

## STRUGGLES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ONLINE INTERNSHIP: SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES IN FOCUS

ANNE JEANETTE C. ALCEBAR, RSW and DR. MINDA B. BRIGOLI, RSW

**ABSTRACT:** This study explored the lived experiences of social work graduates in online internship brought upon the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the challenges they faced and how they coped up with it, the opportunities that were provided to them that the traditional internship cannot offer and their personal insights that are essential to the academic community. A qualitative phenomenological study was carried involving 10 social work graduates from Davao City's select five colleges and universities. They had their online internship in the year 2020 – 2021 at the height of the pandemic. Data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview using open-ended interview guide. Participants were chosen through homogenous purposive sampling. Data analysis was done using Colaizzi's 7-step method. Results revealed 12 themes addressing the study objectives. As for challenges encountered: uncertainty on the plans, challenging interactions with clients and tough realities; for coping mechanisms: self-preparations, exercise of prudence and designing interventions for clients; for the opportunities offered: ongoing guidance from field instructors, autonomy and going beyond social service in meeting the needs of the client; and for the personal insights of the participants: mismatching exposure, innovation and sense of professionalism in applying the learnings gained in online internship. Implications of the findings are presented in the paper.

**KEYWORDS:** *social work, online internship, social work graduates, phenomenology study, Colaizzi's 7-step method, Philippines*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Internship program is a short-term practical experience in a workplace that provides opportunities to the students to enter a job of their chosen profession during their undergraduate course. Internship is a great source of practical experience, learning teamwork, enhancing the skills, and building professional relationships (Anjum, 2020). The social work profession's defining pedagogy is field internship (CSWE, 2022). Students studying social work apply code of ethics and implement social justice in this learning setting. Students are given practical experiences to apply their knowledge of social work practice while preserving the principles and ethical standards of their respective professions through field education, which lays the groundwork for effective social work practice (Azman, 2021).

COVID-19 interrupted internships considerably, with a decrease in the number of placements offered and indispensable changes to the internship scope (Ting et al., 2022). The difficulties higher education institutions in countries across the global face in finding suitable and appropriate onsite student internship opportunities and the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic make a case for online internships (Chand & Deshmukh, 2022). In relation to this, the social work training's field experience requirement had to be promptly changed because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Several reasons helped to direct this process. The experiential learning that takes place during the field practicum is a crucial part of social work training. Through client involvement, assessment, and intervention, this process, which typically takes place in person, frequently leads to development of practice abilities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this field experience had to be quickly modified. Access to the right technologies, ethical and cultural considerations of social work practice, and the responsiveness of educational institutions, social work agencies, students, and practitioners all played a role in this process (Belafonte, 2021). Online internship as defined by Perone (2021), refers to field work that is carried out when students are at home but not in person and instead using some sort of technology. Online training, meetings, and workshops that are performed by students and may or may not be connected to their first field placement activities are also referred to as remote field work. Due to state regulations regulating social distance, social work programs quickly and unexpectedly changed their fieldwork criteria during the COVID-19 issue and began looking for ways to perform distant fieldwork. The lack of face-to-face client interaction consequently became a challenging and sobering reality as educators created curricula that reflected the necessary modifications. Subsequently, Crocetto et al. (2021) stated that field internship reforms had to be implemented immediately due to the nature

of the pandemic and the need to ensure student, faculty, and client safety. In order to meet the field needs of students and accommodate distance learning, contingency plans and updated learning platforms were implemented. Futher, Wheeler and Wailer (2021) stated that for students, internship coordinators, and employers alike, the experiences in online internship that is essential is still provided to student-interns. The job is simply shifted to an online setting, allowing students to learn the kinds of abilities they will need in the increasingly digital workplace of the twenty-first century (e.g., meeting on Zoom, navigating online file storage systems, and working in groups electronically). This method enables internship coordinators to operate substantially as they would with an on-site internship, even if they may need to adapt their assessment processes for this online context.

Earlier research shown that online internships offer several advantages for developing interns' careers by giving them specialized learning opportunities. First, interns can work remotely at their own speed, and when challenges emerge, on campus instructor are ready to provide guidance. Without the need to commute or adhere to rigid time restrictions, online internships give interns the chance to engage in their work with greater degrees of responsibility and autonomy than during an in person internship. Also, online internships are just as considered as traditional office jobs in on a resume (Wong et al., 2021). Moreover, online internships overcome the accessibility and geographic distance between students and field instructors. They seem to provide students with better employment results. With virtual internships, organizations are not limited by the semester (i.e., hiring just during the summer when students are not in class and available for on-site employment), and interns are not limited by factors like transportation, housing, or time away from family or school. Virtual internships are beneficial for agencies with limited resources, collaborative technologies, and remote work and workforces. Due to their flexibility, affordability, and accessibility, online internships are useful to both students and agencis (Pittenger, 2021). Accordingly, the primary benefit of an online internship in our current situation is that it provides students with a safe & work-based learning experience. Students can also develop skills either in technical, inter-personal or intra-personal by successfully carrying out and completing assignments in professional organization where the students are deployed (Hora et. al, 2021).

Furthermore, students understand that the online environment has the potential to enhance their capacity to interpret theory in practice after learning something through online internship. (Smith et al., 2020). Also, partner agencies and industries value online internship. High levels of satisfaction and significant learning gains were reported by field instructors and interns. Industries' skill requirements may change as the amount of telecommuting rises, providing e-interns an edge over students who have never worked remotely because they have honed abilities like self-management and virtual communication. Online internship is viable as a feasible substitute for on site internships in fostering student learning and career transition. (Jeske & Linehan, 2020; Bayerlein & Jeske, 2018). The following suggestions are provided by recent research on online internship: cautious preparation and preparing, maintaining regular online contact/communication, outlining expectations clearly, and paying interns. Agency field instructors must effectively link the internship program to institutional diversity goals. give valuable experiences for the development of skills (Jeske, 2019).

Likewise, in the study conducted by Teng et al. (2021) in the experiences and perception of students and field instructors, it was revealed that since online internship were to be completed remotely and supervisors had adapted the internship scope to accommodate work-from-home arrangements, interns gave online internships higher ratings for the caliber of the supervision and the degree of enjoyment. In terms of quality, interns valued the assistance, adaptability, and independence provided by field instructors. According to research, increasing autonomy and the nature of remote work both minimize workplace stress, which has a detrimental impact on internship satisfaction (Mensah et al., 2021). Since common workplace stressors (such as organizational access concerns, a lack of autonomy, and work relationship tensions) were reduced in online internships, this may help to explain why interns enjoyed their internships more. Although this may be altered by personality, having too much autonomy may be harmful to well-being. Procrastination, an inability to focus, or distractions at home are among the challenges of remote work (Wang et al., 2020).

Similiary, in a study performed by Maini et al. (2021) on the satisfaction of student-interns in the internship program amidst COVID-19 pandemic, the findings showed that although four factors—faculty mentor readiness, industry mentor readiness, interns' readiness for online internships, and interns' internet efficacy are significantly related to internship satistasfaction, the role of industry mentors was discovered to have a significant impact on the IS. The study reveals that interaction between industry mentors may be important for the deployment of e-internships to be successful. Accordingly, Teng et al. (2021) stated that online internship developed interns both technical and soft abilities. Technical skills (such as data analysis, literature reviews, and report writing, presentations making), soft skills (such as interpersonal skills, self-discipline, public speaking, networking, and adaptability), thinking skills (such as critical thinking, creativity, and strategy), and management skills (such as time/project management, networking, leadership, and teamwork) are the skills that emerged from online internships. Furthermore, the internship scope was modified to accommodate online work and was primarily involved the use of technology (e.g., social media) and skills and tasks that students are familiar with. With the focus on online internships, field instructors were more likely to

arrange frequent e-meetings to coach interns through tasks, which could have increased the quality of their work.

Also, in a study conducted by Gill (2020) on the graduate employability skills through online internships during COVID-19 pandemic, he stated that due to limitations, many students completing professional placements and internships had to leave their actual area of employment. Several students who were participating in internships had their placements lost, while others got jobs that required them to work remotely online. This

was a potential benefit of making interns more proficient in online work abilities because of their experiences working through online, as the professional world may shift toward more flexible working arrangements that may combine a remote working environment with an office one.

Moreover, according to Sahadi (2020), there are also many benefits to the online environment. The nature of a home office is you can tool your environment in ways people couldn't at the workplace. This has helped people to be more comfortable at the home desk. In addition, Downey and Naddaf (2021) started professional development and team-building activities should be included in online internships to help interns strengthen their networking and teamwork abilities. Giving groups a list of necessary survival gear and asking them to choose five people to stay alive can still be fascinating even when they are virtual activities. The internship coordinators of internship programs should encourage interns to interact with one another and even organize virtual sessions. Accordingly, according to Kraft et al. (2019), agencies benefit significantly due to internships and especially online internships. When recruiters are searching for possible candidates, they can look at recent interns that had good feedback. The close team of people also know what to expect in terms of behavior but also work ethic and team cohesion. Online internships also have been shown to have a positive impact on the diversity of an organization.

On the contrary, since COVID-19 pandemic had started, all schools around the world have been closed to limit the virus's spread. Due to this, the move to online learning was done with such haste and hurry that it jeopardized the infrastructure of the educational system, instructors' and students' access to resources, and their capacity to effectively teach and learn using technology. The difficulties integrating online learning include varying access to technology, socioeconomic reasons, lack of digital competence, a lot of labor, assessment, monitoring, and compatibility. On the other side, social initiatives as well as technological and scientific advancements are viewed as opportunities. Teachers initially struggled as the transition to remote online instruction necessitated changes in how instruction was delivered. The same is true for students who also had trouble managing their homework (Adedoyin & Sokyan, 2020). Additionally, the limitations imposed by the pandemic have forced the change to online schooling. As a result of this change to online learning, resources and lessons have not been developed that will maximize teaching and learning chances (Kim, 2021). Accordingly, the move to online instruction has sped up changes in the education industry. Specifically, while issues like developing teaching and learning opportunities to enhance participation remain to be a problem, e-learning prepares future graduates for global changes brought about by the pandemic (Rospigliosi, 2020).

Additionally, other drawbacks of online internship are that when an intern is unfamiliar with the work environment or community and is unable to join the physical community or work with a supervisor in person, additional difficulties related with developing and maintaining work connections arise. Since the interns hardly ever interact with their supervisors or coworkers, remote internships might not provide enough networking possibilities. Also, because they are not surrounded by managers, coworkers, and other stakeholders, remote interns may struggle to develop interpersonal relationships or management skills. According to research, persons who work from home have a significantly lower amount of interaction and must cooperate with others virtually, which is less natural than face-to-face conversation and does not produce the water cooler effect (Youngblood, 2020). Additionally, people who work from home discover that the "flow" that makes things operate is missing without face-to-face interaction and casual meetings because the workplace acts as a social setting but one's house does not (National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 2020). Another thing is that employing the WFH mode may make it more difficult for interns who have little or fewer ties to begin with to engage and perform well at work (Levin and Kurtzberg, 2020). Therefore, not all students are suitable for remote WFH internships, especially those who struggle to operate successfully without close supervision.

