

## Exploring Coping Mechanisms Adopted during Restricted Lockdown among Esikhaleni Dweller, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Lawrence Vorvornator<sup>1\*</sup>, Joyce Mdiniso<sup>1</sup>, James Dogbey<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>College of Science and Engineering, Mathematics and Statistics Department, Texas A and M University-Corpus Christi, Texas, United States of America

**\*Corresponding author:** Lawrence Vorvornator

\*Email: vorlaw@gmail.com

### Abstract

The COVID-19 allegedly originated from Wuhan, China, spread to South Africa, forced the country into lockdown on the 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2020. The study analyses coping mechanisms adopted by the Esikhaleni dwellers of KwaZulu-Natal during the COVID-19 restricted lockdown. A qualitative approach was employed for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Thirty (30) participants were selected through random sampling and phone interviews conducted for data collection. The study revealed both challenges and opportunities in terms of the social, physical and psychological mechanisms adopted by Esikhaleni dwellers to cope with the effects of COVID-19 and the associated lockdown. Results indicate that majority adopts social coping mechanisms involve; social media use, watching television, playing indoor games like chess, and using Zoom and Skype for meetings and worship. Google Classroom was adopted for teaching and learning. Physical coping mechanisms include; cleaning, gardening and laundering, and exercises such as, walking, jogging, and aerobics. Psychological coping mechanisms include; creating memes, fun videos and pictures, playing music, and worship and prayer. However, a few participants observed that social media such as WhatsApps created anxiety and stress with misinformation about COVID-19 than solved the challenges brought by the pandemic and the associated lockdown.

Overall, a few participants used the lockdown to fulfil goals they had postponed over the years, and learned new skills such as cooking and baking for their personal growth and development. The findings create awareness to the masses and understanding of coping mechanisms to adopt in future in case of similar events. It is therefore, recommended that COVID-19 protocols should be strictly adhered to in case of future outbreaks, to avoid the spread of the virus, which may necessitate further lockdown.

**Keywords:** Restricted lockdown, Coping mechanisms, COVID-19 pandemic, Esikhaleni settlement

### Introduction

The study explores the coping mechanisms employed by the Esikhaleni dwellers during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic crisis. The COVID-19 allegedly originated in Wuhan, China and served as an epicentre, defied the norms of confinement in a specific area, and spread globally. The rapidness and devastating nature of the COVID-19, killing thousands of people daily coupled with lack of medication for treatment, forced the World Health Organisation (WHO) to declare COVID-19 as world pandemic (WHO, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2020)

The whole world struggled to contain the death tolls as the pandemic spreads globally. Both developed and developing countries, rich and poor nations, were at the mercy of the pandemic. Developed countries such as the USA, Italy, Britain and Spain were among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Human bodies were piled upon each other at the morgues, hospitals overcrowded with dead bodies, and funeral parlours were overstretched to their limit (Liu *et al.*, 2020). Mass burial was adopted as a means to decongest human bodies in hospitals and morgues. The African continent recorded her first case in Egypt on the 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 (Amara *et al.*, 2020). South Africa was not spared. On the 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, a 38 years old man returned from Italy into the country, and he was found to be the carrier of the pandemic (Andrioi and Moraru, 2020). Being clueless and ill-prepared in terms of medical personnel and facilities to handle the situations in case of an outbreak, the South African government instituted restriction lockdown as a measure to curb the spread of the pandemic.

The lockdown measures, prevented economic, social, psychological, religious, cultural, and physical activities operation, but only allowed businesses that operate essential services such as supermarkets, and pharmaceutical departments (Baccini *et al.*, 2020). The restriction was extended to all human activities outside their homes, unless one needs to buy only the basic needs and wants. The citizens were restricted, and confined in their immediate environment. Daily activities, such as jogging on roads, playing football on parks, worshipping in Mosques and Churches were halted (Baccini *et al.*, 2020). Visiting families and friends and entertainment places such as Casinos for socialisation, becomes an offence under the stringent lockdown from, 26<sup>th</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 and later extended to 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Cultural activities such as marriage ceremonies and initiation schools (where in South Africa circumcisions are performed as a passage rite for boys from the teenage stage to adulthood) were halted. The law enforcement agencies were in full force, and about 70,000 soldiers and police deployed to monitor the

citizens not to violate the new rules (Baccini *et al.*, 2020). Only essential workers were permitted to be seen in the towns and workplaces. The whole country and the cities were deserted as a result of the travelling bans. Cities and towns were as quiet as cemetery. For the record ever, petrol prices fell to the minimum, because the demand was absolutely at its lowest (Baccini *et al.*, 2020).

