

HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS DURING COVID-19 COMMUNITY QUARANTINE IMPLEMENTATION IN CARAGA REGION, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-economic conditions of the households in the Caraga Region, Philippines, during the various community quarantine implementations. A total of 1607 households across the region's provinces participated in the survey. The study unveiled that the implementation of the most stringent restriction, which is the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), affects the socio-economic activities of the households. A decrease in the households' monthly income and expenditures were observed during the community quarantine period. Although the in-store or in-establishment type of transaction is dominant across quarantine classifications and economic activities such as selling, purchasing, and banking, it is undeniable that an increase in the use of online platforms is seen during the mentioned period. Moreover, households in the region understand that implementing community quarantines can protect them, their family, and their

community; however, it also transformed their social practices and activities. The most commonly reported difficulty is not being able to go outside to socialize or do errands.

Keywords: *community quarantine; COVID-19; socio-economic condition; Caraga Region, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) became a global phenomenon in early 2020 (WHO, 2020) and has brought enormous change to humanity. The pandemic has caused a serious setback to people's economic activities. Those in the most helpless circumstances are mainly affected, especially those living in poverty, the elderly, persons with disabilities, youth, and indigenous groups (UN-DESA, 2020). On March 18, 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines declared the State of Public Health Emergency due to the pandemic. Areas have been placed under a specific localized community quarantine classification. A city or a municipality shall follow the provisions stated under a particular quarantine classification, which depends on the severity and emergency status of COVID-19 cases in the area. The Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) provides the most stringent guidelines and regulated people and business operations movements. This classification is followed by the Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ), the General Community Quarantine (GCQ), and the Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ). With localized community quarantine, certain

activities are strictly observed, such as suspension of work and classes, regulation of business establishments, prohibition of mass gatherings, regulation of mass public transport, restriction of land, sea, and air travel, implementation of curfew hours, and execution of health measures such as wearing of masks and staying at home (Republic of the Philippines Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), 2021).

Caraga Region was placed under ECQ starting April 7, 2020, after confirming the first COVID-19 positive case in the region. With ECQ, the region implements temporary measures imposing stringent limitations on movement and transportation of people, strict regulation of operating industries, provision of food and essential services, and heightened presence of uniformed personnel to enforce community quarantine protocols (Republic of the Philippines Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), 2021). Consequently, the region's economy has significantly suffered due to the implementation of community quarantine policies and precautionary measures. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Caraga reported that around 71.78% or 39,582 out of 55,144 of the operating establishments in the region were temporarily shut down by the end of April 2020, causing more than PhP4.57 billion loss in business operation. Moreover, the tourist arrival in the region significantly decreased by almost 69.84% in the First Quarter of 2020, and around 88.32% of the tourism-related establishments temporarily closed down due to the pandemic. The Department of Tourism (DOT) also reported that there were 97.93% displaced workers in the industry in Caraga during the COVID-19 situation (National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Caraga Region, 2020). These facts challenged the local executives and community to get through with everyday living and soon sort out things in the midst of a pandemic.

Although the implementation of community quarantine has become one of the classic health interventions during a health crisis (Gupta, Moyer, & Stern, 2005) and was one of the measures of the government to contain the spread of COVID-19 to the community, the works in some sectors in the region were greatly affected. While the economy of the region was at stake during this health crisis, the local government also admits facing other challenges such as increase reports on mental stress and anxiety, absence of telehealth services across the region, schools and parents unprepared for distance/online learning, impaired mobility due to limited access to mass transportation, among others (NEDA Caraga Region, 2020). The necessary actions initiated by the government to contain the spread of the virus through community quarantines undoubtedly have immediate social and economic impacts on the different households in every society.

Implementation of community quarantines of varying levels of strictness affects the activities of the people. This study aims to determine the impacts of the community quarantines, especially the imposition of ECQ on the household's social and economic activities. Specifically, the study determines the people's mobility, including their means of access to sell or purchase goods and/or services and payment of bills.

Methodology

Study Location

The study covered the whole region of Caraga. Caraga Region is an administrative region of the Philippines located in the northeastern part of Mindanao (established based on Republic Act No. 7901).

The Region consists of five (5) provinces namely: Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur and Dinagat Islands, of which Butuan City serves as the regional administrative center in the region. Caraga Region has a total population of 2,933,772 and 574,338 total number of households based on the 2015 census (Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2016). In the 2018 assessment on poverty statistics of Caraga, 35.4% of the total population in the region were living in poverty, and 28.3% of the total number of families had income below the poverty line (PSA, 2019). Caraga Region was among the poorest regions in the Philippines based on the poverty incidence among families reported by PSA in 2021.

