

The Journey of a Musikero: Challenges, Adaptive Strategies and Insights of Local Musicians in Benguet during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 Pandemic has made sweeping disruptions in the lives of the populace, including the music industry. This study investigated the effects of the Pandemic on the local Musikeros who reside in Baguio City and Benguet, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to understand the circumstances of the local Musikeros as to their financial situations, challenges they faced in different areas of their lives, coping strategies, and lessons they learned during the pandemic. Utilizing a qualitative approach, Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted with local Musikeros whose livelihoods were severely affected by the Pandemic restrictions.*

Through thematic analysis, four interrelated themes emerged: The first theme, Compliance with IATF Guidelines, described how the general public's compliance with these restrictions caused two other themes to occur: Disruptions to Work as a Musikero and Personal Challenges. The first refers to the inability of the Musikeros to rely on their livelihood as performers, while the latter encapsulates the difficulties that Musikeros faced in the Socio-Economic, Physical-Mental, and Moral-Spiritual aspects of their lives. Despite these challenges, the Musikeros developed coping strategies through the theme Resilience in order to survive the Pandemic.

The study describes the accounts of local Musikeros – their difficulties and triumphs – as they lived through one of the most turbulent events of the century. Insights from this research contribute to understanding the broader implications of the pandemic on the local music industry. It also emphasizes the necessity of support from Local Government Units and other institutions in helping the Musikeros to achieve stability in their livelihood.

Keywords: *musicians, economic impact, values, resilience, adaptive strategies, COVID 19 pandemic*

INTRODUCTION:

I. Rationale

The pandemic has affected tremendously the lives of people regardless of their socio-economic, political, religious, psychological, and mental status. Their dreams have been shattered and devastated due to the loss of livelihoods and the education of the children has to be greatly disturbed as there is no more source of income from the parents. Consequently, the psychological and mental states of most people have been extremely affected.

While seemingly glamorous from the outside, the music industry can be a dog-eat-dog business. As a result, musicians and depression, anxiety, and a variety of other mental health conditions can go hand in hand. Nashville, the "Music City," boasts a thriving music industry with a population eight times the national average. When the pandemic struck, live music venues shut down, leaving many music industry professionals out of work. This financial hardship wasn't the only consequence; a significant impact on musicians' mental health was also observed.

A survey revealed by Vertava Health (2021) showed that 70% of Music City musicians and a staggering 67.5% of songwriters, composers, and similar professionals reported a negative impact on their mental health due to COVID-19. This aligns with the national trend of increased suicide rates, addiction, and drug overdoses during the pandemic. While specific figures for the music industry aren't available, it's likely this population mirrored those trends.

Musicians that regularly perform in local folk houses, bars, and other establishments are not spared from this pandemic. In fact, they are those who are most affected as these businesses had stopped their operation upon the declaration of lockdowns in March 2020. In the article by Hall, S. (2020), he pointed out that the music industry has been hit hard by coronavirus with live performance revenue the biggest casualty. A six-month shutdown is estimated to cost the industry more than \$10bn in sponsorships, with longer delays being even more devastating. In Kenya last

year, a survey by the HEVA Fund found that more than half of creative industry players estimated their COVID-19 income losses to be “severe” (Henderson, M., 2021).

Nardi, S. (2020) bared that as the economic effects of the coronavirus ripple around the globe, the arts have been hit especially hard. The creative class is vulnerable to financial upheaval. Artists and performers are often independent contractors whose fluctuating incomes require sustained promotional efforts. In fact, artists reeled as all their income-generating gigs, events, tours and shows were cancelled. Karageanes, S. (2020), disclosed that these issues touch everyone in our society right now.

II. Review of Literature

For musicians, live performances are the lifeblood. Hustling means booking shows night after night, generating revenue and building a loyal fanbase (Nardi, 2020). But the COVID-19 pandemic slammed the brakes on this vital aspect. With social distancing measures in place, live performances across the globe were cancelled, leading to a sudden loss of income for countless musicians (Henderson, 2021).

However, this forced pause ignited a spark of innovation. From intimate home concerts by superstars like Chris Martin and John Legend to countless online performances by local artists, music found a new stage (Henderson, 2021). This spirit of innovation extended beyond individual artists. In Baguio City and Benguet, a group called "Isko and Friends" emerged as a beacon of hope for struggling musicians. Recognizing the hardship faced by their fellow performers who depended on gigs, the group organized a series of online music events, aptly named "music for-a-cause" (Empian, 2020).

The initiative proved to be a resounding success. By May 7, 2020, "Isko and Friends" had raised a significant amount – P454,228.32 – which was then distributed to 202 families of local musicians. This financial assistance helped tide these families over during a difficult period.