The background described above constituted the impetus of this study. In particular, the researchers were interested in exploring the coping mechanisms adopted by the people of Esikhaleni, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa during the strict lockdown. It is the hope of the researchers that the knowledge of these coping mechanisms will assist residents to handle similar future pademics. To achieve such goal, the following research questions guided the study;

What social coping mechanisms did the people of Esikhaleni find useful during COVID-19 lockdown period?

What physical coping mechanisms did Esikhaleni dwellers adopt during the restricted COVID-19 lockdown?

What psychological coping mechanisms did the people of Esikhaleni implement during COVID-19 lockdown period?

The study is structured as follows; literature review, methods and research findings. Thereafter, discussion, conclusion and recommendations. The next section presents the literature review of the study.

### **Literature review**

Historically, there have been numerous plagues and epidemics that destabilised individuals, societies, countries, and regions. Meham *et al.* (2020) state that the year around 300 BC, Antonine Plague was identified; the AD 165-180, the American Plague; the 16<sup>th</sup> Century experienced the Karat Plague of London from 1665 to 1666. Meham *et al.* further revealed the flu pandemics such as Spanish Flu from 1889 to 1890; the Asian flu occurred in, 1889-1890; the West African Flu Ebola, 2014 to 2016, and the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which started in the year 1981 and still ongoing, killing and reducing population sizes (Mecham *et al.*, 2020). What is significant about the plagues mentioned above is that they are contained and concentrated in specific regions. In other words, the rate of infection was not globally, apart from AIDS. However, COVID-19 defies the norm, increases rapidly worldwide. As a result of 800,000 infections worldwide, on the 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Italy, the US, the UK, and Germany, among others, instituted restricted lockdown as a measure to curb the spread of the pandemic. People lives were disrupted. Therefore, coping mechanisms that were adopted globally in the literature are discussed to serve as a barometer for this study (Yin, 2015)

### **Patients isolation**

In Wuhan, China, where the spread of COVID-19 began, an attempt was made to isolate the patients who tested positive and advice was given to the citizens to self-quarantine in case someone feels pandemic symptoms. However, COVID-19 continued to spread like wildfire. Two quarantine hospitals were built in Wuhan and Hubei, but the pandemic was out of control. Hence, the Chinese government declared a restricted lockdown (Shi *et al.*, 2020). This disrupted the lives of millions of people, and they had to find new measures to cope with the 'new normal' during the lockdown. Shi *et al.* explain that people designed ways to cure the boredom by creating games such as fishing or hooking in water tanks (Shi *et al.*, 2020). In some cases, the indoor games that were on the verge of collapsing were rejuvenated. Games such as; chess, 'ludo', table tennis, playing of cards became the 'saviour' of the citizens to pass time. Chinese notably were playing ping pong on their dining tables (Shi *et al.*, 2020). The Weibo that operates in China like X with over 230 million users was flooded with a lot of bedroom activities that people engaged in (Shi *et al.*, 2020).

### **Sedentary approach**

The sedentary approach, such as eating and sleeping, little exercises and resting, in order to recuperate the worn-out tissues in the body from the economic hassles before the stringent lockdown was also adopted (Shi *et al.*, 2020). The educational system was restructured to different tones, and dimensions. Face-to-face contact of teaching was abolished. The classroom became an invisible and borderless zone (Kologrivaya and Shleifer, 2020). Online learning, which was instituted and practiced in several educational systems in some advanced countries, became a new norm (Kologrivaya and Shleifer, 2020). Google Classroom became the place of teaching in mostly all sectors of education from the primary to the tertiary level. At some times, the social media trends with information on COVID-19 that creates panic, anxiety, and stress for the users (Shi *et al.*, 2020).

### **Blogging as a coping mechanism**

As a result of boredom, and having too much free time at their disposal, blogging was well used by individuals chronicling their daily activities and sharing them worldwide. (Shi *et al.*, 2020). Shi *et al.* pointed out that photographing and videoing, which were professions for people, became a hobby for individuals as people took pictures and videos with their cell phones with whatever activities, they engaged in, and shared them on social media (Shi *et al.*, 2020). Displaying of masks, pictures, and videos became a new norm. Especially, when people happen to get to the supermarkets. Surprisingly, the videos were taken of chipping birds, to signify how quiet, and serene the atmosphere was and they were posted on social media (Shi *et al.*, 2020). Not only chipping birds videos, but messages of hope and encouragement were sent on the social media to inspire individuals and families never to give up hope against the deadly pandemic (Shi *et al.*, 2020). Messages range from social to biblical scriptures, with some read; "no condition is permanent" and therefore, COVID-19 will never ever be permanent. So, people should be resolute. Scriptures from the bible read "there is nothing that is new under the sun". In that case, the pandemic will also not be here forever (Shi *et al.*, 2020).