Study Population

The study was designed for all households in Caraga Region, but due to limited physical mobility and some guidelines implemented by different local government units during the pandemic, a total of 1607 representatives from the households were able to respond. These respondents were the household heads or members who could provide essential information about the households. The respondent must be 18 years old or above and must be a resident in the area no less than six (6) months upon responding to the survey.

Data Gathered

The survey instrument used in the study underwent a series of validation to warrant the final data collection. Some variables used in the study were formulated by the researchers, while there were those indicators adopted from the study of Saurabh and Ranjan (2020). The study gathered the following information: (a) Household and respondent's profile, (b) Economic status, and (c) Socio-economic activities before and during the pandemic.

Data Analysis

Mean, standard error (SE), frequency, and percentage were obtained to establish a quantitative description of the socio-economic variables. Comparison of households' monthly income and expenditures are presented before the pandemic situation and during the implementation of community quarantines. The study also highlighted how the households could access various services, preferences, and mobility during the pandemic.

Findings and Discussions

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought profound impacts to all human facets that it completely changes what used to be normal. The global economy is abruptly evolving, affecting the movement down to a single business operation. Most of the companies suffered, but the pandemic has also been the gateway of the emergence of new and potential businesses at the local scale. In Caraga Region, the effects of the pandemic on households' economic condition and mobility are evident. This study looks into the household income, expenditure, and social and economic activities during the community quarantine implementation.

Effects of Community Quarantines to Household Income and Expenditure

This section gives the average monthly income of the households before the implementation of the community quarantine, during the implementation of the ECQ, and during the implementation of the GCQ/MGCQ. In Caraga Region, the ECQ was first implemented last April 7, 2020. The following month, ECQ was lifted and was replaced with GCQ. On June 1, 2020, MGCQ was implemented following the lifting of GCQ.

Table 1. Average monthly income of the households across community quarantine classification

	Before CQ (before April 6, 2020)	During ECQ (April 6-30, 2020)	During GCQ/MGCQ (May 1- June 15, 2020)
Overall household monthly income	23440.62 ± 726.03	21097.28 ± 688.26	21499.93 ± 696.78
High	111306.26 ± 5958.35	100822.95 ± 6008.47	99561.41 ± 5532.97
Middle	24390.94 ± 433.30	21866.10 ± 449.65	22565.70 ± 538.95
Low	5777.70 ± 100.44	5263.37 ± 140.60	5351.24 ± 133.98

**Mean ± SE*

As indicated in Table 1, there is a decrease in the average monthly income of the surveyed households in all Caraga Region for all income classes before ECQ to during ECQ, with an overall household monthly income from PhP 23,440.62 to PhP 21,097.28 with a standard error of PhP 726.03 and PhP 688.26, respectively. However, during GCQ/MGCQ, it increased but still not as high as the average monthly income before ECQ. Since the implementation of the community quarantine has forced most establishments to close, employees' work has been dramatically affected, leading to the decrease in income of households. In July 2020, the unemployment rate was at 10 percent, higher than the employment rate in July 2019, which was placed at 5.4 percent (PSA, 2020). During GCQ and MGCQ, some establishments and industries are already allowed to operate with up to 50 percent of the workforce allowed to work.

Table 2 shows a decrease in the average monthly expenditures of the surveyed households before the implementation of ECQ to during the implementation of ECQ, with an overall household monthly expenditure from PhP 11,738.13 to PhP 10,967.29 with standard error of PhP 326.51 and PhP 347.84, respectively. However, during GCQ/MGCQ, it increased but still not as high as the average monthly expenditure before ECQ. This agrees with the data in Table 1 on the average monthly income. Since the income has decreased, the households also adjusted their expenditures. Covered in the expenditures are food, transportation, electricity bill, water bill, house, medicine/vitamins, toiletries, clothing, education, savings, and recreation. It can be noted from the table that the households spend the most considerable amount on food, followed by house rental. The same result was found in the 2018 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) conducted by the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA). However, during the implementation of the community quarantine (ECQ/GCQ/MGCQ), it can be observed that there is an increase in the households' expenditure for medicine/vitamins. This implies that the households have considered health a priority, especially since it is most vulnerable during the pandemic.