The story doesn't end there. Cleff Siguaben, a musician himself and one of the organizers, displayed remarkable foresight. Recognizing the potential for "donor fatigue" and the emergence of other fundraising efforts, "Isko and Friends" concluded their campaign to avoid overwhelming potential supporters (Empian, 2020). This decision reflected a deep understanding of the challenges faced by the community and a commitment to supporting the broader fundraising efforts for musicians in need.

III. Significance of the study

This study can shed some light on the impact of the pandemic on local musicians in Benguet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This could include the loss of income from performances, the closure of venues, and the difficulty of rehearsing and collaborating with other musicians. Coping mechanisms and resilience could also be explored on how local musicians in Benguet have coped with the challenges of the pandemic. This could include finding new ways to perform and earn income, such as online performances or teaching music lessons.

The importance of music in the community is another factor that could be explored especially since music can provide a sense relief from stress (Adiasto, 2022) as well as comfort, joy, and connection, and it may have been even more important during the pandemic (Hendry, 2022). The study could offer insights into the future of live music in Benguet and the Philippines more broadly. The pandemic may have led to a permanent shift in the way that live music is performed and consumed.

IV. Objectives of the Study:

1. To identify the economic conditions of the local *musikeros*’ prior to and during the pandemic.
2. To determine the challenges that the local *musikeros* face during the pandemic as to:
 - a. Socio-economic;
 - b. Physical-Mental; and
 - c. Moral-spiritual

3. To determine the coping strategies that the local *musikeros* use so as to adapt to the challenges and concerns brought about by the pandemic as to:
 - a. Physical;
 - b. Psychological;
 - c. Financial;
 - d. Social (Support group/s); and
 - e. Moral-Spiritual
4. To determine the values and life lessons that the *musikeros* have developed during the pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

V. Methodology:

The study is qualitative research which utilized Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on a sample of 23 local musicians from Benguet whose occupations have been tremendously affected due to the pandemic. More specifically, all participants of the study were local musicians whose regular performances and sources of income have been halted due to the IATF guidelines which started in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to allow the researcher to make some clarifications on responses that are not specific and clear.

Purposive sampling and referral methods were used in looking for respondents. Considering that the intended respondents are either personally known to the researchers or are known because they have been performing online concerts or performances, as well as through social media such as YouTube channels and Facebook, then it would be easier for the research team to identify and locate said respondents through these means. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting the participants purposively since they can understand the phenomenon.

A total of 23 KIIs were conducted with each of the respondents. In each case, a semi-structured interview guide was used to enable us to clarify vague responses and to give us the leeway to explore on the respondents' personal views and feelings in relation to the objectives of the research and to information that are pertinent to the study. Hence, probing had been done.

In addition, five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were utilized involving respondents who belong to the same band and/or were instrumentalists or singers in order to augment the data that were be taken from the individual interviews.

Finally, a frequency count and percentage were used in presenting the profile of the respondents. Thematic Analysis was conducted to find ideas and accounts that consistently appeared in the respondents' accounts in the KIIs and FGDs using the process described by Naeem, et al. (2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

This chapter presents the results of the study, along with the corresponding discussions for each of the research objectives. For an organized presentation, the results were first described in detail, followed by the discussions pertinent to address the research objectives that were presented in Chapter I.

Respondents' Profile

Table 1 presents the summary statistics that describe the respondents. Specifically, it presents the age ranges, civil status, band roles, and earnings ranges of the respondents.

Table 1. Ages of the Respondents

Age Range	Count	Percentage
16 - 25	9	39.1
26-35	6	26.1
36-45	5	21.7
46-55	2	8.8
56-65	1	4.3
<i>Total</i>	23	100

Table 1 presents the lists of the frequency of age count of the respondents. As a whole, the youth (ages 16 – 25), early adults (ages 26 – 35), and middle adults (ages 36 – 45) are represented the most in the sample.

Table 2 shows the lists the respondents’ civil status; more than half of the respondents are unmarried (15), while almost a third are married (7) and one (1) is widowed.

Table 2 Civil Status of the Respondents

Civil Status	Count
Single	15
Married	7
Widowed	1

Table 3 presents the lists of the roles that each respondent had or has in their band. Most of the respondents drawn by the study are vocalists (16). Three (3) of the respondents were bassists, while there were two (2) lead guitarists and one (1) drummer and violinist each.

Role in the Band	Count
Lead Guitarist	2
Vocalist	16
Bassist	3
Drummer	1
Violinist	1

In summary, the sample of 23 musicians from Benguet that was obtained consist mostly of the youth, and early or middle adults. A majority of the sample are single, or perform as vocalists. These 23 musicians were interviewed to record and understand their circumstances during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Objective 1. Economic Conditions of the Local Musikers Prior to and During the Pandemic

Table 4 presents the lists a summary of the respondents’ estimated monthly earnings before the pandemic. The median income was PhP 24,000 while the mean income was PhP 20,850.