### Social media approaches

The stress and anxiety were too high during the stringent lockdown. To overcome them, memes, fun pictures, and videos were created, and posted on social media (Chirombe *et al.*, 2020). People shared pictures with local herbs under their nose masks to indicate that COVID-19 can easily be cured by the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS), and not the Western medicine (Chirombe *et al.*, 2020). Inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE's), at the medical centres were not spared for memes, and fun videos. Miniature and substitute PPE, such as the use of handkerchiefs, socks, bras and sanitary pads for women 'flooded' the social media to create fun to do away with the boredom bestowed by the lockdown restrictions (Chirombe *et al.*, 2020).

Not only pads and bras, but rather, fruits, garlic, and ginger were displayed in pictures and videos to be the pandemic's remedy to create fun (Chirombe *et al.*, 2020). The indigenous practice of steaming by using hot water in a bucket and covering it with clothes to cleanse nasal pores found themselves in videos and pictures on the social media platforms. Chirombe *et al.* claim that the importance of memes help heal individuals and families psychologically, and minimizes the tension and boredom associated with the restricted lockdown (Chirombe *et al.*, 2020).

### Family unity

The social aspect was extended to strengthen the family unit, both nuclear and extended, which was on the verge of collapsing, due to economic pressure on families (Liu *et al.*, 2020). Spouses stayed home together, siblings played indoor games together, and the entire family structure was revived and rejuvenated (Liu *et al.*, 2020). Families bonded together by playing online games, watching television, sharing sentiments and jokes, dining in the same plates, and especially reflections, meditations, and stocks were taken about one's life (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Wong *et al.*, 2020). The unity and 'we feelings' among the family members enhanced individuals' psychological aspects. The family unit as a whole was awesome (Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, those who found themselves in another part of the world, where families were not there before the lockdown, were psychologically revived due to videos, and pictures from their loved ones through Zoom and Skype (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Psychological and spiritual benefits of praying together by the families cannot be underrated (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). Playing music, singing and praying each morning over the country, and the world for the pandemic to 'vanish naturally' enhances individuals' spiritual growth. And it gives hope to the hopeless (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). The borderlessness of the social network also played significant role in the expatriates who could not return to family members before the lockdown. Some governments sent special planes to bring their citizens to loved ones during the lockdown. Various support groups sprang up to provide, economic, moral, social, emotional and psychological support to the citizens. Especially, to the destitute in the society (Huang *et al.*, 2020).

### Indoor sport activities

The outdoor sporting activities that were prohibited by the lockdown restriction were organised and played in confined environments (Huang *et al.*, 2020). Walking within one's compound and jogging in the yard became the order of the day. Since, walking out and jogging on the roads aimlessly was a violation of the lockdown rules and regulations (Mahmood *et al.*, 2020). Physical exercises such as yoga, skipping, gym and aerobics were adopted by individuals and families as a household. Mahmood *et al.* (2020) maintain that the level of exercise during the lockdown improves the psychological and health aspects of the citizens.

Especially, the physical exercise assisted in swinging moods, brought encouragement that was used to cope with the stress, and anxiety surrounding the pandemic (Mahmood *et al.*, 2020). Advanced countries that were hardest hit by the COVID-19 remain resolute. Citizens go to the balconies to cheer up each other (Acheson, 2020). In some cases, the national anthem of the various countries were sung, to signify unity, and encouragement among themselves, that hope should not be lost in these difficult times (Acheson, 2020). Various religious countries could not spare their daily prayer on COVID-19. Italy, as one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and being a predominantly a Catholic nation, resorted to the use of social media like Zoom to honour Mass during which intercessory prayers were held about the pandemic (Acheson, 2020). The practice of singing, praying, and dancing through online mediums like Zoom and Skype spread globally among the Charismatic and Protestants communities to stand resolute against the seemingly hopeless situation (Agrati *et al.*, 2022).

Agrati *et al.* (2020) revealed that for Churches to connect with their congregants to worship, Zoom and Skype platforms were employed. Online prayer groups were formed to pray over the pandemic not to affect their country, and the world at large. The clergies, Protestants and Catholic nuns visited the sick at the various hospitals to offer prayers. Not only were prayers offered by the clergies, but also bible verses were shared to revive loss hopes especially among the COVID-19 patients (Agrati *et al.*, 2022). The prayer and scripture sharing among the citizens strengthen their faith that, there is a higher power that can concur the pandemic (Agrati *et al.*, 2022). In the UK, the loss of loved ones which created a vacuum in the hearts of many, and families enforced women (widows), who lost their husbands created WhatsApp groups, to check on each other daily. They posted encouraging words, and jokes in the WhatsApp group to strengthen themselves to be resolute through the challenges (Kassie *et al.*, 2021). To improve the level of socialisation and do away with the stresses and anxieties associated with the pandemic, the widows established a pub and named it "the widow's arm". The place where they meet to share ideas, discuss events surrounding the COVID-19 and hold quiz events (Kassie *et al.*, 2021). The social media helped keep the loved ones in touch, and take individuals, families, and communities through the storm of stress and anxiety in their homes (Jeon *et al.*, 2020).

