school and college students (Liang et al., 2020). It has been acknowledged that the current challenge significantly affected the educational process, career progression, health, and safety of students (Ferrel & Ryan, 2020). Given that the spread of the COVID virus is evident and the switch in the educational platform in learning modality, an anticipated vulnerability to mental health issues among students is already presumed. The factors that affect students during pandemic are the fear of getting infected, the death of loved ones because of the disease, financial constraints, and adjustment to a new modality of learning (Bautista & Manuel, 2020). In this regard, it is evident that there's an increase in anxiety among students during distance learning brought by pandemic considering the factors that trigger their mental health in these trying times. To put it another way, a good working environment is vital for maximizing productivity. In addition, an efficient design helps individuals preserve their physical and psychological components (knowledge, motivation, creativity, and social skills) (Hoang et. al, 2022).

Most OFWs were mainly the breadwinners of the family, in which 80% of the family members depended on the revenues of their jobs (Aquino, 2019). This concern justified the increase of anxiety among dependents of OFWs, especially those relying on income for their education. The avoidant behavior of the students developed towards education becomes rampant nowadays during distant learning platforms as it directly affects the number of students who discontinued schooling (Galam, 2020). Evidence showed that drastic numbers of dropouts were because of different factors identified, including financial constraints, and unfortunately, most of the population found were dependents of OFWs (Saguin, 2020). Research supports that financial restriction predicts unproductive education, lack of motivation, and other personal reasons (Haarala-Muhonen et al., 2017). Due to the identified factors, this impends the OFW dependents. They tend to be more vulnerable to anxiety than other students in the academe, which might affect their perseverance and determination to succeed.

One factor that correlates in measuring and predicting success is grit. Grit, as defined, it is the perseverance and passion of an individual for long-term goals (Datu et al. 2018). According to Duckworth (2016), success is most likely determined according to the quantified grit and not by an individual's intelligence quotient; it emerges as an indicator of success and well-being. Gritty individuals are more focused on achieving their goals even under a lack of favorable feedback circumstances (Duckworth, 2016). It is differentiated from stamina and conscientiousness because it involves long-term commitment (Duckworth et al., 2017). Quin and Duckworth (2009) added two (2) dimensions of grit; consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Thus, most studies on grit constantly highlighted the significance of perseverance, which postulates a greater probability for success (Bartone et al., 2013). Therefore, factors like socioeconomic status can affect perseverance and hamper the success of individuals (Stewart, Lim & Kim, 2015). This obstruction could suggest triggers on developing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Datu et al., 2016). It is presumed that economic status brought by pandemic can hinder determination of students and could affect their level of grit.

An increasing amount of evidence shows that grit is associated with various indicators of well-being outcomes, like life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Salles et al., 2014). Musumari et al. (2018) support this by showing that mediating factors such as "meaning of life" associated with "gritty" people suggested lower vulnerability to depression. Most of them define life as meaningful and focus on maintaining their perseverance and passion for achieving their long-term goals. (Datu, et al., 2016 & Musumari, et al., 2018). Gritty people are likely to be less prone to mental health outcomes due to their propensity to experience obstacles and failure positively. Moreover, the relationship between grit and mental health outcomes was demonstrated negative significance in different studies (Datu et al., 2018, Moore et al., 2018 & Lei et al., 2018)

Although there are pieces of evidence linking grit and mental health-related issues (Datu et al., 2018, Moore et al., 2018 & Lei et al., 2018), the author observed that assessing grit to anxiety were still unexamined, especially in this trying time of the pandemic. Yet current studies only

showed associations between specific factors that affect OFWs and dependents nowadays (Galam, 2020; Montauk & Khul, 2020; Solnit, 2020;). The researcher of this study found a promising pathway for deterrence of mental health issues like depression and anxiety prevalent in these trying times. Therefore, to the author's knowledge, it is significant to build evidence on the association of grit to the level of anxiety vulnerability among dependents of OFWs to construct further interventions and preventions of mental health issues.

