

## **Stories of Unsung Heroes: Lived Experiences of Filipino Contact Tracers in the Implementation of Contact Tracing During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Contact tracing is a control measure used globally to identify all possible close contacts of COVID-19 patients. Countries known to have successfully curbed the COVID-19 spread, like China, Japan, and South Korea, implemented contact tracing as part of their pandemic response. The Philippines also started contact tracing in the early days of the pandemic. However, more than a year after the contact tracing implementation, the country still experienced its highest single-day increase of COVID-19 cases. Filipino contact tracers are one of the forefronts of this pandemic since the efficacy of the country's pandemic interventions partly relied on their work and the challenges that affected their work process. Thus, this study explored the lived experiences of contact tracers to understand their views on contact tracing in the Philippines and its effectiveness against the COVID-19 spread. This qualitative study uses a descriptive phenomenological approach to gain insights and subjective responses from the participants. This study conducted online interviews with twelve (12) participants, and the responses were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. From the analysis, five (5) themes that focused on the experiences and challenges of contact tracers emerged, namely: (1) *Contact tracing experiences*, (2) *Healthcare skills and preparedness*, (3) *Health education challenges*, (4) *Resource mobilization*, and (5) *Social impact of COVID-19*. Moreover, this study generated a geographical distribution to visualize the breakdown of the participants' shared challenges and experiences: the used contact tracing method, contact tracers' educational background and training, lack of resources and manpower, patient cooperation, privacy issues, contact tracing delays, contact tracers' physical and mental health issues, political issues, and health inequities. The challenges identified through the lived experiences of Filipino contact tracers may contribute to the preparation and enhancement of contact tracing interventions for future surges and novel infectious diseases.

Keywords: Contact tracing, contact tracers, COVID-19, close contacts