Income Group	Estimated Monthly Income	Count
Poor	1 – 5,000	2
Poor	5,001 – 10,000	4
Poor/Low Income	10,001 – 15,000	1
Low Income	15,001 – 20,000	2
Low Income/ Lower Middle Income	20,001 – 25,000	4

Lower Middle Income	25,001 – 30,000	2
Lower Middle Income	30,001 – 35,000	5
N/A	Confidential	3
Total		23

Table 4 Respondents’ Estimated Monthly Earnings Prior to the Pandemic (in PhP)

Note: Income Group designations are based on Albert, et al.’s (2018) calculated Income Thresholds for a family of five.

Albert, et al. (2018) defined these income groups based on how much each successive group made above the poverty line. Those designated as Poor have an income that is less than the official poverty threshold, which in 2018 was PhP 10,957. Low Income earners have a monthly income between PhP 10,957 and twice this amount, PhP 21,914. Those who are designated Lower Middle Income earn twice to four times the poverty threshold, which ranges from PhP 21,914 to PhP 43,828.

Based on these designations and on the assumption that each respondent is the sole breadwinner in a family of five, four respondents had a monthly income of less than PhP 10,957 and would have been classified as Poor. Two respondents had a monthly income below PhP 21,914 and would have been Low Income, while seven who had a monthly income below PhP 43,828 were Lower Middle Income. One respondent’s income range crossed the threshold between Poor and Low Income (and was thus given that designation) while the income of four respondents crossed the threshold between Low Income and Lower Middle Income.

Most respondents reported that they were the breadwinners of their family, while some were students and reliant on their parents before the pandemic. Regardless, the above designations show that the respondents are indigent and vulnerable to disruptions in the economy. When the peak of the Pandemic crisis hit Baguio City and Benguet, the respondents would have made far below their pre-Pandemic income and likely dropped by one or more income group.

Compliance with IATF Guidelines and Disruption of Work as a Musikero

Closure of Establishments and Lack of Clients/Venues. When the general public began to show *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* to protect against an epidemic of COVID-19, respondents described the subtheme *Closure of Establishments* - all local establishments such as bars and folk houses complied and temporarily ceased to operate. However, the respondents relied on performances in these establishments for their income, which is embodies lack of clients/venues – put succinctly by a respondent, “If establishments are closed, no customers, no work.” Another respondent emphasized the difficulty of their profession: “It’s the least number of jobs here. Already infrequent gigs were doubly harder to find when the Pandemic hit”.

Compliance with IATF Guidelines also shut down events and other alternative sources of income for the respondents. For one respondent, “the Pandemic caused a hiatus for the ongoing and upcoming battle of the bands,” which are competitions that bands join to gain followers and fans as well as win cash or other prizes.

No Gatherings/Crowds. Even if the respondents found ways to perform in person, this subtheme acted as an additional barrier that worsened the lack of clients/venues – people were not allowed to gather in large numbers, and so there’s no use in going out to sing since no one will even come because of the Pandemic.

Cannot Gather as a Band. The above restriction also prevented the band itself from coming together to practice or perform. One respondent expressed his frustrations:” It’s difficult to go out,

so we couldn't come together much because it wasn't allowed that time." In addition, to this, the members of some bands returned to their homes in the province because of the Pandemic and the *Disruption of Work* it brought: "No work, no other source of income because of the closure of establishments, no choice but to go home to our province." These factors hindered the respondents from continuing their careers as musicians together.

These same narratives were reported by metal bands in the United States of America (USA); Messick (2021) detailed how establishments and performance venues had to suspend their business operations due to the threat of COVID-19. Furthermore, even when restrictions on businesses were lifted, the public themselves were, for a time, less likely to gather at venues and risk contracting COVID-19. As a result, metal bands in the USA found many of their income streams limited – from performing in live venues to distributing albums and merchandise. Johnson & Gloor (2022) also saw the same disruptions occurring to musicians from USA, Japan, Australia, and India. In their article, they explain how the death of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic has additionally caused a reduction in musicians' work; tourists were unable to visit urban centers, and thus become paying customers to the venues and businesses that musicians perform at.

This same incident occurred in Baguio City and Benguet; to illustrate, tourists in Baguio City spent a total of PhP 691.89 million in 2018 and PhP 534.64 million in 2019. These figures fell to PhP 50.29 million in 2020, the year the IATF Guidelines were established, and further dropped to PhP 5.27 million in 2021. Out of multiple services, entertainment services (of which the local *Musikeros* are included) experienced the greatest decline in spending, falling by 90% twice in 2020, and again in 2021. It is no question that local *Musikeros* could not rely on performances for their livelihood. Because of the themes *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* and *Disruptions of Work as a Musikero*, the respondents faced several challenges in different areas of their life which embodies *Personal Challenges*, as described in Objective 2 below.