Furthermore, this study adheres to address the literature gap by investigating the impact of grit to anxiety among dependents of OFWs during the pandemic.

Literature Review

This research is anchored by the theory of Angela Duckworth, 2016 on Grit which implies that success can be predetermined by an individual's passion and perseverance in what they are doing. Accordingly, gritty individuals are more focused on achieving their goals even under a lack of favorable feedback circumstances (Duckworth, 2016). It is differentiated from stamina and conscientiousness from the Big Five Trait theory because it involves further long-term commitment (Duckworth et al., 2017). Quin and Duckworth (2009) added that Grit could be divided into two (2) dimensions; consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. Thus, most studies on Grit constantly highlighted the significance of perseverance (Bartone et al., 2013). This theory stitches the literature gap on the tendencies of naturally "gifted" individuals with higher intellectual quotients redirected their goals, lost focus, and chose to live an unhealthy lifestyle. Grit emphasized long-term commitment to sticking to your laid goals that include individuals' willingness to accept and overcome failures. This factor is significantly related to retention and performance in the workplace and school (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Thus, in the school context, Grit has been associated with indicators of academic achievements such as students' general percentage average (GPA) (Muenks et al. 2017).

Anxiety Vulnerability

This study is also anchored by the framework that explains the development of anxiety was called the triple vulnerability theory (Barlow et al., 2013; Brown & Naragon-Gainey, 2012). The first vulnerability is a generalized biological vulnerability. Vulnerability is the tendency to be bothered or nervous might be inherited. But accordingly, generalized biological vulnerability to anxiety is not adequate to produce anxiety itself. The second vulnerability is a generalized psychological vulnerability. It is the intrinsic belief that the world could be unsafe and out of any individual's control. With these, an individual might not cope when circumstances go wrong based on the person's early experiences. If this perception is strong, you have a generalized psychological vulnerability to anxiety. The third vulnerability is a specific psychological vulnerability. An individual learned from early experiences, such as being imparted by parents, that some circumstances or substances are fraught with danger (Barlow, 2013). This created an impact on

individuals' physical and psychological aspects, which leads to possible avoidant behavior towards different stimuli.

II. Methodology

This research used non-experimental and descriptive correlational design that focused primarily on assessing the effect of grit to anxiety vulnerability among students who depend on their support from their OFW parents or family member during the Pandemic. This was conducted in all private institutions in Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay. Knowingly, seven higher education institutions in the vicinity were used as a platform for this research. The students were expected that have experienced a setting wherein their OFW parents or family provider were being retained or were being laid off from work and sent home due to pandemic.

The participants of this study were students who have OFW parents or rely on educational support from an OFW family member. This research has 62 participants to represent a sample population in the vicinity. All higher education institution in the municipality of Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay were the prospect setting of this research and participants must be at least 18 years old, currently studying in any higher education institution within the municipality of Ipil and with supporting OFW parents or relied educational support on an OFW family member.

This study used Anxiety and Fear of COVID-19 Assessment Scale of Salgado, J et al. (2021), a 16-item scale with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.92 from 445 subjects and a 17-item Grit scale by Angela Duckworth (2007), with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.85 from 1,500 respondents. Grit is calculated as the average score for items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, and 17. Consistency of interest subscale is calculated as the average score for items 3, 5, 7, 9, 10 and perseverance of effort subscale is calculated as the average score for items 2, 6, 8, 11, 14 and 17. These instruments were substantial in gathering responses according to significant variables in this study.

The study shared information from Lewis (2016) to observe ethical considerations in conducting research. The following parameters were considered during data gathering.

Informed consent. Target participants will receive an informed consent that contains all necessary ethical considerations before participating in the study. Its goal is for human volunteers to engage in research freely after receiving complete information.

Voluntary participation. The researcher will not initiate coercion to answer the scales since the participants' willingness is essential in research participation. The researcher will thoroughly inform potential research participants about the processes and hazards associated with the study before agreeing to participate.