Table 2. Average monthly expenditures of the households across community quarantine classification

	Before CQ (in PhP)	During the ECQ (in PhP)	During GCQ/MGCQ (in PhP)
Overall household monthly expenditure*	11,738.13 ± 326.51	10,967.29 ± 347.84	14,431.90 ± 3,305.78
Food	4,611.42	4,510.10	4,542.69
House	2,651.02	2,611.70	2,619.88
Education	1,505.69	1,121.45	1,189.16
Electricity bill	1,293.28	1,408.05	1,422.64
Savings	959.44	706.42	680.81
Transportation	853.93	628.75	692.59
Toiletries	563.77	610.79	615.82
Clothing	476.68	287.52	313.42
Medicine/Vitamins	455.84	561.55	1,994.91
Water bill	347.44	411.48	418.33
Recreation	220.76	339.33	135.06

**Mean ± SE*

In a study conducted by Morgan, and Trinh (2021), 85 percent of Filipino households have experienced financial difficulty during the pandemic. This financial difficulty includes the decrease of income in the households due to the loss of jobs. This leads to cuts in the expenditures of the households.

Effects of Community Quarantine Implementations to Economic Activities

The impacts brought about by the varying community quarantine implementations to the economic activities of the households in the Caraga Region, Philippines, are discussed in this section. Purchasing of goods and/or services, selling of goods and/or services, payment of bills, delivery of services, banking, accommodation services, and stocks and trading investments are among the economic activities that were investigated across periods as: before community quarantines (CQ), during ECQ, and during GCQ and MGCQ.

Figure 1 below tells us that purchasing goods and/or services and paying bills were done mainly by households in-store or visiting the establishments across community quarantine classifications. The imposition of ECQ has affected these activities, just as people's mobility is restricted to curb transmissions by minimizing physical contact (Reyes et al., 2020). In fact, a decline of around 20% and 15% of the households who visited the physical establishments or stores only to purchase goods and or services, and pay their bills, respectively, during the ECQ.