Moreover, in the study conducted by Teng et al. (2021) in the experiences and perception of students and field instructors in online internship, it was revealed that student-interns felt alone despite frequent online connection because they couldn't experience the real work environment. Jeske and Axtell (2019) hypothesized that more guidance could help interns feel less alone. The findings suggest that such assistance should focus on fostering more social integration into the workplace. In addition to helping people develop their interpersonal skills, the workplace setting offers opportunities for knowledge application due to the variety of job contexts available there. Online internships will therefore need to be purposefully designed with activities that allow interns to establish social exchanges, generate social skills, and increase learning in the virtual workplace. Also, according to Wheeler and Waite (2020) many agencies lack the necessary skills or readiness to take their

activities online. Some might be willing to give it a shot, but they lack the necessary resources. Many students cannot just be given a laptop and some software and told to work remotely. Some jobs simply aren't appropriate for an online internship. Instances when students are merely given "busy labor" to meet their time commitments without any supervision or feedback can be avoided by having an open discussion with businesses about their readiness and capacity to deliver meaningful virtual internships.

Traditional skills, on the other hand, might not have been sufficiently cultivated in student-interns. The development of these abilities may be facilitated more effectively by on-site internships; however, this skills gap has also been noted between on-site interns (Lim et al., 2020). Although setting workplace expectations for interns regarding, for example, proactiveness and speaking out in the workplace had been covered in the pre-internship briefing and prepared webinars, supervisors' input from both cohorts indicated that these qualities were still absent. This observed gap in "people skills" among interns may be attributed to upstream factors like upbringing and socialization or problems with teaching methodologies and educational systems, this gap is difficult to close with short-term interventions. Yet even though the module's primary goal is to foster a self-authored learning style, educational institutions and corporate managers must share responsibility for giving interns real-world opportunity to hone critical interpersonal skills (Majid et al., 2019). Likewise, Wheeler and Waite (2020) stated that if one or more of strategies employed by the academic institutions and partner industries may not be completely appropriate on its own, they might want to pursue a DIY strategy that either combines components of the strategies already covered or creates original content based on the unique requirements and advantages of their program. They may even create several distinct "packages" or "tracks" from which student-interns can select, enabling them to complete their internship requirement in a way that advances their unique professional objectives. Depending on which components are incorporated, there will be advantages and disadvantages for students and partner agencies.

Finally, despite the benefits of online internships, their acceptability has lagged student demand and the popularity of remote labor for several causes. Acceptance by university leadership and faculty is a logical obstacle, especially when traditional models are involved. At first, the inclusion of internships in courses was not warmly received (Pittenger, 2018). It is normal to have concerns regarding the caliber of experience, supervision, mentorship, peer interaction, and exposure to company culture. The lack of infrastructure is one of many additional difficulties. A capability for virtual internships must be developed, just as traditional colleges had to do for online education (Jackson, 2019). Additionally, employers need more tools specifically for online internships. Those in charge guiding student-interns must supply virtual tools engagement, socializing, monitoring, and mentoring of interns, as well as distribution and technology-related training for students and supervisors, are also necessary for remote employment (Thompson, 2020).

The social work education and research center at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica encountered several difficulties in moving the practicum to an online setting while maintaining the caliber of the educational process. To support online transactions and the delivery of social services, the public sector, where many social workers are employed, is still expanding its information and communication technology infrastructure. However, the creation and usage of government e-services are severely impacted by variables including privacy and security, financial limitations in obtaining the necessary gear and software, and the digital divide (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). Another factor that stops certain people and organizations from utilizing ICT to its full potential is a lack of digital and media literacy (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020; Waller, 2020). As telework and telecounseling are uncommon in Jamaica, it is challenging to obtain online practicum locations and/or supervisors with relevant online practice expertise. Home visits are an essential part of the work of some types of social workers, such as those who provide childcare services and those who work in family courts. To evaluate how the family unit functions socially and daily, home visits are necessary. Since there is no element of surprise when doing this over the phone or through other online channels, it is challenging to implement. Client participation in this service may be hindered by obstacles such as poor internet connectivity, outdated technology, lack of digital literacy, and negative attitudes toward ICT for visits that can be handled online, such as a planned check-up. As a result, there is a chance that the most susceptible won't be accessed virtually (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020; Waller, 2020).

Futher, an online survey was used to investigate the work placement experiences of MA and BA social work students at the University of Worcester during the pandemic. Thirteen students responded that the moral and practical effects of an abruptly forced shift to the "new normal" of online working and assessment raised significant concerns about the line separating personal and professional lives as well as the relationship-based nature of the career they believed they were entering. Mixed experiences with agencies' moral and practical support were reported, and the students' perceptions of injustice were exacerbated by the lack of consistency among placement agencies. Students held a strong conviction that the future of social work would involve a permanent locus shift from community work to online interaction regarding the people (service users and careers) with whom they worked. Opportunities for incidental and tacit forms of learning were lacking in online working environments. In English social work services, which before the introduction of COVID 19 had become

more dominated by a task and performance management culture, this change was primarily seen as a loss and a further decline of relationship-based practice (Sarbor & Unwin, 2021).

Moreover, during the efforts taken against the Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey, departments of social work that underwent transition to the distant education system encountered several issues. During the pandemic, social work academics and students encountered problems, including difficulties with the distance education infrastructure, issues with assessment and evaluation, limited interactions with students, worries about offering applied courses online, technical issues, worries about mastering practical skills, and worries about the efficacy of social work education online (SHOD, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is also noted to have a few global effects, including the switch from face-to-face to online education, restrictions placed on the social work curriculum, the lack of practical training, modifications made to the admissions requirements for social work education, and the discovery of new online teaching techniques for social work education (Azman et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis & Lee, 2020; McFadden et al., 2020).

Additionally, the COVID-19 virus spread through New York City in the early spring of 2020, forcing an unexpected end to the field placement for social work interns at a significant cancer center. The pandemic, which affected much of New York State and parts of New Jersey, began in Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs, and spread throughout them. While deciding what to do next considering the quickly changing CDC and local government instructions, educational institutions delayed field placements and cancelled in-person sessions in order to protect their teachers and students (CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). Throughout the challenging days and weeks of the initial spike, these modifications were made continuously. The Council on Social Work Education oversaw the program standards for social work schools (CSWE and Commission on Accreditation Statement, May 9, 2020). When classes started up again, there was only an online option. Many interns had their fieldwork assignments changed to remote work or, in other cases, completely canceled. because of worries regarding the confidentiality and privacy of a patient's sensitive health information in a non-clinical context (Department of Health and Human Services 2020), The cancer center's social work interns were not given the same staff only remote access to see computerized medical records on their home computers. However, it was decided to provide clinical teaching and supervision in a modified virtual/remote capacity, even though the educational program for interns may have been completed sooner under these circumstances.

Like other nations, the Philippine educational system had to make considerable changes in how educational instruction was delivered during the epidemic. Education institutions were shut down and moved to an online learning environment after the Philippine government declared an intensified community quarantine in March 2020. Schools with considerable investments in digital infrastructure and significant integration of technology use in professional development programs were able to quickly switch to emergency remote learning due to the unequal distribution of material resources in the nation. Due to the limited resources available, public-sector schools, for example, have had difficulty developing distant learning programs. Due to challenges in implementing online programs, a flexible approach to learning was developed, giving schools the freedom to design their teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of a variety of students (Tarrayo & Anudin, 2021). There was a shift from face-to-face classes to modular or online mode of learning. Traditional in-person internships were no longer a practical option to ensure safety of the students since the introduction of lockdowns and safety protocol measures given by the government. As a result, online internships were increasing in popularity as best alternative since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

In the Philippines, the Republic Act No. 4373 passed in 1965 otherwise known as the Social Work Law established the professional status of Social Work and promoted the value of undergraduate Social Work Education. Article II, Section 10-12 of this law requires all Bachelor of Science in Social Work graduates to pass a written examination given by the Board of Examiners before any graduate can practice the profession. Part of this law further requires that before anyone can be allowed to take the examinations, one should complete a minimum period of 1,000 hours of practical training under the supervision of a qualified and fully trained Social Worker. OJT/Practicum/Internship course is vital part of the teaching-learning process. This is where theories and concepts learned in the early years of studies will be translated into practice. This hands-on laboratory training will allow students to strengthen theories learned in the classroom with actual organizational practices, systems knowledge, and decision-making mechanisms (Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers Resoulution No. 03 series of 2017). Through BSW degrees, social workers complete supervised practice. Aspiring social workers learn on the job in these settings while being closely supervised by a social worker with a license. Even though programs incorporate work experience, social workers must complete at least 1,000 hours of supervised practice. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) proposal to HEIs concerning the modification of the traditional mode of learning to on-line learning was made possible to continue education notwithstanding health crisis brought by the pandemic. Pursuant to the guidelines issued by CHED and inconsideration of the protocols released by AITF, no face-to-face field instruction were allowed. The colleges/universities explore online case management, tele counselling and other online platforms in lieu of actual face to face fieldwork and field supervision. Field supervision including triologue meetings both by the

school and agency shall be done remotely/online (CHED Memorandum Order No. 04 Series of 2020).

In relation of the online internship experienced by the social work interns of the Philippines, the Diploma in/Master of Social Work (DMSW), offered under FMDS of the University of the Philippines Open Universty requires its students to complete an internship at respectable organizations. The faculty member in charge oversees and provides guidance for the internship courses online through the virtual classroom known as MyPortal. ICT was identified as a crucial component in facilitating communication and instruction between the FIC and the students in a study conducted by Taylan (2018) on the experiences and lessons of UPOU regarding the technologies used by the Social Work program with its field internship courses. This is especially true given that both parties are in different location. With the aid of these technologies, students can access ongoing education for professional and personal development regardless of their location or time zone. The way the field training is carried out also enables the student to participate to social transformation through the organizations where they will be placed, and their experiences while working in these settings have a significant positive impact on the discipline and practice. The study was influenced by Kolb and Fry's (2018) Experiential Learning Cycle, which defines knowledge as the result of fusing experiences' grasping and transformation. Knowledge is the result of doing both. All students were able to give in-depth descriptions of their field teaching experience during the Concrete Experience stage. Reflections on the obstacles faced in terms of the Reflective Observation include emotional challenges, challenges brought on by having many obligations, and practice-related challenges. In addition, the students' realizations based on their final shared outputs covered topics such as the role and niche of social work in society, social workers' competencies, the need for an advanced framework, the significance of self-awareness, and praxis. The students' accounts of new items they learnt in terms of abstract conceptualization include technical information and abilities they picked up because of the field instruction placement and its impact on their lives. The students' reflections on Active Experimentation included their suggestions and strategies. Their suggestions included how the organization may enhance its functions and management while also enhancing the social work profession (Taylan & Muyco, 2018).

The study is anchored on the philosophical paradigm of Constructivism which states that knowledge is best acquired through a process of action, reflection, and construction. Knowledge is a multidimensional interpretation as a result. The student must think about the material being covered and create an interpretation based on prior knowledge, values, and cultural context. There are two primary components of constructivism: radical and social. The first type of radical constructivism, known as cognitive constructivism, contends that an individual's subjective interpretation of their active experience determines how they construct knowledge. The second type of social constructivism asserts that knowledge is created via social interaction and that human growth is socially located. (Brau, 2018). Hence, the experiences of the former student-interns in online internship were explored in this study and thus gave meaning to the phenomena.

Relative to this, online internship is based on the Cognitive Theory of Jean Piaget. According to Piaget, the capacity to reason, associate ideas and solve problems are the result of cognitive structures that are steadily built within the human's brain commencing from direct exposure and interaction with the environment. Furthermore, learning is a process of adaptation to environmental stimuli, involving sequential periods of what Piaget termed as assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium. In assimilation knowledge, students integrate their observations and experiences into the logic of their prevailing or emerging understandings. Piaget proposed the educator's role involved providing necessary learning experiences that stimulate students to advance their thinking (Hargraves, 2021).