Confidentiality. All responses of the participants must be for the research only. Breach of confidentiality jeopardizes the research's confidence and reputation and, in the long run, makes it harder to participate in research in the future.

Anonymity. No names of the participants are divulged to others to ensure that their identity is hidden. The researcher will be using various techniques to keep their participants' identities hidden and will protect their data by using password-protected files, encryption when transferring data over the internet, and even old-fashioned closed doors and drawers.

III. Results and Discussion

In Grit scale, items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17 are intended to measure specifically levels of grit together with reverse scoring towards random items. The sample population (N=62) scored 4.57 overall mean score with “very high” remarks. This implies that the level of Grit among dependents of OFW during pandemic are very high which initiates greater perseverance amidst pandemic.

Accordingly, gritty individuals are more focused on achieving their goals even under a lack of favorable feedback circumstances (Duckworth, 2016). This result implies that amidst challenging experience during pandemic the dependents of OFWs choose to pursue their education. Thus, most studies on Grit constantly highlighted the significance of perseverance (Bartone et al., 2013). This theory stitches the literature gap on the tendencies of naturally "gifted" individuals with higher intellectual quotients redirected their goals, lost focus, and chose to live an unhealthy lifestyle. Furthermore, it explains why these students remain studying despite the unfavorable circumstances.

Most of the items showed low levels of anxiety except item 17 with the mean of 2.64 that implies moderate remarks. The sample population (N=62) has an overall weighted mean of 2.09 which remarked as low in the tables. This implies that there are low levels of anxiety vulnerability among dependents of OFWs during pandemic.

According to Teachman (2005), anxiety vulnerability reflects a tendency to experience fear or concern over the symptoms associated with anxiety such as physical symptoms like a racing heart beat and subjective feelings of nervousness. In such, it also implies that high risk to anxiety vulnerability will incapable the mind on creating possible solutions and interventions in the current crisis. Since the result above shows low anxiety vulnerability among students who are dependent of OFWs, this implies that their risk to possible psychological distress are also low since it is implied accordingly that greater vulnerability to anxiety could possibly lead to high risks on having psychological distress and higher coping mechanisms (Salgado et al. 2020)

The correlation between grit and anxiety among OFW dependents during pandemic. With the sample population (n=62) the correlation value of the variables indicates moderate negative linear relationship with r value of $-.549$ and p value of $.000$. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between grit and anxiety among dependents of OFWs in which explains the inverse relationship between the variable. It is implied that when Grit of the individual increases, it is expected to have lesser anxiety vulnerability. Therefore, it is implied that gritty individuals are with lower risks to anxiety vulnerability. This result is supported in the study of Musumari, et al (2018) in which grit is associated with lower level of depression and anxiety among college student in Thailand in such it implies that gritty individuals are believed to be less prone to psychological distress and illness since they have low risk to anxiety sensitivity. Thus, on the other hand, high risks on psychological illness and distress is correlated to lower grit, optimism and life satisfaction, according to Tuckwiller & Dardick (2018) wherein mindset, grit, optimism and life satisfaction is being explored on university students with or without anxiety and depression. It was stipulated that students with depression and anxiety were also with low levels of optimism, life satisfaction and grit as well. Furthermore, it is associated that grit and anxiety vulnerability are inversely related attributes.

the t-test between consistency of interest to anxiety among OFW dependents during pandemic. With the sample population (n=62) the t -value of the variables is 2.56 and p value of $.000$. This implies that there is a significant difference between consistency of interest to anxiety vulnerability among dependents of OFWs in which explains that perseverance of effort can affect the anxiety vulnerability of the dependents of the OFW.

IV. Conclusion

Since grit denotes perseverance and passion (Duckworth, 2016), dependents of OFWs were found with higher level of grit during pandemic in which shows on how the population persevere to pursue their education despite the odds they experienced in this trying times. This research construe that grit and anxiety has significant negative relationship and has significant impact that means that gritty individuals have lesser vulnerability to anxiety even amidst challenging circumstances.

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