Objective 2. Challenges Faced by the Local *Musikeros* During the Pandemic

The concurrent impacts of *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* and *Disruption of Work as a Musikero* resulted in a number of *Personal Challenges*. Different subthemes of *Personal Challenges* are most relevant to each aspect of the respondents' narratives and are discussed in depth below.

2.A. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: *Personal Challenges as Lack of Socialization and Financial Difficulties*

Based on the respondents' reported accounts, their difficulties in the social and financial aspects of their lives were unrelated to each other. Instead, they were concurrent but separate problems that most respondents faced during the course of the pandemic. These are described by the *Lack of Socialization* for their social difficulties and *Financial Difficulties* for their financial challenges.

Lack of Socialization. This subtheme is caused by *Compliance with IATF Guidelines*. As one respondent explained, "the pandemic made our relationship with our friends and relatives felt [sic] distant since there, we could not see or talk to them physically." Respondents generally felt that their social activities were greatly limited by restrictions on gatherings. While some were able to socialize with family members living under the same roof, most were rarely able to meet their friends or bandmates in person. The use of facemasks was another factor within the theme of *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* that hindered respondents' efforts at connecting with others: "Because of the facemasks, it is hard to identify the person and the face shield and mask made me uncomfortable for socializing."

Challenges in socialization were encountered universally during the pandemic, whether among the youth (Pinheiro & Cholewa, 2023; Larivière-Bastien, et al., 2022) or adults (Ferreira, et al., 2023; Lisita, et al., 2020; Scott, et al., 2021). In particular, the respondents' sentiments on face masks as an obstruction to communication have validity; Grieco-Calub (2021), outlines two ways in

which face masks obstruct communication: disrupting spoken words, and hiding one's face which inhibits nonverbal cues. These obstructions force speakers and listeners to either invest more effort, causing fatigue, or to accede to a subpar communication process.

Uncertainty of Livelihood. Due to *Disruptions in Work as a Musikero*, most respondents' income was reduced. Some saw no difficulty from this as they were students at the time and relied on their parents for their needs – “As students during the outbreak of COVID, we relied to our parents for allowance and the cash prize for the competitions we have been joining were only for extra allowance.” In contrast, most other respondents were older and needed to support their own parents or children: “It was really hard for me because I have bills to pay, I have financial obligations for the kids and for the family.” But once quarantine began, almost half of the respondents found themselves without a source of income. They could not rely on their work as *Musikeros*, yet at the same time, other livelihood options they had (such as part-time work or their businesses) became similarly unavailable. One respondent explained their difficulty. “We don't have gigs; events are cancelled so it can't be helped that our finances are affected and we need to budget extensively. Even worse, our business is a bar, so we don't have any income”

These *Musikeros* were part of the 25.3% unemployed persons who resided in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) in which Baguio City and Benguet are located (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). The unemployment rate in CAR is far above the average of the whole Philippines at the time – 17.6%. This portrays the unlikelihood of the *Musikeros* finding employment during the Pandemic; they would have to compete with an overwhelming number of their peers for extremely limited opportunities because of *Compliance with IATF Guidelines*. The *Musikeros* (a majority of whom were indigent) who remained unemployed would have had to rely on their own savings and government aid (Peñalba, 2021).

B. Physical/Psychological Challenges, Sedentary Lifestyle, and Fear of COVID-19 and Death

Unlike the previous pair of challenges, the respondents' physical and psychological challenges were linked to a degree. Their physical challenges are caused by the *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* and the psychological challenge they face – *Fear of COVID-19 and Death*, another subtheme under *Personal Challenges*.

Sedentary Lifestyle. All respondents reported being unable to leave their homes because they chose to *Comply with the IATF Guidelines* and due to their *Fear of COVID-19 and Death*. As a result, the active lifestyle they used to have been replaced with a Sedentary Lifestyle. The respondents described, “We were stuck inside the house and had nothing else to do but to eat and sleep.” This has resulted in most of the respondents growing unhealthy, though they vary in how they report this.

Some report gaining weight – Almost all of the respondents explain: “Ever since the pandemic, their lives became more sedentary, because of this, I significantly gained some weight”. Ever since the pandemic, my lifestyle became more sedentary, while another respondent stated that there was nothing to do during the Pandemic except to eat, which is why people got fat.

Others reported a weakening of the body – one respondent explained “Didn't have the chance to move a lot since I am mostly stuck at home, so I am physically weak, no exercise at all.” Another respondent said “my body grew weaker because I was always in my room”.

Fear of COVID-19 and Death. The psychological challenge faced by the respondents was primarily distress caused by this subtheme. Anxieties regarding COVID-19 and death were deep-seated during the time of the Pandemic, as the respondents points out: “I was really scared. That time, you can only think a lot of “*what ifs*”. I got paranoid in everything. I always think that life is short. I have those feelings until now.”