The study is also supplemented with the Experiential Learning conceptualized by Kolb. The definition of experiential learning is "a process by which a learner creates information, skills, and value from direct encounters." In other words, it focuses on experience-based learning. Learning from experience and internalizing lessons are two ways to build knowledge. Kolb's learning cycle, which describes the continual process of integrating experience to creating knowledge, contains an interplay between "action/reflection" and "experience/abstraction." Kolb's learning cycle comprises four stages, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Concrete experience means that if learners engage in a real experience, they are learning. Reflective observation is when students look back on their learning. Learners engage in abstract conceptualization when they attempt to use previously learned information to justify and explain their experiences. Learners' utilization of what they have learned from the experience in future applications is the subject of active experimentation. A learner's ability to retain information also depends on how well they communicate what they have learned (Chiu, 2019). Typically, the educator will present a direct, concrete experiential event before facilitating individual or group responses on the encounter. In the conceptualization phase, understanding the experience's significance is a primary goal, frequently with the inclusion of related material. The next step is for students to apply what they have learnt to their personal and professional contexts. The learning cycle concept has been used in various educational programs, including class sessions, degree courses and training programs (Kolb, A.& Kolb, D., 2018).

Another supporting theory to this study is the theory of the situated learning who is authored by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. According to the theory of situated learning, successful instruction necessitates learning that is integrated into real-world practice environments in which students participate in increasingly challenging tasks within social communities. Before one may engage effectively in the circumstance or real setting, one must learn and acquire knowledge. The instructor serves as a knowledge source, facilitator, and mediator so that students can access that knowledge and put it to use in group activities. As a result of their experience as actual practitioners in the group or community, students reach a new level of knowledge and understanding (Pengiran, 2018).

Internships are academically founded upon firsthand learning, where the learner actively creates “knowledge through direct experience that is meaningful to the student with guided reflection and analysis.” They provide real-world settings appropriate to learners' future occupations. Internships embedded within the curriculum meaningfully improve graduate employment rates and are beneficial in strengthening technical competencies, developing cognitive skills, hastening values, and promoting lifelong learning. (Ting et al., 2022). The importance of internships and other work-based learning opportunities is being recognized more and more for college students, experiences. Proponents point out that internships assist students in growing the ability to put academic knowledge to use in real-world settings, create professional networks, and make it easier for students to make colleagues and enter the workforce. Most recently, online internships can range in length, format, and activities, and they have gained in popularity. The COVID-19 pandemic generated a lot of interest in these unusual sorts of internships, as many on-site roles were eliminated or moved online (Hong et al., 2021). In addition, due to the lock-down of workplaces and the start of the epidemic, many industrial partners were unable to keep assisting with student placements for the established internship programs. The change was swift and difficult for the academic institution. While many industry partner were unable to help students complete their internships, others were open to finding alternate arrangements that would allow the program to continue despite the setbacks. Industry partners were contacted to determine whether they could manage an online internship program as opposed to an on-site program (Briant & Crowther, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a contingent shift to remote working and learning worldwide. However, little is known regarding the impact of this shift on internships to the graduates. There were studies conducted about online learning but only few for online internship. Further, much empirical research on the frequency, caliber, and dedication of equity and access among online internships especially during the pandemic. Hence, this study seeks to address gaps identified above. Furthermore, the researcher established the study after becoming interested in investigating the effects of the “new normal” from social work graduates in their experienced in internship placement because of the unanticipated circumstances.

The purpose of the study is to describe the impact of COVID-19 in the education setting specifically in the context of online internship. It explored the experiences, challenges, and opportunities of social work student-interns during COVID-19 pandemic. The study seeksto answer the questions of what the lived experiences of student interns in online internship were, what were the challenges and how did they cope up with the challenges. Additionally, it brings to knowledge of what opportunities provided by an online internship which the traditional, physical internship cannot offer and the insights of the participants that they could share to the academic community about their online internship experience.

The significance of the study will be beneficial to; firstly, the college students who will undergo internship in which the result can be utilized as framework of reference, guiding tool, and motivation to get through the internship notwithstanding the difficulties that might possibly come. Secondly, it will be advantageous to the parents as this will give them more knowledge about internship in our time and thus, they can offer appropriate support and advice to their children. This study will also be essential to the faculties and field instructors from different colleges/universities as the results will be used as knowledge foundation to innovate and enhance the quality of field practice they are offering to students, providing strategies in the context of online internship, and securing the quality of learning, values, skills acquired by students in preparing them to become effective workers in the future. Moreover, the results of the study would yield additional knowledge to the social welfare agencies who are accepting social work student-interns in giving quality guidance and providing contingency plans to internships when a certain unexpected crisis occur thus ensuring that student-intern will be able to apply all their learnings in their lower years in the internship that it will result in them to become a competent Registered Social Workers in the future. Furthermore, this study is also significant to the community because to the COVID-19 pandemic, not only classes and internship programs have been done remotely but increasingly jobs have also gone in that direction. A virtual internship today might be good preparation for the virtual/remote work of tomorrow. Likewise, this study is conducted to add a novel contribution to the virtual internship literature

## II. METHOD

An overview of the research techniques employed in the study was provided in this section of the paper. It included details about the study participants, method and procedutes in the conduct of the study.

### ***Study Participants***

The respondents were 10 social work graduates coming from the University of Mindanao, Ateneo de Davao University, Jose Maria College, Holy Cross of Davao College, and Assumption College of Davao. They had their internship in between the year 2020 – 2021 while in the heights of COVID-19 pandemic. They had completed their field internship despite the online modality. Their experiences as student-interns include both opportunities and struggles in communicating with their field supervisors and their assigned client for casework and target sectors for community organizing. Nevertheless, they were able to outdo those challenges and gained several learnings that is very timely and relevant in this generation. They had graduated in college/university in the year 2021 – 2022 and acquired their Licensed as Registered Social Worker in October 2022.

The researcher uses the non-probability sample specifically purposive sampling to gather comprehensive, complex, and substantial data that would produce insights, allowing patterns and discoveries to emerge through analysis from the target participants. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher is confident that the target groups meet the goal of the study. Since the samples chosen are suitable respondent for the study, there is a certainty that real-time findings will be produced since the target participants has comprehensive knowledge and complex experience in the context of the study. Furthermore, when a researcher be able to speak to target participants directly, desired data and findings will be made (Bhardwa, 2019).

In connection with this, a researcher is required to provide a comprehensive description of the research population in their protocols. The first concern is ensuring that the subject population have the qualities necessary to carry out the research's objective. For participation in the study, the researcher outlined the inclusion and exclusion requirements. The qualities that potential participants are known as inclusion criteria while exclusion criteria are those traits that preclude potential study participants from participation. Establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria improves the possibility of obtaining accurate and repeatable results, reduces the risk of injury to the participants, and prevents the exploitation of weaker individuals (Yale, 2022).

Graduates of social work programs who completed their internships in face-to face modality despite the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak threat were not qualified to take part in the study. Colleges and universities offer online courses and internships during COVID-19 starting March 2020. This was done to protect the students' wellbeing and safety without sacrificing their learning or the standard of their education. Instructors and field supervisors support students' online learning in accordance with the mandate from Commission on Higher Education. Hence, the study focuses on the opportunities and struggles in online internship as per experience by the student interns who had undergone it. Thus, social work graduates who deviate in the online modality were not eligible to participate in the study.

The research participants were free to accept or decline the invitation to participate. They responded to all the questions voluntarily; they were not coerced into doing so. They shared their thoughts and insights from undertaking online internship without worrying about being threatened or subjected to manipulation. The researcher granted the participants permission to leave if they desire to do so midway during the interview for any reason; otherwise, the session will end. Additionally, participants were able to choose to withhold any information they disclosed during the interview if they decide on it.

### ***Materials and Instrument***

The researcher constructed an interview guide with open-ended questions to be used in the conduct of interview. A common technique for gathering data in qualitative studies is in-depth interviewing. Interviews can be highly structured, semi structured, or unstructured, with the latter being the most typical. A well-designed semi-structured interview guide has preset questions but also leaves room for discussion on unexpected subjects related to the research objective. Researchers must pay attention to important factors. factors such as who conducts the interview, who participates in the interview, what is included in the interview guide, where the interview takes place, and how data will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed are all impacted by the qualitative technique that is employed before, during, and after the interview to acquire rich interview data (Eppich et al., 2019). During the validation process of the questionnaire, the approval committee gave the researcher a mean score of 9.6 described as good. In so doing, the questionnaire was duly approved. The questions that were enquired to the participants led to the in depth sharing of the social work graduates in their experiences, difficulties, opportunities, coping mechanisms, and insights in the online internship that honed them in their journey to social work profession.

### ***Design and Procedure***

The researcher used the Qualitative Research tradition specifically Phenomenological design to examine and give understanding of the experiences of social work graduates in the online internship. Phenomenology is an approach to research that aims to capture the essence of an event by looking at it from the viewpoint of individuals who have participated in it. In terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced, phenomenology seeks to explain the significance of this experience. Several phenomenological approaches have their roots in various conceptions of what and how of human experience. Husserl argued that a



lived experience of a thing contained characteristics that people who had encountered the phenomena frequently perceived. These widely acknowledged traits, or universal essences, can be discovered to construct a description that can be applied globally. Husserl thought that a phenomenon's essences represented its true nature (Neubauer et al., 2019). As a philosophy and method of investigation, phenomenology goes beyond a simple approach to knowing and instead engages the mind in interpretation and meaning making to comprehend the conscious lived experience of humans. By employing this strategy, a researcher can obtain insights into people's lived experiences and interpret them to make sense of them by using bracketing as a basic premise to describe the natural way phenomena arise. To illuminate the unique experience and pinpoint the phenomena that the participants in each circumstance see, data gathering, and analysis are conducted side by side. The findings of a phenomenological investigation extend the mind, enhance methods of thinking to perceive a phenomenon, and enable one to see ahead and define one's position as a researcher by intentionally studying life experiences. However, phenomenological studies have placed a strong emphasis on the subjectivity and personal knowledge in perceiving and understanding it from the point of view of the research participant. In social sciences, phenomenology could be heavily utilized to accomplish this goal (Qutoshi, 2020).

The researcher opted to use interview as a method to gather data and obtain rich and in-depth information from the chosen participants. For the most part, the researcher used the semi-structured interview where the key areas of phenomenon being examined were being questioned. According to Barrett and Twycross (2018), a well-planned semi-structured interview should provide for flexibility for participants to bring their unique perspectives to the discussions while ensuring that data are recorded in important areas. During data collection, the researcher played the role of an interviewer/data gatherer and an observer. The researcher encouraged the participants to divulge rich and varied data based on their understanding of their experience. As an observer, the researcher categorized and systematically document how each person responded to experiences in everyday life (Sharma, n.d.). Furthermore, to ensure accuracy in data gathering and data analysis, the researcher asked permission to the respondents to conduct process recording as well as audio recording in the entire duration of the interview.