### Learning of new skills

Kassie *et al.* (2021) assert that new skills such as baking, cooking, and trying of new recipes for the families were acquired during the lockdown. The procrastination that is the hallmark for some individuals, the lockdown assisted some in undertaking

of repairs, and maintenance works at homes. This was achieved through painting the inner, and outside the rooms which, they have been postponing over the years due to busy schedules (Kassie *et al.*, 2021; Vorvornator and Mdiniso, 2022.). The gardens were created in the yards to supplement food in the households. Cleaning activities that the services of individuals and agencies are employed to do were undertaken by the citizens. This to some extent saved money for the family (Kassie *et al.*, 2021).

The situation discussed above is similar to what transpired in South Africa. In Cape Town, the city dubbed as “the mother city”, Mandal and Pal (2020) posit that as it was in Spain and Italy, the citizens went out to balconies to cheer up everyone including the frontline workers. They are the health workers such as, doctors, nurses, and other voluntary workers to be courageous. Cohen *et al.* (2021) established that since the restricted lockdown prevents people from walking out their pets, the pets were being walked out in the home vicinities and in the yards. Like other Christian countries, in South Africa, many also resorted to singing, praying and dancing as a means to curb the horror of the pandemic. However, there were some other workers such as tailors and receptionists for the organisations among them, who worked from home apart from the essential workers (Cohen *et al.*, 2021). As elsewhere, many families were bonded by constant interactions, sharing ideas, watching television, and playing indoor games together.

The focus of this study, is to explore the coping mechanisms adopted by Esikhaleni dwellers in KZN. Esikhaleni is largely informal sector, and does not form part of the essential services, but rather non-essential services (Luke, 2020). Majority of people depend on their daily activities to survive. Hence, the lockdown restricted and confined them in their immediate environment. What coping mechanisms were adopted to overcome the stringent lockdown? This presents a unique situation which could result in psycho-social burden to the people of Esikhaleni. The next section presents methodology of the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Study design**

The underlying philosophy for the study is the phenomenology approach guided by qualitative research used to collect data. The qualitative approach is the best and the most effective way to gather information when there is a need to know much about an occurrence as they happen (Creswell, 2016). It is also relevant because the research topic deals with the psycho-social that is coping mechanisms of the Esikhaleni dwellers during the restricted lockdown. Dillon explains qualitative research as a means of collecting data, interpreting, analysing, developing empirical ideas, and understanding of the data collected (Dillon, 2020). Creswell and Poth (2016) elaborate that qualitative approach is the process of identifying human problems, analysing, and assigning meaning to them.

### **Study area**

The study area (Esikhaleni), as it is currently called, was known as Esikhawini, which means in IsiZulu language “the meeting point of the sea”. Esikhaleni was established in the year 1976. (Whitelaw *et al.*, 2016) Located in the King Cetshwayo District (KCD), of KZN, South Africa, the people are mostly Zulus, with 99.8% representation (Luke, 2020). As of 2001, the population was 32,437, and in 2010, the number of township dwellers increased to 49,265. In 2023, the total population stands at 52,369, with females 26,607, and males 25,779 with a median age of 28 years (Luke, 2020). The density of Esikhaleni is 5,500/km<sup>2</sup>. The Esikhaleni is located 2km from the N2 route and the closest towns are Empangeni and Richards Bay with 15-20 km apart. Esikhaleni doubles as the home of Ecubhu Lake and the King Cetshwayo monument, where it is on the record that, King Cetshwayo boarded a ship to be imprisoned in Cape Town after the defeat of Amazulu in the 1879 war in Ulundi (Ndawonde *et al.*, 2007).

### **Ethical clearance**

To get the participants for the study, researchers surveyed the Esikhaleni settlement for five (5) days (Yin *et al.*, 2020). Permission was sought from the participants to partake at their own will. It was explained to the participants that they were at liberty to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable answering any questions. And all information collected by that point would be deleted without any penalty.

### **Target and sample size determination**

A sample is drawn from the target population. The sample selection was guided by the fair representation of the total population, and the influence of the final result (Alvi *et al.*, 2016). Since, there is a definite list of Esikhaleni dwellers' addresses as the target population, the non-probability sampling technique was not possible. Regard, the sample size was determined through the probability sampling technique, by the use of random sampling (lottery draw). Because, the participants are not known (Yin *et al.*, 2020). Random sampling is the statistical tool employed to select a sample out of a whole population. This is done since the entire population is large to study for time constraints and resources, whereas purposive sampling is employed to identify, and select the information-rich cases related to a phenomenon of interest.<sup>24</sup> Purposive sampling is employed in case the participants of the study are unknown.