All of the respondents described fears of getting infected with COVID-19 and dying, both with regard to themselves and with their loved ones: “Since I was not with my mother and father during the pandemic, I was terribly worried/paranoid for them especially during the times when I was not able to contact them.” and “Every time someone gets sick, we always make sure that it was not COVID-related sickness. We always get worried.” Some factors further solidified these anxieties (for good and bad). One was the prevalence of COVID-19 on the news, as described by a respondent. “All the news was about how someone got infected with the virus”. Another is the reality of death that COVID brought to people they knew. “COVID-19 is very harmful, as one respondent says that “I also lost a family member during the pandemic.”

As a result of this fear, some respondents were afraid of going outside due to the risk of contracting COVID-19. Three respondents describe their anxieties, “I was extremely afraid of getting infected with COVID whenever I went out for groceries. I have small children too, so I was very anxious as well, which is why if we don’t have any necessities that we need [to buy outside], we stay inside the house”.

While the *Musikeros*’ fear could encourage *Compliance with IATF Guidelines* and to take further precautions against COVID-19, it nonetheless contributes to greater distress and poorer mental health. (Çaki, et al., (2021). The anxiety responses by the *Musikeros* support the findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Şimşir, et al. (2022) – fear of COVID-19 is strongly correlated with anxiety. It is also related to traumatic stress, distress, stress, and depression.

In the *Musikero*’ responses, however, *Fear of COVID-19 and Death* were the primary mental health challenge identified – anxiety and depression as conditions were never brought up. This speaks of either the pragmatic nature of Cordillerans, or the possibility that COVID-19 was an overwhelmingly heavy object of fear for the *Musikeros* at the time.

C. Moral-Spiritual Challenges and Unable to Attend Church

The only challenge that respondents reported in this case is related to their spirituality which prevented masses from being held and the populace from attending religious gatherings. *Fear of COVID-19 and Death* additionally discouraged the respondents from attending masses. As one respondent explains: “Even if I want to go to mass, I don’t have access to transportation, plus the virus is frightening, so I just don’t go outside”.

Objective 3. Coping Strategies of the Local Musikeros

This section discusses the coping strategies adapted by the respondents in response to the *Disruptions to Work as a Musikero* and *Personal Challenges* that they face. The single theme derived from the respondents’ answers are embodied in *Resilience*. This is a complex trait that can be expressed as its subthemes *Continued Self-improvement*, “*Diskarte*”, and *Involvement with Others*.

A. Coping with Physical Challenges through Continued Self-improvement

During the Pandemic, the respondents were faced with the consequences of a *Sedentary Lifestyle*. To address this, some coped through *Continued Self-improvement*. This subtheme focuses on how respondents coped with their difficulties by improving themselves (e.g. fostering new traits, acquiring new skills, or refining existing skills). When faced with *Sedentary Lifestyle*, some respondents reacted by improving their habits: “We just need to strengthen our bodies and to have healthy lifestyles so that our bodies don’t grow weak”. Others did this by farming in their yards. “I got physically healthy because I farmed – it was my exercise”.

In hindsight, resolving *Sedentary Lifestyle* through *Continued Self-improvement* may have also acted as another layer of safety against COVID-19; exercise increased the body’s capacity to combat viral infections (Shirvani & Rostamkhani, 2020). While authorities on health and evidence recommended exercise in the form of exercise routines (such as “knee-to-elbows, plank,” etc.) with varying intensities (Hu, et al. 2020), the *Musikeros* did not exercise in this way. Instead, they became

more physically active while engaging themselves in alternative livelihoods (such as farming described above) and engaging with hobbies and other skills. As such, it is also possible that objectively, some *Musikeros* failed to meet the exercise thresholds necessary to improve their health nor ability to combat viral infections found by Shirvani & Rostamkhani (2020).

B. Coping with Psychological Challenges through Continued Self-improvement, Involvement with Others, and Spiritual Reassurance

In coping with distress caused by *Fear of COVID-19 and Death*, the respondents all tapped into two different subthemes of *Resilience*, *Continued Self-improvement* and *Involvement with Others*.

Continued Self-improvement. In using this subtheme to cope, the respondents hoped to release the tension caused by their anxieties toward productive tasks. Eighteen (18) respondents focused on their health to address this: “I need to distract myself from the threats of pandemic, so I make myself and mind busy, and work out with music to be physically healthy.” While the five others achieved the same by working on their living conditions: “I need to be busy and help with household chores since I was stay-at-home. It’s better for me to be busy than to be bored”. *Continued Self-improvement* not only shifts the *Musikeros*’ thoughts away from COVID-19, it also helps them become more capable musicians for when they are able to return to their livelihood, or become qualified to be employed in other professions (Bhattacharjee & Acharya, 2020).

Involvement with Others. This subtheme refers to how the respondents all engaged with different groups of people in order to cope with the difficulties of the Pandemic. In response to the *Fear of COVID-19 and Death*, some respondents expressed how growing closer with their family helped them cope. “Since I am with my family, we are all together, it was better that we interacted and played together and this boosted my mental health.”