The researcher communicated to the Program Coordinator of the five colleges/universities offering BSSW to get a permission of the conduct of the study to their social work graduates who had undergone online internship. Afterwards, the researcher forwarded an invitation letter to the chosen participants to partake in the study. Upon their agreement, the researcher provided an informed consent letter. The researcher discussed briefly to the respondents the background and purpose of the study. After the explanation, the interviews were carried out with within 40 minutes to 1 hour to ensure that each respondents had enough time to recall their experiences and answer all the questions that were asked. The researcher set up the date and time on the preference of the participants. The researcher took note of the interviewee's body language and expressions. The researcher verified the transcripts with the interviewee after transcribing the recordings. Through process recording and audio recording, the researcher ensured the accuracy and legitimacy of the information gathered. The data that were gathered from the interview from the chosen participants were examined utilizing Colaizzi's seven-step procedure. The first stage is that the interviews' statements were initially recorded and transcribed into verbatim. The second stage involved extracting the core ideas and meanings and identifying the crucial parts. The key themes were established in the third stage, and the researcher then set out to interpret each extraction and its associated ideas. At the fourth stage, the themes were grouped, and the concepts were carefully examined before being categorized according to how closely they resembled the topic areas or the key ideas. The results were used to produce a thorough explanation of the subject as the fifth phase. To locate the concepts of the primary description at this stage, many subject categories with the same meaning were arranged in more expansive categories. The explanation of the phenomenon under study's intrinsic structure was then presented as the sixth stage, which was a clear statement of its fundamental structure. The final phase involved conducting a private interview with each participant to ensure the credibility of the findings. Following the interview, the findings were finalized after each participant provided feedback on the findings (Koohestani, 2019).

Furthermore, the criteria for trustworthiness were followed by the researcher in conducting the study. Different qualitative researchers frequently disagree on the optimal criteria for determining trustworthiness. However, the current consensus is that credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity are the five most relevant characteristics for establishing the trustworthiness of research.

According to Lincoln & Guba, it is crucial that people will acknowledge the study as legitimate especially by the academe, professionals, decision-makers, and the public. Being trustworthy is one method. The researcher tried to get to know the participants, establish rapport and gain their trust by setting a calm and stress-free environment. The researcher allotted enough time for data gathering to ensure credibility. The researcher ensured that the participants could narrate their experiences without feeling under pressure in any way. The capacity for expansion is referred to as transferability. It is based on the idea that results can be generalized or applied to different contexts or populations.

The capacity for expansion is referred to as transferability. It is based on the idea that results can be

generalized or applied to different contexts or populations. To further ensure the dependability of the data, it was checked by external reviewers (extended check) was done. Details of the study procedure, including data collection, analysis, and extraction of codes and themes, were elaborated to ensure conformability of the study as well as allowing readers to make an informed decision after reading the report. The entire process was thoroughly explained to support authenticity and make it simple for readers to examine the study (Koohestani et al, 2019).

In conducting the study, rigorous adherence to the University of Mindanao Ethics and Review Committee (UMERC) policies was maintained by the researcher. The researcher followed thoroughly the corresponding actions necessary for the permission and approval from school-in-charge in proceeding and completing the research. The approval certificate number was UMERC-2022-378. Further, the involvement of the participants in the conduct of the study were completely in their own accord and not in under compulsion. Their names were appeared anonymously to protect their identity. The researcher made sure that proper information and explanation were given to clear out possible confusion on the part of the participants before proceeding to the interview. The researcher secured confidentiality as to any information that the respondents deliberated during the interview. Furthermore, the process recording, and audio recording was never read nor heard by anyone except by the researcher. The researcher explained to the respondents the informed consent and their right to withdraw at any time without the fear of being threatened. The researcher secured that the questions asked in the interview were duly approved by the advisor and research committee. When employing the thoughts of other authors and experts, the researcher was careful to adhere to all the correct and detailed citation rules. To do this, Turnitin and Grammarly tools were used to check this paper for grammar and plagiarism. The study was based on several previous investigations. Every source of the study was taken from credible academic journals and scholarly publications. The researcher adhered to avoid changing or deleting data or outcome just to support claims or hypothesis. In so doing, the data gathered were accurately recorded in the research. The results of the study were solely based on professional judgements while carrying out and conducting the research. Personal gains, personal considerations, or money on the part of the researcher was strictly forbidden. This study wasn't made possible without the significant contribution of the researcher's adviser, panel committee and data analyst. Their thoughts had become a tremendous importance in the success of conceptualizing in the study. As a result, the researcher acknowledged their intellectual contribution, which led to the publishing of the study.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper presents the results of the data gathering and the analysis of the data gathered. Based on the analysis of the results of the data being gathered, 12 themes emerged, and each theme has its core ideas. These themes were presented in a logical sequence with reference to the research questions.

#### Lived Experiences in Online Internship

**Table 1.**

Themes	Core Ideas
Uncertainty on the Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- doubted if field internship can be done through online. - felt anxiety about what should be done.</li> <li>- had miscommunication with our instructors. - suffered dilemma of whose authority to follow. - very difficult to do it online due to many restrictions. - had no gadgets to use, neither a laptop nor internet connection.</li> <li>- frustrated with unstable internet connection that interrupted online presentations.</li> <li>- very disappointed to endure the online set-up for internship.</li> <li>- very low signal; could neither call nor use cellular data. - recurrence of brownouts without notice; could not give an excuse with absences.</li> </ul>
Challenging Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- participants had difficulty using virtual platforms. - clients were uncooperative, so busy and unresponsive to calls and messages.</li> <li>- unable to observe clients' non-verbal cues. - hard to know if clients got bored/ uncomfortable by just hearing their voices.</li> <li>- failed to establish rapport and strong helping relationship with clients.</li> <li>- challenged due to difficulty in building a working relationship.</li> <li>- challenged to initiate interaction with clients and be mindful of actions.</li> <li>- interviewed and gathered information via phone calls only.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unsure if interviewees understood by clients due to limited human interaction.</li> <li>- had language barrier with online participants.</li> </ul>
Tough Realities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- negative mindset like cannot do something due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>- had to adjust to do everything all alone.</li> <li>- did the paper works near deadlines.</li> <li>- was able to communicate but unable to help all clients. - couldn't apply all learnings in the internship.</li> </ul>

### ***Uncertainty on the Plans***

Based on the data showed above, the participants had doubted if field internship can be done through online due to many restrictions that leads to feeling anxious on what steps should be done. They had suffered dilemmas on whose authority or instruction should be followed. They had difficulty doing the internship online due to many restrictions. In addition, they had difficulty in internet connections due to instability and recurrence of brownouts to those who were staying in their provinces.

Participant 1 who was a graduate from Ateneo de Davao University on May 2022 shared that he had difficulty on presenting his outputs during case conferences due to internet connection. He stated that:

*"It was difficult because we must adjust presenting our case studies online. First sa iyahang cons, dili nako makita ang reaction sa panel everytime mag-present ko, walay human interaction, it's like talking to the screen. Another cons pud is ang connectivity sa internet, unpredictable sya. I must go to the coffee shop para makakuha ug stable na internet, although stable ang internet, naa gihapoy tendency mawala and hassle sya. Naan naka sa middle sa zoom presentation then mokalit lang kawala ang internet so panira or boomer kayo sya, gwapo na presentation nimo then nawala ang internet and vice versa pud, usahay ang professors ang mawala ang internet, inig present nako wala na diay sila sa meeting. Ang prons po kay makacomment lang dayon ang professors sa amoang outputs via google docs so they can easily skim through the documents and put their comments. Kung sa virtual pud ma'am kay mas less ang kulba kay everytime naay ma-comment ang teacher virtually, pwede ipalusot lang sa pikas dunggan kay para dili ma-feel kayo ilahang mga comments unlike sa actual na ma-feel gyud emotionally ilahang comments. Another thing is mas convenient sa amoa kay pwede ra mi mg-uban sa amoang groupmates and mg discuss simultaneously." (RQ1, IQ1)*

(It was difficult because we must adjust to present our case studies online, it has both positive and negative aspects. For the negative aspect, we cannot see the reaction of our panels every time we have our presentation, so we do not have human interaction, it is just like talking to the screen. Another is the issue of internet connectivity which sometimes was unpredictable. There was an instance that in the middle of the zoom presentation, the internet became unstable in which I needed to go immediately to a coffee shop to have a stable internet connection. It's frustrating since it interrupted my presentation. There were also times that teachers were the ones who had left the zoom meeting due also to the internet connection. On the other side, its positive aspect was that professors can easily skim through and give comments on our outputs via google docs. Another thing is the online presentation was less frightening since every time professors give their comments, there were no hurt feelings compared to the face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, using online platforms was convenient to use because we can meet with our groupmates and discuss simultaneously our outputs.)

Moreover, participant 10 who graduated last May 2022 at the University of Mindanao also had a fair share of experienced in her difficulty to online set-up due to concurrent brownout in their area.

*"Isa jud sa nakaapekto ato is time consuming siya. Naay schedule si maam pero kalit ra kog kawala, malahi napud akong schedule. Ma-jampack akoang first and second session, taas kaayo among session, taas na among activity, ang attention span sa bata kay very short ra pud biya. Mao na siya ang naka affect jud sa akoo'ng internship. Ang availability of course po sa field instructor. Dili all the time, muhangyo ko kay available pud akoang field instructor." (RQ1, IQ1)*

The brownout occurrence made the process to be time-consuming. Our field instructor would give us a schedule to met with the client but I would suddenly disappear from the meeting so my field instructor would re-schedule the meeting. It resulted of combining the activities of the 1st and 2nd session. It took so long and I am not sure if my client was still listening and learnings since the attention span of a children are short. In addition, it's not all the time that my field instructor was always available. So, it's not a guarantee that if I re-schedule for a meeting, she would be available to assist the client with an online session.

As stated by Adedoyin and Sokyan (2020), schools all over the world have been closed since the

COVID-19 epidemic began to stop the virus from spreading. Because of this, the transition to online learning was made with such speed and urgency that it put the educational system's infrastructure, teachers' and students' access to material resources, and their ability to use technology effectively to teach and learn.

Additionally, Kim (2021) noted that the limitations imposed by the pandemic have forced the change to online schooling. As a result of this change to online learning, resources and lessons have not been developed that will maximize teaching and learning chances.

Furthermore, according to Wheeler and Waite (2021), many organizations lack the necessary skills or readiness to take their operations online. Some might want to give it a shot, but they lack the necessary resources. Some courses are simply being appropriate for online internship. Instances when students are merely given task to meet their time commitments without any supervision or feedback can be avoided by having an open discussion with businesses about their readiness and capacity to deliver meaningful virtual internships.

### **Challenging Interactions**

From the data being gathered and analyzed, participants had difficulty using virtual platforms because clients are uncooperative and unresponsive to calls/ messages. The social work graduates were unable to observe clients' non-verbal cues, so it was hard for them to know if clients got bored or being uncomfortable by just hearing their voices. They were challenged in building a working relationship with their client because they failed to establish rapport.

Participant 2 who was a graduate from Ateneo de Davao University shared her experienced of difficulty on building helping relationship with her assigned client and implementing activities that would address the client's concern.