### **Sampling techniques**

The Esikhaleni residents' data was arranged in alphabetical order with numbers assigned to them on pieces of paper, and placed in a single pot. This means all the target population had an equal chance to be selected (Yin *et al.*, 2020). Simple random was employed to select the sample of thirty (30) 100% participants, which comprises seventeen (17) 57% females and thirteen (13) 47% males, which served as a saturation point. Creswell and Poth maintain that there is no specific unit to arrive at saturation point for a small unit of target population.<sup>24</sup> The saturation point is reached, if the additional sample drawn does not give any new information to the study, but only repeats the existing information. So, we arrived at 30 for saturation point. The participants' age ranges from 25 to 75 years, and the mean age is between 30 to 39 years. The majority obtained a secondary



education qualification popularly known as Matric Grade 12. Most of the Esikhaleni dwellers are married, and predominantly in the informal economic sector practicing petty trading (buying and selling). However, there are few of them that commute daily to the neighbouring cities (Richards Bay, and Empangeni) for industrial and clerical jobs respectively. Since, there are only a fewer industries and offices in the Esikhaleni settlement.

### Research instrument

**Table 1.** Semi-structured interview guide

Demographic information of Esikhaleni dwellers		
-Gender -Age -Qualification -Marital status -Economic activities		
Social coping mechanisms	Physical coping mechanisms	Psychological coping mechanisms
-Watching of television -Playing indoor games like chess 'ludo', ping pong, table tennis, -Zoom, WhatsApp and Skype	-Cleaning of the yard -Painting of the house -Trimming of trees -Planting of crops -Gardening -Laundering of cloths -Exercises such as, walking, jogging, and aerobics.	-Creating memes -Fun videos and pictures -Playing music and dancing -Worship and prayer.

**Source:** Authors construct.

The semi-structured interview guide, consist of demographic information and three (3) questions based on the coping mechanism comprises: social, physical, and psychological mechanisms were designed for the study as presented in (Table 1). Further, pilot study was done to test the validity, reliability and length of the interview. Through the pilot study, it was realised that there were some ambiguities, and the length of the interview was too long. These guided us to restructure questions and ambiguities for the main interview. The pilot study helped the researchers to anticipate the real experiences for the fieldwork. During the interview, permission was sought from the participants for the voices to be recorded. The services of a research assistant were employed since one of the researchers cannot competently speak IsiZulu- the dialect of the township dwellers. The research assistant was educated about the study aims, objectives, and other expectations before the semi-structured interview was conducted over the telephone.

The use of the telephone was necessary since, the rules and regulations of the lockdown were still in place before data was collected. The phone interview lasted for forty-five (45) to sixty (60) minutes. The participants were impressed about the interview as an opportunity for talking to someone about their experiences during the lockdown. And the researchers were also pleased to hear the experiences of people.

### Data analysis

Dortins explains that during translation state researchers should take "themselves out of the interviews" (Dortins, 2020). This implies that jokes, rapport to establish relations, and mannerisms were taken out of the transcription. This made us distance ourselves from the interviews and presented only the participant's views to avoid biases. The data collected through the interview was read over thoroughly, proofread, and coded. The emerging themes relevant to the study were identified. Thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the data. And data were presented using narratives. The thematic analysis is the method of reading through data and looking for patterns, and trends and coming out with a theme (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The results from these analyses are presented under the findings and discussion. Table 2 displays the demographic and other profile information of the Esikhaleni residents who participated in the study.

**Table 2:** Demography of the Esikhaleni dwellers, in KwaZulu-Natal.

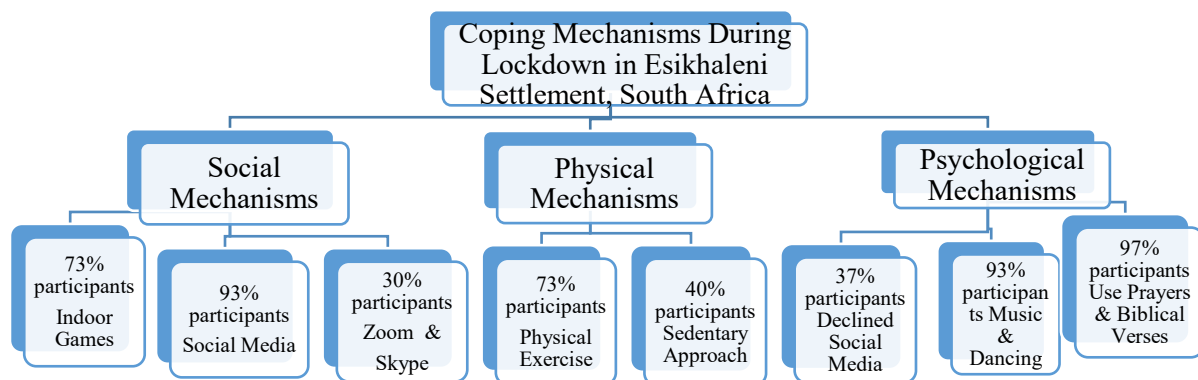
Participants	Gender	Age (Year)	Qualification	Marital Status	Economic Activities
Par 1	**	33	SSS	Married	Retailing
Par 2	**	39	Bachelor	Married	Teacher
Par 3	*	75	SSS	Married	Pensioner
Par 4	**	37	JSS	Married	Welder
Par 5	*	51	SSS	Married	Police
Par 6	**	34	JSS	Single	Food Vendor
Par 7	**	40	SSS	Married	Plumber
Par 8	*	36	Honours	Widower	Lecturer
Par 9	**	44	Masters	Married	Pensioner
Par 10	*	59	SSS	Married	Retailing
Par 11	*	72	Bachelor	Married	Pensioner