This is in contrast to Senturk & Bozkurt’s (2021), findings on the family dynamics of people in poverty during COVID-19; persons who were both unemployed and in poverty were likely to fail in their obligation to provide their family with food, safety, and other necessities. As a result, discord and possibly even violence could occur between family members. In the case of the *Musikeros*, however, their family ties were strengthened and even became a source of reassurance against the threat of COVID-19. As mentioned in the quote above, it was important for the *Musikeros* that the family stays intact.

Spiritual Reassurance. This subtheme encapsulates the respondents’ faith and the activities that promote it. With this subtheme, respondents address their anxieties by immersing themselves in their faith; one respondent says, “there is always fear/worry in my mind because of the virus, but prayer is the most important that help me a lot.” Another respondent explained that “Reading inspirational quotes, Bible and other inspirational stories is uplifting and encouraging.”

In other words, *Spiritual Reassurance* staves off the anxiety caused by *Fear of COVID-19 and Death*, while improving one’s mental well-being.

This narrative was also found by Lucchetti, et al. (2021) by Brazilians during COVID-19. Private religious activities (e.g. prayer and bible reading) were linked to lower levels of fear and sadness, greater spiritual growth, and hope. This suggests that the impact of spirituality and religiosity could be common across countries.

C. Coping with Financial Challenges through “Diskarte” and Involvement with Others

The respondents all sought different ways to address the *Uncertainty of Livelihood* they faced during the Pandemic.

Diskarte. This refers to the resourcefulness and ingenuity of respondents in resolving challenges. In the case of financial challenges, some respondents persisted with their career as

entertainers; instead of playing in their pre-pandemic venues, however, they looked for alternative ways to perform.

Most who took this route made use of social media platforms to perform and receive gratuity from an online audience. One respondent describes it as “By gaining lots of views and blessings while performing online, we were able to collect money that served as our allowances.” Facebook Live was an especially important platform for the respondents: “FB Live Performance helped us local performers, especially when *Meta* introduced the Star System where viewers can send love gifts to us.” ‘Love gifts’ in this case refers to ‘Stars’ that an audience can send during livestreams. The respondents can then exchange these Stars into its cash equivalents. Another respondent acknowledged a benefit to the Pandemic for those who performed online: “One of the benefits brought by the pandemic is that people from other places are willing to pay singers to do a live performance.”

The *Musikeros*’ transition to livestreaming follows some parallels to that of Hong Kong independent musicians. Both held very niche spaces in the music industry of their locality, were ‘de-platformed’ from in-person establishments due to quarantine measures, and recovered some of their livelihood and audience by streaming through Facebook, Youtube, or TikTok. A key difference lies in the intent of their music. Most of the *Musikeros* are the breadwinners of their family consider music to be their chosen livelihood to fulfill that obligation. For Hong Kong independent musicians in contrast, music is made in pursuit of art and the culture of the independent music scene, and not necessarily as a livelihood (Mouillot, 2022).

Meanwhile, other respondents continued to pursue their work as entertainers through in-person performances (especially weddings) once these were allowed: “Even with high risk of the virus, we still need to earn. We sang in weddings in the province. Just follow the guidelines for protection.” All respondents who reported performing in weddings noted that safety protocols and guidelines for gatherings were followed for their own protection as well.

Rather than continue working as performers, other respondents began seeking employment in positions related to their experience. It was a way to use the skills they learned over the course of their career, as one respondent explained: “Setting up during online live jammings made me learn or paved way for me to learn a different skill such as proper basic sound and light setups for events”

Some worked as music tutors: “I tried giving tutorials on vocal-singing or “I accepted part time guitar tutorial for additional income.” Another respondent rented out their equipment to others. “We rented out our sound systems when there were events in the province since they weren’t as strict with IATF there”.

Finally, a portion of the respondents transitioned to other areas of work that were unrelated to music. One respondent explained: “I was not really a professional musician during the pandemic.” Most of those who took this route went into agriculture. “It’s why, as a resident of Benguet, I took up gardening so that we had a source of necessities, because we knew how to do that”.

Some respondents also tried establishing their own online shopping businesses. “I was engaged in online selling of musical instruments, sound systems – buy and sell.” However, one respondent reported having difficulty in this area of work: “Tried to do online selling, at first, business is doing well but it failed since others are doing it as well.”

Involvement with Others. While most respondents relied on *Diskarte* to build up their livelihood, some had no choice but to rely on others. Many reported relying on their friends or relatives, especially those that were overseas: “That’s why we went online and asked for help from our friends and people from the same community abroad. There were those who gave us [something], which we used to buy goods that we packed and distributed to our neighbors/community”.