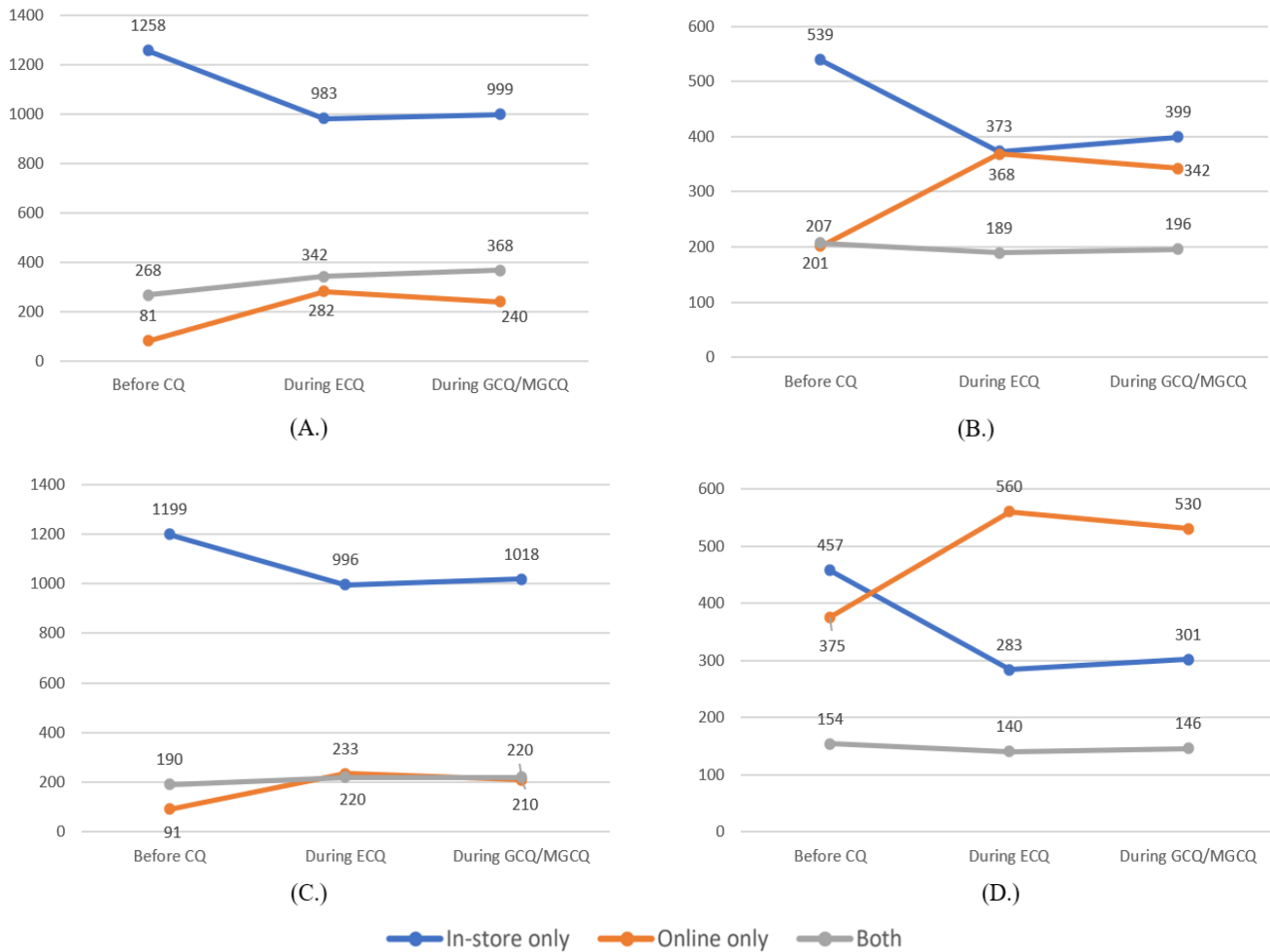


Figure 1. Effects of community quarantine implementations to economic activities in terms of (A.) purchasing goods and/or services, (B.) selling goods and/or services, (C.) payment of bills, and (D.) delivery of services

On one hand, the number of households who opted to purchase goods online before community quarantines was tripled during the ECQ. Ali (2020) also found a surge in online purchases despite the difficulty of adapting to such means. This is further supported by Gu et al. (2021), Vasquez et al. (2021), and Jilkova and Kralova (2021). Vasquez et al. (2021) observed an increase in the purchase of essential goods due to confinement measures, contagion risks, shortage of supplies, and economic situation. Shifting to online platforms regarding online shopping and selling is therefore becoming evident among consumers (Ledesma, 2021; Crismundo, 2021).

On the other hand, the number of households who chose to pay their bills online only before CQ was doubled during the ECQ. Additionally, those who sell goods and/or services solely through in-store/in establishments seemed to be inversely related with the number doing it online. Similar observations can be deduced for the delivery of services. A decrease in the number of households selling goods and availing delivery services was seen from CQ to ECQ periods.

Realized payments are done online and delivery of goods and services increased, as found in the study of Jilkova and Kralova (2021). However, the present research unveiled that these figures increased slightly from ECQ to GCQ/MGCQ. It was the time when less stringent measures were implemented. Ledesma (2021) added that the availability of on-online transactions on food, medicine, plants, and others has consequently led to the delivery at the customer's doorstep. This was made possible through availing online transactions concerning deliveries.