Par 12	**	31	SSS	Married	Traffic Corp
Par 13	**	41	Masters	Married	Lecturer
Par 14	*	29	SSS	Single	Tailor
Par 15	*	30	Bachelor	Married	Retailing
Par 16	**	39	JSS	Divorced	Hairdresser
Par 17	*	65	SSS	Married	Pensioner
Par 18	*	52	Honours	Divorced	Taxi Driver
Par 19	**	49	SSS	Married	Hairdresser
Par 20	*	25	SSS	Single	Food Vendor
Par 21	*	32	Bachelor	Married	Teacher
Par 22	**	29	JSS	Divorced	Mechanics
Par 23	**	22	SSS	Married	Police
Par 24	*	36	Honours	Divorced	Electrician
Par 25	**	42	SSS	Married	Retailing
Par 26	**	27	Bachelor	Widow	Teacher
Par 27	**	38	SSS	Married	Mechanics
Par 28	**	51	SSS	Married	Food Vendor
Par 29	*	21	Bachelor	Single	Teacher
Par 30	**	30	SSS	Married	Taxi Driver

**Key:** Par (Participants), \* (Females), \*\* (Males), JSS (Junior Secondary School or Grade, 9), SSS (Senior Secondary School or Grade, 12).

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

## Research findings



**Figure 1.** Coping mechanisms during lockdown in Esikhaleni settlement, KZN

The result discussions are based on the research objectives which are used as subheadings. Figure 1 presents three result's summary of the coping mechanisms adopted by the Esikhaleni dwellers at a glance during the stringent lockdown. The results indicate that the majority 73%, 93% and 30% of participants employed indoors game, social media and Zoom and Skype respectively as a social mechanisms to cope with the restricted lockdown. Further, the physical mechanisms employed are physical exercises by 73% participants, sendantary by 40% participants. The psychological mechanisms adopted ranges from 36% participants declined to use social media, 93% participants employed music and dancing, and 97% participants engaged in use of prayers and biblical verses. The result creates awareness and understanding about measures to adopt to overcome future events or outbreaks that could prevent movement of people to avoid boredom. The next section presents the discussion of the study.

## Discussions

### Social coping mechanisms adopted by the Esikhaleni dwellers during the restricted lockdown.

The study revealed that 73% participants employed playing of indoor games such as, chess, playing cards, 'ludo', snooker, and squash as means to cope with the effects of the lockdown. The entire family was bonded together with some of the varieties of indoor games to reduce boredom and anxieties brought about by COVID-19 and its associated lockdown. This is what one participants had to say:

*"In fact, it is not easy with the lockdown; you have to create situations to entertain yourself, so that you do not get frustrated. We normally play chess to pass time".*

Another participant also added:

*"It is quite a long time we spend time together as a family. We were very busy trying our best to put food on the table for the households, now that we are restricted not to go out, we are playing cards together as a family".*

The participants' statements indicated that they had not been playing games as a family together for some time. The lockdown restriction made them to play together. This finding is consistent with that of Wong *et al.* (2020), that the Chinese designed own game by playing ping pong on their dining tables. Liu *et al.* (2020) revealed that the lockdown revived the family unit, which was on the verge of collapsing as the finding agrees the families were playing games together.

A majority of the participants 93% adopted social media such as WhatsApp to overcome boredom and stress. They were making memes and fun on social media platforms to cheer up themselves and others. Pictures and videos were taken of themselves wearing the nose masks and posted on social media. One participants revealed that:

*"I am very grateful for the inventor of WhatsApp. What are we going to do if we were not to have WhatsApp in this lockdown? He quizzed".*

The statement explains the importance of the social media, and how it keeps them busy to forget about their boredom.