*“Given our profession na dapat ma-establish gyud ang relationship, at first, I was skeptical about it kay naay deliverables nga dapat buhaton unlike sa other courses na kaya ra jud nga digital. I was skeptical at first pero laing mabuhat, we must adapt during that time, so mas visible gyud aNg blended na internship. I was skeptical at first but eventually I was able to accept it, I guess mao na lang pud the way I cope, it's just to accept, give suggestions and not complain always. Complaining always in the sense na limited ang human interaction so mahirap yung instructions, mahirap yung communication line within your supervisors so it's really a two-way relationship, teachers being the supervisors and students na maghatag pud dapat ug suggestions and comments. My client's case needed assistive device. So, during that time, sya akoang first na client, and strict kayo ang barangay dili magpasulod and all. Kato na time, na test ko nga dapat maka-build ug connection with other agency, networking but because it was online, dili ko mkaadto sa agency mismo to facilitate, everything is done through online. I must go beyond and ask contact. Gamay ra akoang ang na-acquired na details pero need jud sya tutukan unta, pero lisod sya buhaton ato na time kay daghang restrictions.” (RQ1, PQ1)*

(Given our profession that we must establish rapport and helping relationship with our clients, at first, I was skeptical about it, I was doubting if field internship can be done through online. Some deliverables needed to be done through face-to-face unlike other courses that their deliverables can be done through online. Although I was skeptical at first however we have no other option but to adapt during that time. I was able to accept it in the long run, I just learned to give suggestions for the better of the implementation rather than complaining. Complaining in the sense that there is limited human interaction, so the instructions were very difficult to follow especially on the two-way relationships between the teachers to the students as supervisor and supervisee. Concerning this, I have a case where my client needs an assistive device, he was also my first client. The barangay where he lives was very strict and I am not allowed to go there. That time, I was being tested that I should build connections with other agencies through networking even though I had to do it through online. I just acquired limited information with this client even though my case study report to be submitted must be intensive. It's very difficult to do it online due to many restrictions.)”

Moreover, participant 4 who was a graduate from Jose Maria College shared her struggle in communicating with the client due to signal and internet connection.

*“Sa internet, pag mag-communicate nami sa amoang client, dili namo sila ma contact usahay, ilahang number mag-lahi lahi, dili nila tubagon usahay ang tawag, so dili kaayo ko kakuha ug information nila, nya kailangan na nako magbuhat sa akoang case study pero kulangan pa ang information nila, so communication gyud ang pinaka-challenging adto time. Naa pud times tawagan namo amoang client, motubag sila pero dili namo masabtan ilahang tingog, kulang –kulang ang information, dili nako sila maapsan. Ako nga intern nagadali ko para mahuman ko sa amoang output pero madugay kosa amoang client. Dili man gud nako sila macontact face-to-face, so naa koy ipabuhat na seminar, gamay lang mag-attend. Tapos ang internet pud, in time nga magpa-check mi sa amoang supervisor, dili pud mi maka-in time usahay kay usahay mohinay ang internet, usahay brown out, dili dayon namo mapasa amoang output. Maglisod mi ug kuwan sa ilaha, kay ang uban naay trabaho.” (RQ2, IQ1)*

(It was the issue on the internet. It was hard for me especially in communicating with my client

because sometimes I cannot contact them, sometimes they changed phone numbers, and they would not answer the calls, so I wasn't able to gather thorough information from them. It was challenging since I needed to do their case studies as required by the school. There were also times that we needed to submit our documents to our field instructor for checking but we will be delayed due to intermittent connection and loss of electricity. Further, there were times that I would be able to communicate with my client, but I cannot clearly understand their voices that's why it still led to lacking information. As an intern, I tried my best to meet the deadline, but it still delayed due to the circumstance with my client. We cannot also meet them face-to-face that's why there were seminars to be conducted, only few will attend. We find it hard to force them as well since they also have a job.)

In a study conducted by Ugalingan, et al. (2021), the difficulties encountered during the online internship in the Philippine setting includes interaction in an online environment, lack of self-confidence and technical mastery that paved ways in an uncertainty in providing a quality of output or results in the internship. Additionally, according to Youngblood (2020), online internship has downsides. First, when an intern is unfamiliar with the work environment and is unable to join the physical community with a supervisor in person, additional difficulties related with developing and maintaining work connections arise. Since the interns hardly ever interact with their supervisors, online internships might not provide enough networking possibilities. Second, because they are not surrounded by managers, coworkers, and other stakeholders, interns may struggle to develop interpersonal relationships or management skills. According to research, persons who work from home have a significantly lower amount of interaction and must cooperate with others virtually, which is less natural than face-to-face conversation and does not produce the water cooler effect. Third, people who work from home discover that the "flow" that makes things operate is missing without face-to-face interaction and casual meetings because the workplace acts as a social setting but one's house does not.

### **Tough Realities**

As shown from the data above, participants had once thought that they cannot do something in their online internship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them did their paper works near deadlines and some of them couldn't apply all the learnings in the internship.

Participant 5 who was a graduate from the Assumption College of Davao shared that she couldn't apply all the learning she acquired in the lower years due to the online set-up.

*"Dili kaayo mi ka-practice sa amoang internship, wala kaayo silay cellphone, gadget or laptop na pwede nimo magamit pang-communicate then hassle sya kay katong sa amoang field I na-assign mi sa mga bata then wala kaayo miy interaction sa mga bata since sa field I kay gibawal ang face-to-face. Mangita jud dapat ug pamaagi kung unsa ang mabuhat para sa client."* (RQ1, IQ1)

(I couldn't apply all my learnings in the internship. My clients have no gadgets, phone, or laptop that they can use for communication. The clients assigned to me were children and I do not have much communication since face-to-face was not allowed. So, I needed to find alternative ways on how I could guide and assist my client.)

Moreover, participant 7 who was a graduate of University of Mindanao expressed how difficult it was to gain the skills needed in internship if done through online.

*"Para sa akoa kay wala nako na-acquire ang skills nga gikinahanglan, since ang profession kay dealing with people, so dapat gyud face to face. Lisod jud mag build ug relationship sa imohang client if online. Sa amoang part kay naa miy gadget, pero dili sya magamit kung walay signal ang client kay naa sa bukid nagpuyo. Kagulan nako if maging effective ba ko nga community worker puhon."* (RQ2, PQ5)

(I couldn't acquire the needed knowledge and skills through the online internship because our profession requires dealing with people, so it needed to be face to-face. It's difficult to build rapport and a helping relationship with your client if it's only virtual. On our end, though we have gadgets to be used but it would be of no used if our client has no signal because they are staying in far-flung areas. At that time, I became worried that I wouldn't be an effective community worker someday.)

According to Youngblood (2020), internships do have drawbacks. When an intern is unfamiliar with the work environment or community and is unable to join the physical community or work with a supervisor in person, additional difficulties related with developing and maintaining work and helping connections arise. Since the interns hardly ever interact with their supervisors or coworkers, he reiterated that remote internships might not provide enough learning possibilities.

Moreover, in the study conducted by Teng et al. (2021) in the experiences and perception of students and field instructors in online internship, it was revealed that student-interns felt alone despite frequent online connection because they couldn't experience the real work environment. Thus, online internships will therefore need to be purposefully designed with activities that allow interns to establish social exchanges, generate social skills, and increase learning in the virtual workplace.

### **Coping Mechanism of Student-Interns**

Table 2.

Themes	Core ideas	Challenges
Self-Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prayed to God for strength as needed at that time.</li> <li>- Became flexible in the learning process.</li> <li>- chose to stand firm through its difficulty.</li> <li>- had to be knowledgeable and skillful with appropriate intervention for them.</li> <li>- relied more on oneself and read a lot of books.</li> <li>- revisited the basic theories learned from previous studies.</li> <li>- managed to pass the requirements for graduation.</li> <li>- overcame the experience without being disheartened.</li> <li>- were able to save money due to less expenses in transportation fees.</li> <li>- were able to continue their part time online jobs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- have uncertainties if internship can be done in online setting due to many restrictions.</li> <li>- difficulty to access communication to client due to internet and signal problem.</li> <li>- difficulty to implement activities in a purely online manner.</li> <li>- hardship in complying all the necessary requirements in a comprehensive manner to pass the internship.</li> <li>- experienced some disappointments since the expectations for internship were not fully meet due to abrupt changes.</li> </ul>
Exercise of Prudence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- had self-awareness to overcome all struggles.</li> <li>- discerns one's capabilities in doing a great job.</li> <li>- learned to adjust to any situation; adapt to the changes.</li> <li>- jotted down notes from the Messenger.</li> <li>- had to be confident in speaking to many crowds.</li> <li>- applied strategies in dealing and helping with clients.</li> <li>- focused on clients and agency work as there was time for everything.</li> <li>- addressed issues with internet connection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- experienced to doubt own capacities to adjust to online internship.</li> <li>- experienced interruption in communication with field instructors and clients due to problem in internet and signal.</li> <li>- difficulty in acquiring confidence in presentations during online conferences.</li> <li>- present of temptations to procrastinate since no intensive monitoring from field instructors.</li> </ul>
Designing Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- found alternative ways to guide and assist the clients.</li> <li>- understood clients' situations and adjusted to their availability.</li> <li>- established rapport with clients to earn their trust.</li> <li>- created activities to catch their attention during interviews.</li> <li>- made every interview session interactive.</li> <li>- conducted impactful interventions for the clients and their families.</li> <li>- provided quality service to clients amid the situation.</li> <li>- organized the group in the agency to be self-determined and empowered.</li> <li>- Became resourceful in solving problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- difficulty in recognizing non verbal cues of clients that affects real understanding of client's situation.</li> <li>- difficulty in getting the full attention of the client during video call due to many distractions from the surrounding.</li> <li>- experienced doubt if a quality service can be given to client.</li> <li>- difficulty at first to gather clients in field 2 internship for groupwork in an online setting.</li> </ul>

### *Self-preparations*

Based on the information presented above, the interns had their strategies to conquer difficulties in online internship. They made themselves flexible in the learning process and chose to stand firm through its difficulty. They read lot of books, revisited the basic theories learned from the previous studies to be knowledgeable and skillfull with appropriate intervention for them. They incorporated the case studies of the clients thus managing

to pass the requirements for graduation. Furthermore, they overcame the experience without being disheartened by praying to God for strength as needed at that time.

Participant 3 who was a graduate of Holy Cross of Davao College shared his experienced on how he managed to produce a comprehensive case management.

*"Pinaka-una nako gibuhay maam is nag-search ko sa youtube. First man gud amoang discussion is sa field 1, mga theories, so gipangbalikan nako tong mga theories na mga basic na ginatun-an sa una sa first year and second year. Nangayo pud ko ug ideas sa mga higher years like mga graduates na ug mga kaila pud sa akoang mama na mga social workers, mangayo ug idea unsaon pagbuhay ug mga case study report ug process recordings."* (RQ2, PQ3)

(The first thing I had done was to search in the youtube. I revisited again the basic theories that we learned from 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year to be incorporated for the case studies of the client assigned to me. I also asked for ideas in my seniors, alumni and the friends of my mother who are also Social Workers on how to do case studies and process recordings.)

Moreover, participant 5 who was a graduate from Assumption College of Davao shared how she managed to cope up with the challenges of online internship.

*"It's being flexible. Dili man jud tanan nga gi-plano nato kay ma-achieve, kailangan nato mag-make ug other way para ma-achieve atoang goal though dili tong specific nga goal pero duol adto. Useless nga mag-dwell sa usa ka butang nga dili nato kaya. Plus, being resilient kay naa man jud tay low times tanan, dapat kabalo ta mo-bawi ug kabalo ta muhogot ug kusog, ug dadtoa nato mabuhay nato kung unsa atoang angay buhaton."* (RQ3, PQ1)

(I've learned to be flexible. It's not all the time that all our plans will be achieved but we need to find alternative ways to achieve it if the situation requires us to do. It may not be the specific goal but near to it. It will become useless if we dwell on the things that we do not have any control over. In addition, I've learned to be resilient because in life, we will experience low moments so we need to know how to bounce back, and we need to know where we should find our strength. In this with this, we would be able to do the things that ought to be done.)