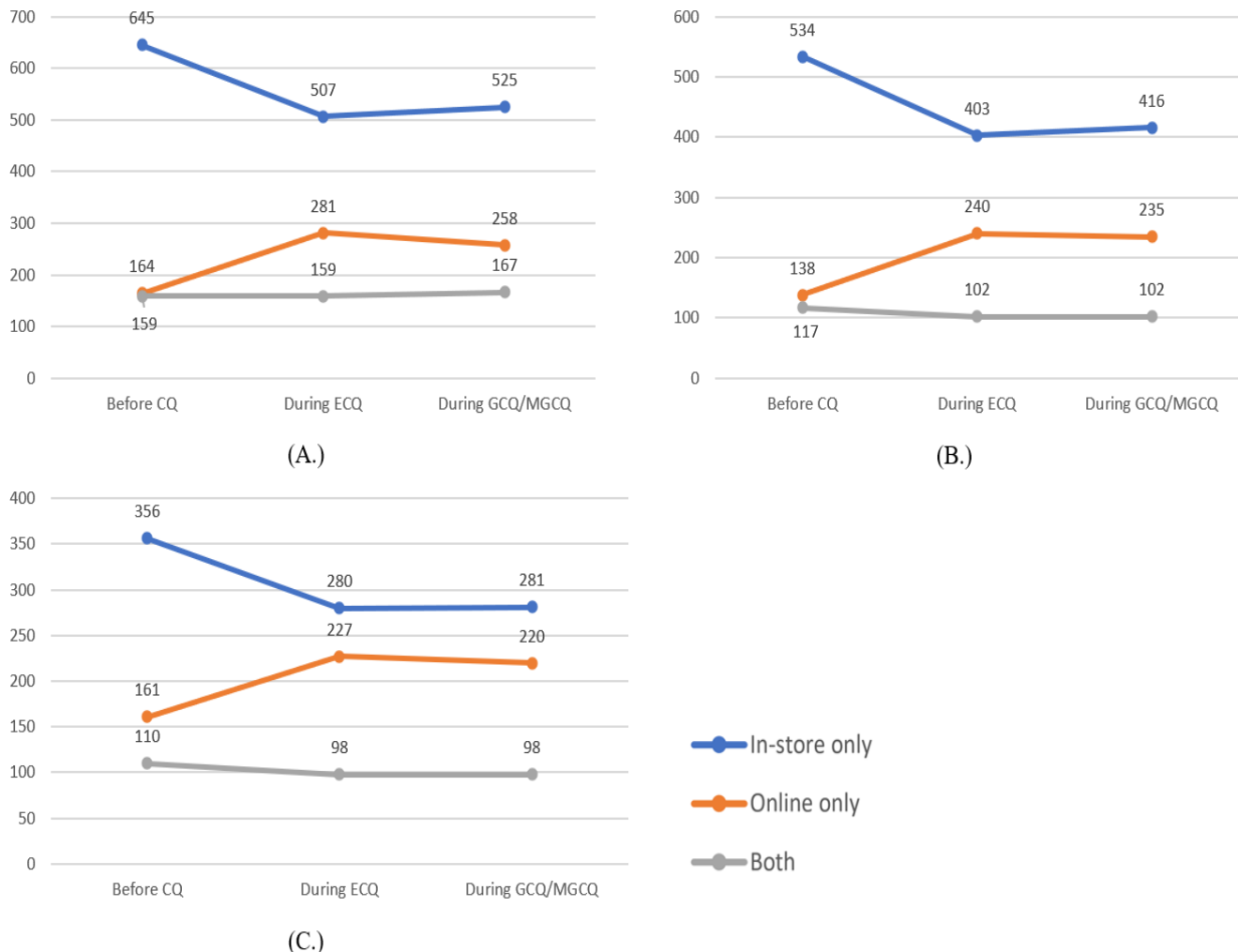


Figure 2. Effects of community quarantine implementations to economic activities in terms of (A.) banking, (B.) accommodation services, and (C.) stocks trading and investments

It can be depicted from Figure 2 that banking, accommodation services, stocks trading, and investments were made mainly by visiting the establishments solely across quarantine classifications. The number of households doing such decreased rapidly from CQ to ECQ, slightly increasing from ECQ to GCQ/MGCQ. Nevertheless, a sudden increase in the number of households doing such economic activities online only is seen from CQ to ECQ.

CNN Philippines (2021) reported that Filipinos utilized online fund transfers over ATM transactions during the ECQ. This means an acceleration in the use of digital banking as being pushed by movement

restrictions due to COVID-19. Moreover, Khatun et al. (2021) affirmed this result where an escalation in mobile banking transactions during the pandemic was seen. This has contributed to the people's increase in financial access. Not only are Filipinos shifting to online transactions for banking activities, Gatpolintan (2021) observed a silver lining amid the pandemic. People started investing in stocks at the onset of the ECQ, taking advantage of the decline in share prices.

Effects of Community Quarantines to Social Activities

Government implements community quarantines to protect people from COVID-19 virus infections. With this idea, this study asked households whether said initiative protected them, their household, and their community from the disease. In general, the majority of the households acknowledged the protection they received from the implementation of community quarantine, as shown in Table 3. Specifically, 83.63% believed that community quarantines could protect them. On one hand, 84.07% agreed that community quarantines protect their households from being infected. Lastly, 84.19% concurred that these quarantines could protect their community. Quarantine, isolation, and maintaining proper physical distancing are some of the strategies that can help prevent or mitigate the effects of infectious diseases like COVID-19 (Mattioli et al., 2020).