Another participant also added her voice:

*"Hey, the pictures and videos on the WhatsApp will make you even forget about the Covid-19 pandemic. You will laugh and laugh your head out".*

The statement shows that social media creates amusement and entertainment for people during the hopeless situation. Huang *et al.* indicate that in Britain widows created WhapApp group to fill the vacuum that was created in their families by their husbands' death due to the pandemic. Inspirational messages, jokes and funny videos and pictures were shared in the group the finding is in support.

Further, the finding reveals that 30% participants engaged in the use of Zoom and Skype as virtual means of bringing the physical contacts closer. They called on Zoom and Skype platforms to have meetings, worship, and conference calls. One of the participant had to say:

*"Hmmm, the world has changed, now you can be in South Africa and see someone in America. The world now becomes a real global village".*

The statement explains how close people who are quite far from each other can be seen through Zoom and Skype platform conference calls. Another participants maintains that:

*"There is no border between the countries now. The world is now borderless. They should remove all the physical borders in various countries. Because, I can see what is happening in any country now".*

Acheson found out in Italy that the Catholic Mass and prayer intercession were conducted through the Zoom and Skype platforms the research is in agreement. Mahmood *et al.* (2020) revealed that the practice of using Zoom for congregational worship and holding meetings spread globally the result is in consistent with their finding.

Furthermore, the finding reveals that 50% participants used the restricted lockdown to enhance their skills, trade, and professions. Some were students who were behind in their work. Others used the pass times to make use of Google Classroom for effective teaching and learning. This is what one of the participants had to say:

*"To me, Covid-19 is a blessing in disguise. I use the period to update my schoolwork".* Clearly, the student saw hope out of the hopeless situations. Another participant who happens to be a parent of a 10 years old learner had this to say:

*"I am now a teacher. I normally download my child's work sent by teachers to the Google Classroom and we do it together. It is interesting".*

The statement indicates how the classroom has become borderless. No teacher and learner contact. Kassie *et al.* postulate that in China the Google Classroom was the order of the day, used at all levels of the educational system this research outcome is in support.<sup>19</sup>

### **Physical coping mechanisms implemented by the people of Esikhaleni during lockdown.**

The study identified that 73% participants used some form of physical exercise as a means to cure boredom and stress under the lockdown. Physical exercises take the form of cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and gardening. The rest are brisk walking, jogging, and aerobics. Another participant had to say:

*"When I wake up, since there is no place to go, I spend most of the time cleaning the yards, the rooms and mixing of the soil in the garden".*

Another participant added his voice by saying:

*"Cooking makes me to go ups and downs, and it makes me to get nice shape".*

The statements imply the basic activities in which someone could have been employed to do were done by the family members. Liu *et al.* (2020) study revealed that, the lockdown period was used by the English for cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and repairs work in their houses, and this research is in support (Wong *et al.*, 2020). The next finding reveals 60% participants undertake jogging, brisk walking, and aerobics. Physical exercises were undertaken to make the body active. This is what one participant had to say:

*"It is tiring staying without doing anything. Since, we are not permitted to jog on the road, we do it in our backyards or in the room".*

Another, participants also maintain that:

*"Exercising the body helps you to refresh your total being".*

Mahmood *et al.* (2020) research in China indicates that, the Chinese resorted to physical exercises such as brisk walking, and jogging around the compound to improve their mood. It was also maintained that, physical exercises help repair worn-out tissues in the body, the finding is in favour.

Similarly, 40% participants adopted the practice of a sedentary approach. The sedentary approach involves eating and sleeping to renew the worn-out tissues and energy, as well as to get rejuvenated. It could be that people did not have much to do, or they were exhausted from going ups and downs, before the lockdown. This is what one of the participants had to say:

*"Since I cannot go out for anything, the best way is to be in my bed".*

However, some complained about their partners or spouses sleeping too much.

*"My hubby is sleeping too much. He is even getting fat. I wish the lockdown is over for him to go to work".*

The statement indicates that there are some of the participants who are not happy about their partners gaining weight. Shi et al's. (2020) research postulates that some Chinese adopted the means of eating and sleeping during the lockdown this finding is not different from theirs.

#### **Psychological coping mechanisms employed by Esikhaleni Community during the lockdown.**

The finding revealed that 37% participants were negatively affected by social media information about the deadly disease. They felt that some of the information on social media, especially WhatsApp was misleading and misinforming. One of the participants had to say:

*"The social media has actually been spoiling our mood with some of the messages. It is very annoying and provoking".*

The statement indicates that postings on social media were not scrutinized before they are posted. And they were boring and provocative sometimes. Another, participant added her voice by saying that:

*"I decided not to be on WhatsApp again. It creates much panic about the COVID-19. Anybody anywhere just put up any information he or she thinks is right".*

The statement indicates how social media was 'flooded' with irrelevant information concerning the pandemic. Shi et al's. (2020) research in China insinuates that some citizens abstained from the social media to avoid the anxieties speculated about the COVID-19, this study positively relates to theirs.