As seen in the last statement, the respondents did not unilaterally ask for aid from those overseas; there were intentions to also help their relatives with what they had received. Sometimes, this aid was also received in return for online performances: “We agreed to perform online, but at night since that’s when it is day abroad. There were many of our neighbors and relatives abroad who gave us cash gifts”.

Musikeros all chose different means to sustain themselves over the course of the pandemic. While a few continued to make music, others had no choice but to rely on non-music related professions for their livelihoods. In contrast, others are able to continue operating as musicians thanks to the support of their fans (Messick, 2021). A key difference between these groups lies in the scope of their audience. *Musikeros* often sing folk songs, which only Cordillerans are likely to appreciate. Even then, those who consume these and are willing to financially support them are the *Musikeros*’ friends and relatives as well. Other musicians have a large enough fanbase who are willing to purchase merchandise and provide substantial support.

This illustrates the niche nature of the local *Musikeros*’; advocacy and support (whether by the local government or other institutions) are needed to support and ensure their livelihoods.

D. Coping with Social Challenges through Involvement with Others

The respondents experienced a *Lack of Socialization* due to *Compliance with IATF Guidelines*. The key coping strategy that respondents used to address this was *Involvement with Others*. In this context, the subtheme focuses on how the respondents connected with others through various methods.

The most prevalent among the respondents was through social media platforms: “Because there was a big shift in our means of communication among others, socializing was mostly done through social medias back then.” Another respondent described how important social media became in connecting with others during the pandemic: “Facebook, Messenger is still the fastest way to talk with others, to share happy events, and to get to know other people”.

Respondents also involved themselves in their community: “During the pandemic I spent time helping the community by packing and distribution of goods or *ayuda* in our barangay.” Similar to this quote, respondents who chose to be involved with their community did so in order to volunteer and help other members of their community.

Socialization via social media does seem to compensate for the *Lack of Socialization* that the *Musikeros* faced. However, it is not enough to fully meet their social needs and does not fully replace in-person interaction (Ali, 2024). As acknowledged by the *Musikeros* themselves, engaging themselves with their community and other social groups helps to fill the need for socialization that *Lack of Socialization* has left them.

E. Coping with Moral-Spiritual Challenges through Spiritual Reassurance

The challenge that most respondents felt in this regard was that they were *Unable to Attend Church*; they reported no Moral challenges or difficulties. While gathering for Sunday masses is a religious practice that is valued among the respondents, most did not feel that their faith was weakened as a result. An important factor to this is that they were able to gain *Spiritual Reassurance* through other religious activities. The respondents reported praying, reading the bible and other inspirational/spiritual materials, attending online church, or a combination of these three activities to fulfill their spiritual needs:

“Sometimes, we attend online mass if our signal is good. We read spiritual materials since a lot was given out back then. We also pray as a family”.

“I attended online Sunday mass and I read spiritual materials. That’s what really helped me – I prayed when I was feeling sick and for protection so that we don’t get infected with COVID”.

To the respondents, it is not the religious practice itself that they value but the things they do that fulfill their faith and gives them *Spiritual Reassurance*. A prime example is this respondent who does not attend church but finds value in prayer: “I admit that I am not one to attend masses, but I always pray for everyone, especially for the sake of my family”. These echo the findings by Lucchetti, et al. (2021) that attending church, praying and reading the bible, are all activities that increase spiritual growth and further reinforces religious habits, at least within the Brazilian population.

Objective 4. Learned Values and Life Lessons of the *Musikeros*

The values and life lessons that the respondents learned from living through the Pandemic can be encapsulated in the theme *Resilience*: each subtheme represents something that the respondents acquired that improved their character or lives in some way.

Continued Self-improvement

Under this subtheme, the respondents acquired valuable traits and cultivated important skills that they continue to rely on even after the Pandemic has passed. The benefit of this Most respondents reported that they were able to learn patience; this respondent describes it best: “I exercised patience during the pandemic; we needed to be kind to each other, especially in lines and the large number of checkpoints”.

Diskarte

Another valuable lesson to the respondents was *Diskarte*, or how they managed their resources and created opportunities for themselves. In addition to the ingenuity they showed regarding their livelihoods in Coping with Financial Challenges, the respondents also expressed how important it was to be economical or thrifty. One respondent explained “[I] need to be resourceful so that I have things I can fall back on”, while another described their thought process as “even with a small ‘love gift’ [from Facebook Live], I need to keep it in mind to save [money]”.

Involvement with Others

Some respondents expressed how important it was to be socially connected. All of the respondent viewed it as a way to secure viewers or an audience when one is performing: “there is a need to have a lot of friends online so that we have viewers when we go live”. Another respondent considered it their responsibility to make friends online as a way of helping others: “I take it upon myself to make online friends in order to encourage those who get depressed”.

