

Battling Beyond Boundaries: The Experiences of Hemodialysis Patients with COVID-19 during the Pandemic

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Abstract – *the study focused on the Experiences of Hemodialysis Patients with COVID-19 During the Pandemic. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. Moreover, the participants for this study consisted of ten hemodialysis patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19 during the pandemic. Participants were recruited from two hospitals in Cebu City that provide hemodialysis services. The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: (1) Adult patients (18 years and older) currently undergoing dialysis since the pandemic, (2) Patients who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 during their hemodialysis treatment, and (3) Patients who were willing to share their lived experiences and participate in interviews. In addition, The interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participant's preference. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, during which participants were asked to recall and describe their experiences in as much detail as possible. The study highlights the various challenges faced by hemodialysis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, including significant physical, emotional, mental, and practical stressors. Despite these difficulties, patients showed remarkable resilience and adaptability, actively seeking support and information to manage their health*

Keywords: *Hemodialysis Patients, Covid 19 Pandemic and Phenomenology*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created major challenges for healthcare systems and individuals (Carredo et. al., 2022; Zulueta et. al., 2023; Canque et. al., 2021; Canque et. al., 2023; Romeo et. al., 2023; Derasin et. al., 2023; Derasin et. al., 2021; Gemao, 2024; De Pedro and Derasin, 2022; Obinguar et. al., 2023), especially those with chronic illnesses. One of the most vulnerable groups is patients on hemodialysis (Derasin, 2019; Derasin and Derasin, 2021; Derasin et. al., 2023; Derasin, 2024; Derasin and Derasin, 2024), who not only deal with kidney disease but also face higher risks from the virus (Derasin et. al., 2023). The regular treatment required for hemodialysis makes these patients more likely to experience complications, including those caused by COVID-19. The pandemic has also changed the way these patients cope with both their illness and treatment, affecting them physically, emotionally, and mentally.

While existing studies have explored the effects of COVID-19 on chronic illness populations, particularly in the context of renal patients, few have specifically focused on the lived experiences of hemodialysis patients who also contracted COVID-19. Most literature has concentrated on the clinical outcomes of COVID-19 among dialysis patients, examining hospitalization rates, mortality, and the direct health impacts of the virus. However, there is a significant gap in understanding the subjective, lived experiences of these individuals—how they navigate the psychological, emotional, and social challenges of coping with both a chronic condition and an infectious disease

Previous studies (Wong et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2021) have emphasized the physical health risks faced by renal patients during the pandemic but have not fully explored the mental and emotional toll or the coping mechanisms these patients use. While there is much research on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, there is limited focus on the specific challenges faced by dialysis patients also battling the virus. These gaps highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the combined struggles faced by this group, particularly in terms of resilience and how they adapt to these challenges.



This study aimed to address these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of individuals undergoing hemodialysis who were also affected by COVID-19 during the pandemic. By capturing their personal stories, the research sought to understand how they navigated the combined challenges of chronic illness and pandemic-related stress, focusing on their resilience, coping strategies, and emotional and psychological impacts. Through this exploration, the study contributed new insights into the intersection of chronic illness and infectious disease, providing a deeper understanding of the complex realities of managing a life-threatening condition during a pandemic.

Methods and Materials

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of individuals undergoing hemodialysis who contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic. The phenomenological approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of how these patients perceived and made sense of their dual health challenges. By focusing on their personal experiences, the study aimed to uncover the meanings and emotions associated with managing chronic kidney disease (CKD) while simultaneously navigating the risks and uncertainties posed by COVID-19.

Moreover, the participants for this study consisted of ten hemodialysis patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19 during the pandemic. Participants were recruited from two hospitals in Cebu City that provide hemodialysis services. The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: (1) Adult patients (18 years and older) currently undergoing dialysis since the pandemic, (2) Patients who had been diagnosed with COVID-19 during their hemodialysis treatment, and (3) Patients who were willing to share their lived experiences and participate in interviews.

In addition, The interviews were conducted in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participant's preference. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, during which participants were asked to recall and describe their experiences in as much detail as possible. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent for transcription and analysis

To ensure the reliability of the research, several strategies were used. Credibility was ensured by having participants review their interview transcripts for accuracy and spending enough time with them to build trust. An audit trail was kept to document all research decisions, ensuring consistency. Confirmability was achieved by the researcher keeping a journal to track personal biases, making sure the findings reflected the participants' experiences. Data triangulation helped ensure objectivity by cross-checking interview data with field notes. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to assess if the findings apply to other groups. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to participants' emotional states, were prioritized throughout the study. These methods helped ensure the study produced credible, reliable, and ethically sound results.

Results

Three main themes emerged from the study: (1) **Theme 1: The Multifaceted Stressors of Hemodialysis during COVID-19**, (2) **Defying the Odds**, and (3) **Holistic Care and the Role of Healthcare Providers** The findings of the study offered valuable insights into how the participants experienced undergoing hemodialysis while also contracting COVID-19 during the pandemic.