Surprisingly, the majority of the participants 93% reported that they listen to music, watch television, sing and dance to boost their morale. To them, listening to music and singing helps them to relax and soothe their body. It makes them to swing their mood from negative to positive, and renew their well-being. This is what one participant had to say:

*"My brothers, with praises and worship, I am very strengthened in the spirit. I forget entirely about the problems of lockdown and COVID-19 anxieties and stresses".*

The statement indicates how the participants were uplifted in the spirit to face any battle ahead of them, after music and dancing. Another participant expressed it succinctly that:

*"Music is soul food and heals your well-being".*

The statement implies that with music, and dancing you will be energized with your inner soul. Kumar et al. research in China postulates that music, singing and dancing were used by the Chinese to overcome the hopelessness that the COVID-19 has bestowed on them. This study corresponds with their finding (Kumar et al., 2020; Korsi and Mdiniso, 2021).

Furthermore, a majority of participants 97% confirmed that, they used prayer and biblical verses to get strength, during the difficult times. In this study, religion is treated under the psychological coping mechanism. Because, religious beliefs boost one's element of psychological status. They claimed that early morning prayers connect them to the higher power that makes them psychologically sound. This is what one participant had to say:

*"In these distress and difficult times, you have to be closer to your Maker to protect you on this earth. Do you see the pilling of dead bodies in the hospitals? He quizzed?"*

Another participant also added her voice:

*"Prayer moves mountains. I believe strongly that, the only remedy for this deadly disease is to seek the face of higher power to intervene. The whole world is struggling; with prayers, we are an overcomer".*

This might be one of the believers of Christ, who thinks, with the absence of a cure for COVID-19, and no vaccine yet found to treat the patients, the only means available to the entire globe is to unite and pray fervently to the Maker. Kologrivaya and Shleifer in Italy assert that, Catholic nuns and clergies pray intercessory prayers for the country, and the world.<sup>9</sup> Kologrivaya and Shleifer claimed that hospitals were visited to pray for the sick, because there was no cure for the pandemic this study agree with their finding.<sup>9</sup>

The limitations arose since the study was carried out during the stringent lockdown where no one is permitted to be out from their immediate environment and the presence of the security personnel to ensure the full force of the rules and regulations. The participants might keep some information to themselves without divulging it to the general public. Moreover, the use of the random sampling might not indicate other sub-groups that exist within the Esikhaleni dwellers. Despite the aforementioned as limitations, these do not make the findings of the study invalid, but rather they should be interpreted with caution, and within the context the study was undertaken.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study's findings revealed that the sudden restricted lockdown by the South African government instituted took Esikhaleni dwellers by surprise. Lives were disrupted hesitantly. Esikhaleni dwellers could not go about their daily activities. To deal with the new normal created by the lockdown, coping mechanisms such as, social, physical and psychological coping mechanisms were adopted. The social coping mechanisms involve, use of social media to contact family and friends, and playing indoor games like snooker, chess and table tennis. The rest are video calls like Zoom and Skype platform conferencing employed for meetings, and worships during congregational times. The educational system adopted Google Classroom a borderless educational platform to reach all learners. The physical coping mechanisms are divided into two broad areas. The process and procedures of cleaning, doing laundry, gardening and undertaking repair works are regarded to mould and shape the participants. Some of them engaged in physical exercises such as, brisk walking, jogging, gym, and aerobics as a means to overcome the lockdown anxieties and stresses. The psychological coping mechanisms identified to be: creating memes, fun videos and pictures, listening to music, singing, and dancing. Participants also adopted, watching television and playing online games with the family and lastly religious and psychological coping mechanisms includes; praises, worships, prayer and fasting. Prayer and worship was employed as a means to cure COVID-19 due to the absence of any medical cure or vaccine to treat COVID-19 patients at the time. The people believe that seeking the face of the Maker was the only remedy for the pandemic.



The findings revealed that the social media was flooded with misinformation about the COVID-19. It is recommended that, the South African government create the specific channel that should be well published for citizens to assess any information relate to Covid-19 or any outbreak in future.

The COVID-19 rules and regulations must be strictly adhered to by the citizens in case of any future outbreaks of the COVID-19 to ensure, the deadly disease does not necessitate further lockdown.

Due processes and diligence must be taken by the government to assist families who may be in need at this difficult times during and after lockdown in the future. More especially, the destitute in our society and communities.

The study recommends that since research conducted through phone interviews during restricted lockdown, there should be fieldwork research that should be carried out after COVID-19 so that the outcomes can be juxtaposed.

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