According to Hora et al. (2021), the primary benefit of an online internship in our current situation is that it provides students with a safe and work-based experience. Students can also develop skills either in technical, inter-personal or intra-personal by successfully carrying out and completing assignments in professional organization where the students are deployed.

### **Exercise of prudence**

Based on the data being gathered and analyzed, participants were able to accept the situation of the virtual set-up in the long run. They were able to adapt to online internship and addressed issues with internet connection. They were applied strategies in dealing and helping with clients such as jotting down notes and using of technologies to implement the activities for the client.

Participant 3 who graduated from the Holy Cross of Davao College shared how he managed to overcome difficulty on his online connection and communication with her assigned client.

*"Google meet gyud unta mi sa sugod nya kay lisod man sa part sa akoang client, so nag-messenger lang usa mi, so akoo na lang ginasulat tanan iyahang gipang-ingon. So mao to ang struggle, hangtod sa naka-adjust man japon sya, gitudluan sya sa iyahang anak unsaon, mao tong naka-google meet maong naka-record na nako amoang convo, ug mas dali na kay ma-review nako iyahang tubag sa recordings."* (RQ1, PQ3)

(We supposedly had used the google meet in the beginning so I can record our sessions, but since it was difficult for her to use the online platform, we ended up using messenger, so all I did was just jot down notes. Nonetheless, there came a time that my client was able to adjust to using google meet because her child taught her, so I was able to record the sessions for reviewing purposes in doing the comprehensive case study report.)

Additionally, participant 6 who was graduate from Assumption College of Davao shared how she was able to implement the intervention plan for the clients using the technologies in the modern world.

*Nakatuon ko sa pag-gamit sa technology para maka-hatag ug tabang sa akoang client. Sa intake ug pag-gather ug information kay kinahanglan naay knowledge and skills. For example, akoang client kay naay anger issues, gisabutan namo na magtan-aw ug videos which is mao iyahang hobbies, so magtan-aw ug mindful exercise or breathing exercise para makatabang sa iyahang anger issues."* (RQ3, IQ1)

(I had learned to use technology to guide my client because it also needed knowledge and skills to do intake and gather information for my client. Say for example, my client's problem was anger issue so we decided with my client that she would watch videos like mindful and breathing exercises to lessen avert the undesirable emotion.)

According to Wheeler and Waite (2021) in their study entitled Internship Alternatives, the online internship experience can have several benefits. The practice experience that is essential to an online internship is still provided to the students. The training is simply shifted to an online setting, allowing student-interns to learn the kinds of abilities they will need in the increasing digital workplace of the twenty-first century such as meeting on Zoom and navigating online file storage systems.

### Designing Interventions

Based on the data being gathered and analyzed, participants had strategies to provide impactful interventions to their assigned client/s. They shared ideas as advised by field supervisors for group assessments and found alternative ways to guide and assist the clients. They focused on clients and agency work as there was time for everything and understood clients' situations and adjusted to their availability. They created activities to catch their attention during interviews and made every interview session interactive. Furthermore, they socialized with them to be self-determined and empowered individuals & provided financial literacy and management webinars for them.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the field experience component of social work training had to be immediately altered. Several reasons helped to direct this process.

The experiential learning that takes place during the field practicum is a crucial part of social work training. Through client involvement, assessment, and intervention, this process, which typically takes place in person, frequently leads to the organic development of practice abilities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this field experience had to be quickly modified. Access to the right technologies, ethical and cultural considerations of social work practice, and the responsiveness of educational institutions, social work agencies, students, and practitioners all played a role in this process (Buchanan & Belafonte, 2021). Participants had shared on how they were able to modified ways that enable them to provide impactful interventions to their assigned clients with their active participation.

Participant 10 who was a graduate from the University of Mindanao also shared how she was able to provide effective intervention to her assigned clients.

*"Pinaka-unforgettable jud nako is ang community ug ang groupwork kay matawag jud nako siya nga success kay long distance, sa Bohol amoang mga client pero nahuman gihapon namo amoang intervention plan sa ilaha ug ma organized sila as a group. Nag-groundbreaking na sila sa ilahang project, which apil sa amoang plano sa ilaha. Online was not really a hindrance. As a student, ma appreciate nako ang process kung pa-unsang social work mghatag ug tabang. Through atong experience nako, kay na-serve nako ang purpose sa internship. Kani nga experience madala jud nakoin the future as a Social Worker."* (RQ1, PQ3)

(My most unforgettable moment was during my group work and community organizing in field 2. It was a success since our clients were residing in Bohol but we were still able to implement our intervention plan and organized them as a group. In addition, the community had a groundbreaking project as part of our intervention with them. Online setup was not really a hindrance. As a student, I appreciated the process of how the Social Worker helps the client. That experience served the purpose of our internship. This experience I would bring it as a Social Worker.)

Moreover, participant 9 who graduated from the University of Mindanao also shared how she was able to make both of her field 1 and field 2 internship productive and successful.

*"Despite nga online sya like ang pag-catch sa attention sa client na motubag gyud sya sa imoha kay screen lang nimo sya makita, imohang buhaton na mga activity para lang jud malingaw, so kana ang nagpabilin sa akoa na masking online sya, dapat kabalo ka mgbuhat ug mga activity na dili hindrance ang sa screen lang. Maayo pud jud ang rapport nga na-build nako sa akoang client nya naga-share gyud sya, ana pa akoang AFI nga dili kaayo toh sya gaistorya nga bata pero good thing lang kay nag-share gyud sa iyahang family ug sa iyahang mga gusto. Though at first struggle sya pero nakalahutay lang gihapon. Sa field 2 naman during sa last part sa amoang internship which is ang culmination kay nakita namo ang participation sa tanan. Nahiusa namo ang barangays kung asa mi assigned. Sa amoang barangay kay ng-attend pud sila ug ng-participate."* (RQ1, IQ1)

(Despite the online internship, I was able to create activities to catch the attention of my client through interviews and made every session interactive. This learning remained in me which is that eventhough it's online and that the client can only be seen through screen, there is still ways to create & implement activities. I had also built a good rapport with my client that enable him to share a lot in his circumstance. According to my agency supervisor, my client is not that talkative but in our helping process, the client was able to share about his family and what is his likes and hobbies. So, we can still have an effective helping plan for our clients whether it be face-to-face or online. It may be hard at first but we can still be able to pursue it. Additionally, for my field 2 internship experience, the thing that stand out the most for me was the culmination activity because we were able to gather them as one and the clients from the barangay to which we were assigned happily participated.)

### Opportunities Offered in Online Internship



Table 3.

Themes	Core ideas
Ongoing Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintained a support system and learn to ask for help. - had lots of support systems especially instructors lending gadgets.</li> <li>- supervisors assisted the interns in constructing and finalizing case studies.</li> <li>- were guided constantly and received advised by field instructors.</li> <li>- provided with helpful consultations by field instructors. - less frightened with professors' comments; no hurt feelings.</li> <li>- helped each other as classmates with internship concerns.</li> </ul>
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pushed to move forward.</li> <li>- never dwelt on the things that had no control.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- excelled despite limited actual observations by field instructors.</li> <li>- developed competence despite being alone. - followed all requirements such as doing the outputs.</li> </ul>
Going Beyond Social Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supported clients in addressing their needs. - sustained the livelihoods offered to them by the government.</li> <li>- initiated in giving loads for data and tokens in games during sessions.</li> <li>- surpassed all challenges by doing once best in everything.</li> </ul>

### ***On-going guidance***

Based on the information mentioned in the table above, the social work graduates had maintained a support system and learned to asked for help. Their school field instructors had provided constant guidance and giving of advises through consultations. They had communicated with their classmates and helped each other in their internship concerns.

Social Work graduates had shared how the school field instructors assisted them in their online internship journey.

Participant 1 shared how their instructors had the supervisory conferences and consultations had helped them to accomplish their online internship despite the odds.

*"The faculty was always there to assist and guide us everytime we have questions. Prior case conference, we had consultations about our case studies pag naa miy concern sa client namo ug possible agencies nga maka-ask ug help para sa problem sa amoang client tapos gina-guide mi nila asa mag contact. Gaghatag sila ug advice sa amoa because they know nga ga-online setting lang mi since 3<sup>rd</sup> year, aware pud sila na amoang knowledge and experience is kulang gyud, so they must guide us all the way especially sa interview. Although sometimes, murag makalimot sila maghatag sa ilahang comments, I understand na man kay nagapangapa pa sila sa online setting and, I think maglisod sila ug manage nga daghan na silang roles, but they still fulfill na makahatag ug time sa amoa." (RQ1, PQ9)*

(The faculty was always there to assist and guide us every time we have questions. We had consultations prior supervisory conferences of our case studies in which we opened our concerns with the case of our client and in which agencies we should connect to futher assist our client. Our field instructors guided us all the way since they knew that since 3rd-year college we had the online setting. They were aware that we were lacking both knowledge and experience, so they guided us all the way, such as on how to conduct effective interviews. Although, there were times that they forgot to give us their comments and feedback, but we understood back then they were just busy and adjusting also to online setting. Nonetheless, although they had many responsibilities, still they were able to fulfill weekly consultations and gave time for us.)

In addition, participant 4 who was a graduate from Jose Maria College shared that their instructors gave them guidance and advice that enable them to continue in their internship journey.

*"During sa amoang internship, nagahatag jud ug advice amoang field instructor, gina-guide gyud mi niya para dili mi mawala sa amoang mga bulahatonon, mapasa namo on-time amoang output ug mabuhat namo amoang duty as student intern. Although gikapoy nami usahay pero amoang supervisor kay ginapush gyud mi nila, ginaingnan mi nila nga pag dili namo tiwason masayang amoang effort from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 4<sup>th</sup> year." (RQ1, PQ9)*

(During our internship, our field instructor gave us advice and constantly guided us so that we would not drift away from the task that we needed to do. It resulted that we passed output on time and fulfilled our duty as student-interns. Although we felt tired at times, but our field instructor pushed us and told us that if we will not finish our internship, all our efforts from 1st year to 4th year will be futile.)

In a study conducted by Maini (2021) on the student-interns' satisfaction in online internship amidst the

pandemic, it was discovered that the student-interns' greatly benefitted from the guidance of their mentors or instructors. The study reveals that communication between student-interns and their instructors is important for the online internship to be successful.

### **Autonomy**

From the information gathered, it can be inferred that the online internship brought autonomy to the participants. According to them, they pushed to move forward and never dwelt on the things that they had no control. They excelled despite limited actual observations from field instructors.

Participant 2 who was a graduate from the Ateneo de Davao University shared on she overcame her challenges being the sole intern to be assigned in the agency in an online set-up.

*"During that time, I was assigned kasi sa NGO na for children, during that time ako lang mag-isa na assign duon, masasabi ko po na it was hard for me, I had to really adjust kasi I must do everything on my own. During that time, double time po talaga kasi first for all, yung pag-handle po ng client, say for example, yung client ko po is 103 years old na sya, it was really a challenge for meon how would I be able to do case management na tigulang na kayo, compromised pa kayo ang health and all this factors na maka-affect gyud sa iyaha if ever mag face to face. Parang flexibility po and going beyond what is required of me. I have limited interaction with my client, it was hard, but I guess I was able to do well based sa mga comments sa akoang field instructor."* (RQ1, IQ1)

(During that time, I was the sole intern from our school assigned to a non government organization. It was hard for me since I had to adjust of the feeling of being alone and had to do everything on my own. At those moment, I had to double time especially in handling my client because I was assigned to a 103- year-old elderly. It was challenging for me to think of how I could handle my client given her old age and it was an online setup. I realized that I need to be flexible and to do beyond what was required of me. However, despite limited interaction with my client but if I had to gauge myself, I can say that I was able to do well in my internship based on the comments from my field instructor.)