Table 3. Perceived protection benefited from quarantine implementation

Perception	f	%
Quarantine protects self	1344	83.63
Quarantine protects household	1351	84.07
Quarantine protects community	1353	84.19

Table4 presents household practices relevant to implementing the enhanced community quarantine in the region. During this period, at least 85% of the households use separate towels and are wearing facemasks when other household members are present. In addition, 69.32% of them use separate cutleries, and only 56.81% practice sleeping solely from other household members in different rooms. The latter results might be because households in the region belong to the middle-income class, on average, as presented in Table 1; hence, they might have limited cutleries and a number of rooms. These findings are also linked to the work of Gouveia et al. (2021); their results showed that there had been changes in the structures of living in a household and they highlighted that reconfigurations were done to cope with the disruptions the pandemic has brought.

Table4. Household practices during the enhanced community quarantine

Practice	f	%
Household members used separate towels during the ECQ	1368	85.13
Household members used separate cutlery during the ECQ	1114	69.32
Household members slept in separate rooms during the ECQ	913	56.81
Household members used mask when other household members are present during the ECQ	1352	84.13

In terms of social activities affected during the implementation of the community quarantines, Table 5 conveys the percentage of households whose social activities were limited by ECQ and GCQ/MGCQ. In both types of community quarantines, "attending to health-care visits" is the least social activity

affected. In addition, the implementation of community quarantines in the region affected the social activities: "going on a vacation" and "allowing visitors into home", of about 65% of the households. Further, the social activities that are greatly affected (roughly 78% to 86%) by the quarantines are "attending important events" and "going out of the house to socialize." These imply that the implementation of community quarantine protocols in the region is strict enough, limiting community movements for leisure and social gatherings to minimize the transmission of the virus.

Table 5. Households' social activities affected during the community quarantine periods

Social Activity	During ECQ		During GCQ/MGCQ	
	f	%	f	%
Going out of house to socialize	1386	86.25	1282	79.78
Attending important events	1269	78.97	1262	78.53
Going on a vacation	1057	65.77	1087	67.64
Allowing visitors into home	1058	65.84	1032	64.22
Attending health-care visits	938	58.37	933	58.06

Moreover, the results also exhibit that the percentage of households who could not go out to socialize is higher during the ECQ (86.25%) than during the GCQ/MGCQ (79.78%). This indicates that outdoor gatherings and socialization are more limited during ECQ in the region. The pandemic has changed how people interact with each other; it has affected the interpersonal relationships of many (Saladino et al., 2020). It is also notable that similar percentages of households are affected by the other social activities in both types of quarantine classifications.

Table 6. Households' difficulties faced during the community quarantine periods

Difficulty	During ECQ		During GCQ/MGCQ	
	f	%	f	%
Not going out of house to socialize	1287	80.09	1231	76.60
Not going out of house on errands	1182	73.55	1150	71.56
Using face mask when friend/s is/are present	973	60.55	962	59.86
Using face mask when other household member/s is/are present	952	59.24	937	58.31
Staying in the house with gates closed	730	45.43	653	40.63
Taking care of children	526	32.73	507	31.55

Table 6 indicates the difficulties faced by households during the community quarantines. During ECQ and GCQ/MGCQ, households considered not being able to go outside to socialize or to do errands to be the topmost concern; at least 71% of them had difficulties doing these activities. This finding is consistent with the results in the previous table, and it must be taken into account since social distancing, one of many protocols of community quarantines, may present risks of escalating social rejection, impersonality, individualism, and a diminishing sense of community (Sikali, 2020). In addition, households considered wearing face masks when other household members or friends are present during the community quarantines as less problematic than going outside to socialize and do some errands. Further, taking care of children and staying in the house with gates closed are the least felt difficulties. It is also worthy to note that households considered it more difficult to go outside their

houses for socialization during ECQ than during GCQ/MGCQ, which also validates the results in the previous table.

Conclusions

The income and expenditures of the households in the Caraga Region were affected by the implementation of the community quarantine regardless of the income class. The decrease in the households' monthly income has caused the households' expenditures to decrease.

The implementation of COVID-19 community quarantines affects the economic activities in terms of purchasing and selling goods and/or services, banking, payment of bills, delivery of services, accommodation services, stocks trading, and investment of the households in Caraga Region, Philippines. Although in-store or in-establishment type of transaction is dominant across quarantine classifications and economic activities, it is undeniable that an increase in the use of online platforms is seen during the ECQ. Conversely, a decline in in-store or establishment transactions is observed during the mentioned period.

Implementation of community quarantines in the region has also led to effects concerning socialization. A significant number of individuals understand that the implementation of community quarantines can protect them, their family, and the community; however, it also transformed their social practices and activities. Not being able to go outside their household to socialize or do errands is considered the most identified difficulty, and it may post desocialization problems.

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