Theme 1: The Multifaceted Stressors of Hemodialysis during COVID-19

This theme talks about the tough challenges faced by hemodialysis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their chronic illness, along with the global crisis, added to their physical, emotional, social, nutritional, and financial struggles. Physically, they worried about getting infected because they had to go to hospitals often. Emotionally, many felt more anxious, isolated, and unsure as social distancing kept them away from their usual support systems. Social connections with healthcare providers and others were also harder to maintain, making them feel even more alone. Nutritionally, they found it difficult to stick to their strict diets with limited food access during



lockdowns. Financially, many had higher healthcare costs and income loss, worsening their already difficult situation. These combined pressures show the heavy burden on hemodialysis patients during the pandemic and the need for better, well-rounded support during crises.

“It is really depressing, I have nothing else to do cry because it's hard to accept” – Participant 3

Theme 2: Defying the Odds

This theme captures the participants' profound sense of survival, focusing on their ability to endure both the relentless demands of hemodialysis and the life-threatening impact of COVID-19. It reflects their determination to keep going despite the physical and emotional toll of these dual challenges. Participants expressed gratitude for being alive, a sense of triumph in overcoming immense obstacles, and a renewed perspective on life. Their stories embody strength, resilience, and the belief that, despite everything, they are still standing strong.

“Communication is the most important thing, especially with your family and your child always by your side. It strengthens your life because you trust in Him. The Lord was there for me during isolation. He showed me that things can be good, even though it's not always easy. Despite the challenges, I feel grateful and happy because He provides comfort and guidance” – Participant 5

Theme 3: Holistic Care and the Role of Healthcare Providers

The theme of holistic care shows how important nephrology nurses and healthcare resources were in providing good care for hemodialysis patients, especially during COVID-19. Nurses did not just handle medical tasks; they also gave emotional, educational, and psychological support. Their close relationships with patients-built trust and comfort, helping people manage both their kidney disease and the fear of catching COVID-19. Even with limited hospital resources, nurses quickly adjusted, making sure patients understood safety measures and felt supported.

“I was terrified of contracting COVID-19, especially because I was already so weak from my condition. But the nurses were always there to explain everything, they took the time to help me understand the risks and taught me how to protect myself. They didn't just treat me as a patient, they treated me like family, and that made a huge difference” – Participant 4

Discussion

The study shows that hemodialysis patients faced many kinds of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. These stresses were not just physical but also emotional, mental, and practical, impacting their overall well-being. These findings match other research that points out the extra difficulties people with long-term medical treatments face during a global health crisis. A study by Ozturk et al. (2021) found that dialysis patients were at higher risk of getting COVID-19 because they had to regularly visit healthcare settings. This constant risk of infection added to the stress of dealing with chronic kidney disease (CKD), causing increased anxiety and fear among these patients. Xiong et al. (2020) found that patients with chronic illnesses, like those on dialysis, experienced more psychological stress and anxiety during the pandemic. The uncertainty of the situation, along with disruptions to their usual healthcare routines, made feelings of helplessness and isolation even worse. Likewise, Lin et al. (2021) reported that hemodialysis patients during COVID-19 faced logistical problems like delayed treatments and transportation issues. These challenges added to their stress and disrupted the continuity of their care.

Moreover, The study also highlighted the remarkable resilience and strength shown by hemodialysis patients in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the difficulties, they demonstrated the ability to cope and adapt. De Silva et al. (2021) emphasized that patients with chronic illnesses, including those on dialysis, showed a sense of empowerment when faced with challenges. They actively sought information and support to manage their conditions more effectively, taking control of their health during tough times. Similarly, support from



family, friends, and healthcare providers was key in building resilience among participants. During the pandemic, social connections became vital, providing emotional support and hope. Kim et al. (2020) found that strong social support improved the mental well-being of chronic illness patients, leading to better health outcomes.

Finally, the study highlights the critical role healthcare professionals, especially nephrology nurses, play in supporting the overall well-being of hemodialysis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes that quality care goes beyond medical treatments, addressing the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of patients. Daugirdas et al. (2021) stressed that effective communication and strong relationships between patients and healthcare providers are vital for improving treatment adherence and patient satisfaction in chronic care. Nurses played a key role by educating patients, addressing their concerns, and providing reassurance, which helped reduce anxiety and fear related to both their chronic condition and the risks of COVID-19. Likewise, Abudari et al. (2021) highlighted the significance of psychosocial support in managing chronic illness. It showed that patients who felt emotionally supported were more likely to actively participate in their treatment plans.

Conclusion

The study highlights the various challenges faced by hemodialysis patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, including significant physical, emotional, mental, and practical stressors. Despite these difficulties, patients showed remarkable resilience and adaptability, actively seeking support and information to manage their health. The vital role of healthcare professionals, especially nephrology nurses, was emphasized, as they provided essential emotional support and education, improving patient satisfaction and adherence to treatment. Overall, the findings underscore the need for holistic, patient-centered care that prioritizes the well-being of hemodialysis patients, particularly in times of crisis.

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