In a study conducted by Adedoyin and Sokyan (2020) in the experiences of learners in online setting here in the Phillipines, despite the challenges faced by them, the online internship afforded opportunities not just on collaboration with supervisor but also on the student's development of autonomy.

In addition, Wong et al. (2021) stated that online internship provides advantages for developing interns' career such as without the need to commute or adhere to rigid time restrictions, online internships give interns the chance to engage in their work with greater degrees of responsibility and autonomy.

### **Going beyond social service**

Based on the information presented in the table above, the participants supported clients in addressing their needs. They sustained the livelihoods offered to them by the government, initiated in giving loads for data and tokens in games during sessions & doing the best in everything that ought to be done.

Participant 8 who was a graduate from the University of Mindanao expressed how she was able to come up with a successful intervention to her assigned clients despite the online mode.

*"Sa field 2 nag-adjust na kami since field 1 was online. However, it's still challenging, kasi iba ibang chapter yung women leaders tapos kailangan mo silang i-communicate, yung iba walang load, yung iba malalayo at walang signal so kami nagpapa-load sa kanila, may pakulo kami, so lahat ginawa namin para lang maka-join sila. That is why nabuo namin sila as a group at na-implement namin yung plan at activities namin for them such as strengthening their existing SLP (Sustainable Livelihood Program). We provided webinars to them on management finances/financial literacy para maitaguyod at ma-sustain nila ang binigay sa kanila na livelihood program."* (RQ1, IQ1)

(For the field 2 internship, we were able to adjust since field 1 was online. It was still challenging since every women leader from purok must be communicated and there was an issue of unavailability of mobile loads and signal due to far location. Nonetheless, we did everything we can such as we initiated to give them loads and to have games/tokens during session to get their active participation. We were still able to organize them, and we were able to implement our plans which is strengthening their SLP (Sustainable Livelihood Program). We decided to provide them with webinars for the management of finances/financial literacy so that they can sustain the livelihood offered to them by the government.)

Moreover, participant 3 who was a graduate from Holy Cross of Davao College shared how he managed to do assessment and intervention to her client and the family despite the difficulty of the online set-up.

*"At first nag-struggle ko, dili pa kayo ko hanas sa case work ug kailangan jud nako ug guidance pero at the end, nagrely ko sa akoang sarili, nagbasa-basa ko ug maayo sa akoang books. COVID-19 patient akoang client pero instead na sya ra akoang client, nahimo sya nga family case work. Nabuhatan nako sila ug assessment ug intervention ug naka-impact sya sa ilaha. Sa amoang case study tanan, ako ang pinaka-unique. Nalipay pud ko kay naka-experience ug sa medical field sa social work."* (RQ1, PQ3)

(At first, I really struggled because I am not yet that skillful in doing case work and I really need guidance, but

in the end, I relied more on myself and read a lot of books. The case assigned to me was a COVID-19 patient. At that time, she was not only my client but her family as well, so it wasn't merely an individual case work but also a family case work. I was able to do assessment and the intervention was impactful for the client and her family. Out of case studies in our class, I am the most unique. I am also grateful that I was able to experience a medical field in social work.)

As stated by Wheeler and Waite (2021) in their research study of internship alternatives, student-interns can pursue a DIY strategy or creates plans that is still based on the requirements of their program just to fulfill their internship and to the advancement of their carrier. This will also enable student-interns to finish their goal & objectives in the internship despite it's an online set-up.

### Insights of Graduates in Online Internship

Table 4.

Themes	Core ideas
Mismatching Exposures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- online internship is not applicable to the social work profession.</li> <li>- felt like we were not that exposed for the profession. - different from face-to-face where there is no distraction.</li> <li>- some actual learnings cannot be acquired through online set-up.</li> <li>- some parts were never honed with online internship alone.</li> <li>- needed to experience how it is to help our clients. - missed something big due to being inexperienced in community immersion.</li> <li>- ideal to be implemented face-to-face with interns deployed to the community to help many clients.</li> </ul>
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- struggled but learned many things from the online internship.</li> <li>- had a feeling of fulfillment for helping the clients and the agency as well.</li> </ul>
Sense of Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- never dwelt on negative feelings.</li> <li>- needed to have a strong foundation or nothing would happen.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- realized we can't do anything about the pandemic. - it helped us grow professionally to be ready for a job. - discern before making action; became patient. - learned the pain only through experiences.</li> </ul>

#### *Mismatching exposures*

Based on the data being gathered and analyzed, participants concluded that online internship does not apply to the social work profession because they felt like they were not exposed for the profession and actual learnings cannot be acquired through virtual set-up. They also expressed that online set-up is challenging due to limited resources. They needed to experience how it is to help clients and they had to be supervised properly with professors' improvisation in any situation. They felt that they had missed something big due to being inexperienced in community immersion thus they expressed that internship is ideal to be implemented face-to-face with interns deployed to the community. Finally, participants expressed that some parts were never honed with online internship alone.

Participant 5 who was a graduate from Holy Cross of Davao College shared her difficulty in online internship thus giving her conclusion the online set-up is not applicable to the social work profession.

*"Ang online internship kay dili sya applicable sa social work na field labi na kung ang client kay naay physical difficulties. Akoang client kay mute so maglisod sya makig-communicate. Through guardian lang niya ko gakuha ug information, iyahang i-describe unsay pasabot sa bata, tapos katong ng-communicate pa gyud mi sa guardian kay cellphone lang, dili nako ma-video call kay ang cellphone sa guardian kay keypad, so mao to sya, lisod."* (RQ1, PQ1)

(The online internship does not apply to the social work profession especially if your client has physical limitations on my case, my client was diagnosed as mute so I experienced difficulty in communicating with her. It was only through the help of her guardian that I was able to gather information about my client. I only communicated with the guardian through phone calls because she has no idea how to use video calls, that's why it's hard.)

Participant 9 who was a graduate from University of Mindanao expressed her judgment on internship being

done on the actual rather than face-to-face.

*“Mas better gyud na face to face kasi nga on the job training so dapat naa sa agency or community, since online man toh kaya medyo struggle sya. Sa learning mas better gyud na actual sya kay hands on ang learning, nga mag immerse jud first sa people, mag-imbibe gyud sa people para makabalo sa ilahang mga hinanaing ug mkatabang ug dako sa ilaha.” (RQ1, PQ1)*

(Field internship in social work is better implemented through face-to-face since we call it on-the-job training, interns must be in the agency or community. Since it was online, it was challenging. In terms of learning, face to face is more hands on since it requires immersion to the community resulting for student interns to imbibe with the people to know more about their felt needs/problem & to really provide impactful intervention plan.)

According to Wong et al. (2021), not all students are suitable for remote WFH internships, especially those who struggle to operate successfully without close supervision. Employing the WFH mode may make it more difficult for interns who have little or fewer ties to begin with to engage and perform well at work.

In addition, according Adedoyin and Sokyan (2020) stated that difficulties integrating online learning include varying access to technology, socioeconomic reasons, lack of digital competence, a lot of labor, assessment and monitoring, and compatibility.

### **Innovation**

The online internship had brought a significant improvement on the participants such as accumulating proficiency in writing deliverables. They struggled but learned many things by acquiring new ideas on how to do things in an online setting. In the end, they had a feeling of fulfillment of the helping the clients and the agency as well. Participant 6 who was a graduate of Assumption College of Davao shared the knowledge and skills she gained through the online internship.

*“Ang isa sa akoang natun-an kay ang magbasa, dili lang spoon feed kay murag naga-home schooling during online internship so kinahanglan mag-effort to read and to study kay dili enough na magsalig lang sa meeting ug sa discussion sa field instructor. Dako kaayo sya ug importansya sa akoo kay mas natun-an nako mg-documentation ug mg-record keeping. Ako gud na ginabalik balik ug ingnan akoang supervisor na dako sya ug tampo sa akoang na mas nahasa ko sa pagsulat sa casework, minutes of the meeting, progress report and documentation.” (RQ1, PQ8)*

(One thing I had learned was to read and to not rely on spoon-feeding because it felt like we were home-schooled during the duration of the online internship. That’s why, there is a need to give an effort in reading and studying and to be dependent to the discussion of the field instructor. The online internship has a big importance to me as I was able to learn documentation and record-keeping. I would tell my supervisor back then that she had a great help on me since I became more skillful in writing case studies, minutes of the meeting, progress reports and documentations.)

Moreover, participant 9 who was a graduate of University of Mindanao shared her strategy that enable her to do submit the needed requirements in the online internship without facing difficulty.

*“Akoang natun-an sa online internship is ang pagiging innovative, maghuna huna ug mga activities na makasugakod gyud sa online. Na-learn nako ang mag-adjust to any situation. Instead nga pugson ang face to face, maghuna huna na lang ug other strategies. Isa sa mga strategy nako, kay since daghan documents na kinahanglan ipasa ug isa na dadtoa ang process recordings, kay gina-record nako ang kada-session nako with my client, tapos gina-encode dayon nako sa file para dili ko kalimot ug dili ko mag-cramming. Before mg-end ang adlaw, nagapaminaw ko sa recording ug ginabuhat na ang process recording. Tungod ato, wala ra kaayo ko naglisod magpasa sa mga needed documents.” (RQ2, PQ3)*

(It made me become innovative in thinking of activities that I should do to overcome the online internship. I’ve learned to adjust to any situation of rather forcing the activities to be implemented via face-to-face, I ought to think of strategies to be able to implement it through online. One of my strategies was since there were a lot of documents that needed to be submitted such as process recording, so I recorded every session I had with my client. I would then encode and save the file so that my deliverables would not pile up. Before the day ends, I would listen to the recording and make the process recording. This strategy enables me to not face difficulty in the submission of outputs.)

Futhermore, participant 7 who was a graduate of University of Mindanao shared how she developed time management skills in an online setting with less supervision from field instructors.

*“Na-learn nako nga kinahanglan jud mag-manage sa time, kay kami ang gagunit sa amoang time ug walay mag-close monitoring sa amoa. At first sige ko ug procrastinate kay nagsalig ko na pag ma-pressure ko, akoang utok mas magdagan. Pero na-learn nako na mag-manage gyud sa time kay once naay time frame ug magsubay adto, mas daghan pa ang mabuhat. Kung dili mag manage sa time, daghan maapektuhan, dili lang and academic but other responsibilities. So na-learn nako is time management and lessen procrastination.” (RQ2, PQ2)*

(I had learned to manage my time well. At that time, we were the ones who held our and we were not closely

monitoring. At first I procrastinated for I was confident that whenever I get pressured, my mind would be productive. However, I learned that I need to manage my time well because If I have a time frame and will follow through it, I can accomplish more things. However, if the time won't be managed, there are many things that will be affected like academics and responsibilities. So learned to have time management and to lessen procrastination through the online internship.)

According to Teng et al. (2021), since student-interns frequently work independently, online internships may better nurture soft skills like self-discipline, time management, setting realistic deadline, and proactive problem-solving. The internship scope was modified to accommodate online work and was primarily involved the use of technology (e.g. social media) and skills and tasks that students are familiar with. Online internship also developed their technical skills such as presentation, documentation and communication skills.