This again shows the pragmatic nature of Cordillerans; while most would consider socialization in the time of COVID-19 as a way of maintaining mental health, In line with this, another respondent told the story of how they were able to entertain frontliners and patients as a musician under the organization “Backliners” mentioned that “It is fortunate that there was a father – Father Mario – who made this small organization called ‘Backliners’ where we have a Facebook Page that we can hold live concerts in. The purpose of this is to simply entertain our front liners and all the patients that the Backliners are helping”.

Spiritual Reassurance

In line with the value of *Spiritual Reassurance* to the respondents as described in Coping with Moral-Spiritual Challenges, the respondents reported a strengthening of faith following the Pandemic. All of the respondent explained how they were able to place more value in what blessings came their way. They all agree that their faith become stronger as they say “My faith wasn’t weakened, like the other members, I actually prayed more because if I received even PhP 200, I feel really grateful. It wasn’t like when there was no Pandemic where I felt nothing when my tip was PhP 500; when it was the Pandemic, I began to value all my blessings”.

To all respondent, the phenomenon of the Pandemic itself strengthened their faith, as they explain: “I believe that these happenings are bound to happen since it was written in the bible. I observed that the crime rate lessened and faith was also strengthened during the pandemic.”

Global Implications

The current study analyses the narratives of *Musikeros* during the time of the Pandemic. Discussions above show similarities (e.g. with Hong Kong musicians and Brazilians in Spirituality) and differences (e.g. with American touring bands) in how musicians from around the world experienced the pandemic. This study provides further material for consideration in understanding the Music industry, especially from the perspective of musicians that are indigent, rooted in culture and community, and are thus far unrepresented in academia.

Multiple key points of discussion have been recognized through the narratives of the *Musikeros* when compared to American touring bands (Messick, 2020) and Hong Kong independent musicians (Mouillot, 2022). It becomes apparent that the scales of audiences and the support received from governments and advocacy groups increase the job security and financial reliability of a musicians' livelihood. Culture also plays an important part in shaping the dynamics of how an audience supports a musician – American fans purchase merchandise to support the continuation of musicians' livelihoods (Messick, 2020). Fans of Hong Kong independent musicians enjoy creativity and experimentation with sound and visuals, allowing for a niche but global audience (Mouillot, 2022). Local *Musikeros* play in a variety of genres, but face difficulty in expanding their audience due to a lack of support from government and cultural institutions. Future studies on the global music industry are likely to find how different contexts and cultures create opportunities or challenges for musicians in the aftermath of COVID-19

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Conclusions

Based on themes common to the accounts of local *Musikeros* during the pandemic, several conclusions are drawn:

1. The economic conditions of the local *Musikeros*' prior to pandemic are stable but during the pandemic their income differ because of the IATF Guidelines. Most *Musikeros* were able to secure their livelihood by engaging with their family, friends, and community.
2. The *Musikeros* grappled with a multitude of challenges brought on by the pandemic. Social distancing measures hampered their ability to socialize and perform, leading to feelings of isolation and financial uncertainty. The shift to a sedentary lifestyle resulted in physical decline, and anxieties surrounding COVID-19 and mortality caused emotional distress. Despite these difficulties, their faith remained largely unshaken, although they missed attending church services in person.
3. The *Musikeros*' resilience shone. They tackled health challenges, anxiety, and financial strain through self-improvement, *diskarte*, and faith. Social distancing led to deeper online and community connections, while spiritual practices specifically prayer, filled the void of in-person church attendance. Their story is a testament to overcoming adversity.
4. They learned the importance of strong social connections (deeper involvement with others) and a strong spiritual foundation (through spiritual reassurance). They emerged stronger, having cultivated valuable traits like patience (through self-improvement) and resourcefulness (*diskarte*).

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to the Local Government Units of Benguet, La Trinidad, Baguio City, and other local Municipalities:

1. Advocate for policies that protect the livelihoods of musicians during emergencies similar to the pandemic. This could include financial assistance program and subsidies that allow them to play in venues and make their livelihoods have more stability. Government-sponsored concerts, competitions, or other events may also be concerned.
2. Recognize local musicians as a valuable resource in maintaining the culture, identity, and morale of Benguet and the Cordilleras as a whole. An advocacy group may be formed as an initiative of Benguet State University itself or other concerned groups in order to achieve this goal.
3. Develop and offer training programs to help musicians enhance their digital presence and performance skills. This includes workshops on using social media like Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, creating engaging online content, possibly generating income and utilizing virtual performance platforms.
4. Encourage the formation of support networks and organizations similar to "Backliners" & "Isko and friends," Such groups can provide mutual support, share resources, and create opportunities for collaboration among musicians. Foster collaboration between government, the private sector, and local music industry organizations to leverage resources and expertise.
5. For future researchers, conduct ongoing research to monitor the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the local *Musikeros* and the music industry of Benguet. This data can inform future interventions and support mechanisms to better prepare for any similar crises in the future.

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