### ***Sense of Professionalism***

Participants in their experienced in the online internship shared that they needed to have a strong foundation, or nothing would happen since they cannot do anything with the pandemic. According to them, the challenges they faced helped them and the opportunities they gained helped them to grow professionally to be ready for a job.

Participant 1 shared the skills he acquired in his online internship journey.

*“Online setting improved the skills of student-interns since we all know that the impact of the pandemic shaped the society so virtual conferences, seminars, and other activities with clients in the future is a possibility. On my part, I developed some skills such as documentation, interviewing and technical writing skills. Despite the limitation, I was able to fulfill all my tasks.” (RQ2, PQ5)* (The online setting improved the skills of student-interns since we all know the impact of the pandemic shaped our society so virtual conferences, seminars, and other activities with clients in the future is a possibility. On my part, I was able to develop some skills such as documentations, interviewing, and technical writing skills. Despite the limitation, I was able to fulfill all my task.)

Furthermore, participant 10 also shared how the online internship prepared her in becoming an effective Registered Social Worker.

*“We will grow professionally. Makabuild ug professional growth. We learn from experience. Mao jud na akong mabalon gikan sa internship and as an intern student. Kato nga experience, very significant sya ug magamit pud nako puhon on how to handle the client. Nakabuild sya confidence ug kaya na nako muatubang sa mga tao with high positions. It helped me grow professionally so ready napud ko mo work.” (RQ1, PQ8)*

(It built our professionalism because indeed we learn from our experience. That's the thing I acquired from the internship and as once a student-intern. Those experiences I had which are handling clients and dealing with professionals built my confidence that I am now able to communicate with different kinds of people. It helped me grow professionally and I can say that I am ready for a job.)

Gill (2020) states that the professional world may be moving toward a more flexible working arrangement that may include a remote working environment mixed with an office environment. In his study on the graduate employability skills through online internships, it revealed that graduates are now being capable in online work skills due to remote working. It was also supported by Rospigliosi (2020) in which he states that online internship prepares graduates in any courses for global changes brought about by the pandemic.

## **IV. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### ***Implications for Practice***

The major purpose of this study was to perceive the experiences of the Social Work Graduates who had undertaken online internship, mainly in their challenges, opportunities, and insights. To develop themes based on the research objectives, the researchers used semi-structured interviews as the research instrument for data collection. Consequently, the initial application of the research is crucial for faculties and field instructors from various colleges and universities because the findings will be used as a knowledge base to innovate and improve the quality of field practice they are providing to students and to provide strategies if an online internship should happen again in the future. This ensures the quality of learning, values and skills acquired by students to prepare them to become a Registered Social Worker in the future. Field instructors must be prepared and be flexible in all seasons since no events must thwart students' education and learning. Hence, institutions must have a module that would give clear instruction to student-interns on what are the things that they ought to do in online internship and on how would they be able to produce comprehensive and quality outputs that are expected from them.

Furthermore, they should also listen to students' feedbacks during online internship since students are the ones who will be greatly affected if abrupt changes should happen in the academic setting specifically in the context of internship. Thus, it is necessary that field instructors should have knowledge on the experiences of the students who had undergone online internship as a guide to make a better course of actions in internship.

Moreover, field instructors must also provide student interns with psychosocial help in addition to academic

support. The online internship influences student interns in both positive and negative ways. Since they are going through a transition period, students need to feel that their lapses are being acknowledged and understood to lessen those negative effects. Student-interns need support that will enable them to overcome obstacles and perform well in their online internship journey.

In addition, they must continue to monitor students' progress so as not to be reliant from the agency placement of student-interns. They should do constant consultations with the students to check if student-interns are following the process accordingly. This is also to secure if students had applied the principles, knowledge, skills, and values in engaging with their assigned clients. In addition, consultations would also aid students on demonstrating strategies and techniques in formulating viable solutions for interventions to clients' problem. On the other hand, for the student interns to get proper guidance for the online internship, they must also learn how to effectively communicate with the field instructors.

In addition, the research participants' perceptions and coping mechanisms provide the second significant implication of this study and that us for college students who will complete internship will use the result as a frame of reference, a tool for direction, and inspiration to complete the internship despite any challenges that may arise along the way. Future student-interns must also manage their time well and prioritize important things since the online setting tend to make the students to less identifying themselves as student-interns since they are only staying in their own houses. They could do quality work if they could effectively manage their time. They are also urged to develop resiliency because it is expected that there are setbacks in the internship journey especially if it is done through online. Instead of dwelling on the difficulties, they should learn from it and use those learnings to be an effective student interns. In addition, student-interns must not carry all their challenges alone but rather they are encouraged to have a support system and call for help when necessary. Also, to apply theories and concepts that are most appropriate to their clients or community problem, they must also take the time to review and read books. In addition to applying theories to concepts, student interns should also develop a patient attitude and character because they will come across clients who are difficult to contact especially on the online setting due to signal and internet connection limitations. They must therefore have effective communication skills in both face-to-face and online setting.

Thirdly, the implication of the study is that to ensure that student-interns will be able to apply all their lower-year learnings in the internship and that it will result in them becoming competent Registered Social Workers in the future, the study's findings will provide additional knowledge to the social welfare agencies that are accepting social work student-interns. These agencies can use this knowledge to provide contingency plans to internships when a certain unexpected crisis occurs. At the same time, it would provide a frame of reference for agency field instructors to provide innovative ways to assist the student-interns' competency development. Further, the agency field instructors can guide the interns to operate concepts and theories studied and be able to support learning experiences for them. Simultaneously, to meet the objectives of field instruction, the agency field instructor shall be able to assign the work or tasks that the student will complete.

Lastly, the significant implication of the research is for the parents of student interns and the community. The experiences of student-interns will allow parents to have an increased awareness of the field instruction in the modern world, thus enabling them to better guide, counsel and give support to their children in their internship journey. On the other hand, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more jobs are being done remotely, in addition to classes and internship programs. Today's virtual internship could serve as valuable practice for the remote/virtual jobs of tomorrow. The learnings and skills that are gained uniquely through the online internship that are not present in the traditional setting would be of great use to student interns employability in today's technological advancement of agencies and industries. Furthermore, the result of this study will make an additional contribution to the literature of the online internship on the Social Work profession as guide for future generations especially on circumstances that would come along the way that is beyond control that would affect the academic preparations and plans for the internship.

### ***Implications for Future Research***

The study focuses on the opportunities and struggles of online internships based on the experiences of Social Work graduates from the five schools and universities in Davao that offer bachelor's degrees in the field. The study's findings highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of online internships for students seeking to develop their knowledge and skills in the Social Work field. The results indicated that because the transition from face-to-face to online learning was unexpected and many institutions, including schools, were not fully prepared for it, the student interns' psychosocial as well as academic development was impacted by it. The participants reported that they had made significant adjustments but that there was little they could do but accept the circumstances and try their best to complete the internship requirements. On the other hand, those difficulties shaped their fortitude and capacity for overcoming obstacles. At the same time, it provided them with a chance to identify their intrinsic knowledge and abilities so they could use what they had learned to practice on the online mode of internship.

The researcher would like to suggest that future research in this area of study focus on the effects of online

internship considering the experiences of school field instructors in their adjustment, the strategies they had developed for student-interns to obtain the knowledge and skills they required despite the online setting, as well as the silent struggles they overcame to continue providing student-interns with high-quality education and field instruction.

Furthermore, it is also recommended to conduct studies on the impact of online internship in the light of the experiences of social welfare agencies who accepted student-interns so that they could practice the theories they had learned in the school through field instruction. Accordingly, the experiences of agency field instructors would also be included in the study as how they manage to guide the student-interns despite the online set-up, furthermore on the learnings and skills they gained while overcoming the limitations of online internship.

Lastly, the researcher would like to recommend that further studies be done on the experiences of the clients who had a helping relationship with the student-interns through an online method of internship. In specifically, how did the online helping process affect the welfare of the clients, was it helpful to them or not, were they able to obtain the aid they needed, and what changes were brought about by the helping process.

### ***Concluding Remark***

The study highlights the opportunities and struggles of social work graduates who had undergone online internship due to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020 – 2021. Listening to the stories of this graduates who came from the five (5) colleges/universities in Davao City, I can affirm that their journey wasn't easy, they had to endure a lot of challenges not just in their academic but as well in their psycho social aspect as they need to cope up with the roles that they needed to perform and the demands from their environment. Their salient experiences involved difficulty in communicating with their clients due to intermittent connection thus resulting to not being able to provide a comprehensive intervention plan to their clients because of the limitation in analyzing both verbal and non-verbal cues. At the same time, they felt pressured in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as student-interns as they felt amid their internship journey that they would not be able to produce quality case study reports. Furthermore, since they are not in the intensive monitoring both of their school field instructor and agency field instructor, they admitted to had felt demotivation, complacency, and mismanagement of time. All these circumstances resulted to the feelings of not being good enough as student-interns and the possibility of failing their internship. Nonetheless, this hardship they faced paved way into opportunities that enhanced their personal and professional skills. They embodied resiliency and autonomy by adjusting to the situation regardless of the difficulty in communication with the assigned clients and lesser supervision from field instructors. They become innovative as to finding practical ways to produce a useful intervention plan to the problem of their clients and thus producing a quality case study report despite the online set-up. Furthermore, one thing that enabled the social work graduates to surpass those turmoils are the support they received from their family, loved ones, faculty members and agency field instructor. Their journey might not be easy but for them it is still worth it as their testing will become a testimony to rise above the circumstance and unexpected challenges. It will become a story of inspiration to future social work student-interns and parents/guardian. It will also pave ways to colleges/universities as well as social welfare agencies to be innovative of ways in guiding student-interns to put to practice all theories and concepts they learned from their lower year.

### **V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to acknowledge the people in my life that contributed greatly to the success of the study.

Firstly, to the all Mighty God who is the source of all wisdom, knowledge and strength. It is by His grace alone that I was able to overcome all the challenges in the midst of conducting the study.

Secondly, to my family who is always there to give guidance and provide encouragement me in every season of my life, both in successes and failures. Thirdly, to my close friends who constantly believes in my innate capacity and skills that motivated me to do my best in fulfilling all the requirements for this research study.

Forthly, to my adviser, panels, data analyst and grammarian who gave me continuous supervision in the proper means of doing the study and giving their insightful comments and suggestions for me to produce a comprehensive and impactful study.

Fiftly, to the research participants who gave their undivided time and effort in the conduct of the interview that enabled me to gain vast informations to the topic being discussed on this study.

Lastly, to the University of Mindanao for the gift of education that inspired me to finish thus study in a timely manner.

All glory and honor to our living God!

### **VI. DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this research study to the graduates from different colleges/universities who were a product of the online mode of learning due to COVID 19 pandemic. Despite the hardships and difficulties, you encountered from the restrictions and limitations imposed by the government, you did a great job in pursuing your goal and finishing the tertiary education. All your perseverance, dedication and sacrifices we all paid off.

I would also dedicate the study to all colleges/universities from polishing diamonds from the rock that despite the abrupt changes to the mode of education in securing the health of students, you were still able to guide and facilitate learning them.

Lastly, I would like dedicate the study to one of my classmates who had passed away last January 2023 due to an impending illness. His all-out efforts in his research study while fighting in his sickness inspired me to carry on from all the hurdles and finished this research study.

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