

The Lived Experiences of Selected Flight Attendants: Exploring Challenges and Outlook in the New Normal

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Abstract

Introduction: During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries closed its borders to stop the spread of the virus. Travel bans were implemented. The Airline was severely affected leaving its employees like the flight attendant putting their job and health at risk. This research explores the situation and lived experiences of flight attendants during the pandemic and the new normal. The approach of this study is to conduct an interview to selected flight attendants that specifically attempts to seek the challenges faced by the flight attendants during pandemic and the new normal, the opportunities that can be explored, and the perception of the participants about the outlook of the airline industry. It was revealed that most of the flight attendants experienced difficulty in their job such as fear of getting infected and worrying about job security. The participants show positive insights about the future of aviation industry.

Keywords: COVID-19, New Normal, Lived Experiences, Flight Attendants, Cabin Crew

Introduction

In resurgence of COVID-19 cases, the airlines from the Philippines cancelled domestic flights originating from Manila. Even international flights were affected by the quarantine policy in the Philippines. Restrictions in the borders made traveling difficult. This causes several changes in the operation of the airline companies. The Philippine Airlines' (PAL) international schedule were reduced, and the usual everyday flight schedule was reduced to 1-2 times a week on their international routes. Some domestic destinations such as Davao and Zamboanga are requiring having COVID-19 tests for passengers originating within

the country (Schofield, 2020). Different destinations have their own set of health protocols when accepting travelers. COVID-19 has brought unfortunate events from around the world. It spreads like a wildfire affecting every single tree. To prevent further increase of COVID-19 cases, the World leaders and their government had to come up with a plan to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in their country as it will affect their economy and will put the citizen's health at risk. Some world leaders did not waste time to put effort and precautionary measures. They took this virus seriously as it has the potential to tear every wall that the virus encounters. The world leaders immediately took actions by cancelling all flights bound to Wuhan, (Hubei Province) China, the origin place of the virus, as it could bring the virus back to their country and start infecting other people. Wuhan's tourism industry went to a major downfall because of the panic caused by the virus. After several days, the situation got worse as the virus quickly spreads all over China. After the coronavirus was hit most of China, it started to infect the citizens of other countries around the world. After the situation have worsened, the Philippines closed its borders so no one could leave and enter the country. Weeks have passed by, and the cases are still growing and yet the government still has no solid plans. After months of lockdown, some airline companies had to let go some of their newly hired workers to save money for the losses of the company since the borders are closed. Flight attendants, janitors, and other workers were disheartened by the news as some of them has no other means to make money to buy food and pay the rent. This affected their mental health because they got discharged from their job. The airline industry was truly hardly hit by the pandemic, which, affected the lives of the airline workers, most especially, the flight attendant.

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This pandemic brought new precautionary measures on how to beat COVID-19 and we are facing a new normal because of this virus. This COVID-19 pandemic took the world by surprise. Everyone was affected as this pandemic run its course, no one was excused. As a result of this dilemma, many lost their jobs, some decided to quit just to put their safety first, and most of them stayed accepted the future consequences of their decisions. One of the main industries that are threatened by Corona Virus pandemic is the Airline Industry. In which Philippines had trouble resolving at first few months, they were not able to track down people coming from different countries that are already infected. It was too late to isolate infected people. Airline Companies decided to prevent and take an action. According to World Health Organization (WHO) this is a type of virus that is a droplet transmission meaning “transmission of the COVID-19 virus can occur by direct contact with infected people and indirect contact with surfaces in the immediate environment or with objects used on the infected person” but then it became airborne transmission which refers to the presence of the tiny dry particles known as aerosols, that can last in the air for long term of time and can be transmitted to others through range greater than 1 meter (DOH, 2020). In the unfortunate event of the Pandemic, the PAL decided to lay-off their flight attendants to survive the pandemic. It temporarily reduced its fleet size and waits for government support. AirAsia Philippines and Cebu Pacific made similar reductions. The health crisis made it hard for the airlines and caused damage to the aviation sector. The employees are informed of that they will implement retirement and retrenchment programs due to the current situation. The Philippine Airlines (PAL) and PAL express will be implemented job cuts where a lot of employees out of 6,000 will lose their job. They are considering an action to make the flag carrier survive. The airline is responsible for the growth of the economy. It has a fixed cost to pay on which it includes the aircraft maintenance. The pace of the recovery is unknown and no guarantee about the planned layoffs. PAL still have flights to bring home the stranded overseas Filipino workers abroad. If the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act is implemented, the Department of Transportation will assist the transportation industry in the form of cash, loan, fuel allowance and regulatory fees (Camus, 2020). To survive, low-cost carrier Cebu Pacific decided to cut jobs their employees and was laid off newly hired cabin crews. By reducing the number of employees including the flight attendant, they

will be able to revive the airline. Cebu Pacific planned to expand their route around the world and was interrupted by the pandemic was put on hold. The layoffs could potentially displace thousands of employees. The airline will undergo transformation process that aims to recover. The airline warned the passengers that the schedules might change depending on the command of the local government. The vice chair of the Air Carriers Association of the Philippines (ACAP) stated that the government need to ramp up COVID-19 testing to allow the entry of international travelers (Camus, 2020). This study will help to understand the experiences and knowledge of people working in an airline industry. To assess the risks that are needed to take in case a pandemic happen which is the current situation and to justify the importance of this study is included by providing clarified explanation and information. The Flight Attendants will have additional knowledge related to the field of Airline Industry for the post-pandemic. This will be helpful at this present time for the flight attendants in this new normal to engage or react based on a given uncertain situation. This study will provide awareness to the students of the risks they about to take in this profession and environment. This will also give students the information on what are the precautions that are needed to take on this given kind of situation. To the aspiring flight attendants, this will encourage them to learn from the experiences of the flight attendants who felt the impact of the pandemic and will enable them to anticipate similar scenario in the future. The result of this study can be useful for the mentors and professors; this study can serve as a guide and source of information. This study can also recommend to the students to follow the right approach they should use. The people who will benefit the most from this study are the researchers, this study can be use as reference material. The findings from this study will help the future researchers to obtain learning and awareness. It is to improve the future studies of the future researchers who choose to conduct the same study.

Method

Design

The research design will convey the experience of LCC flight attendants with the use of Colaizzi's (1978) strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis. The method includes the use of real research example, the process of Colaizzi will be used to aid in extracting,

organizing, and analyzing narrative dataset. These are the steps in Colaizzi's (1978) seven step process in Phenomenology.

Step 1. Familiarization – Reading and familiarizing the participant's statement.

Step 2. Identifying Significant Statements – Identify statement that is helpful in supporting the study.

Step 3. Formulating Meanings – Identify meanings to the study that arise from a careful consideration of the significant statements. The researcher must reflexively "bracket" the pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced (though Colaizzi recognizes that complete bracketing is never possible).

Step 4. Clustering Meanings – Clustering the identified meanings. Organize the statements into themes and will separate the common and similar statement across all accounts.

Step 5. Developing an Exhaustive Description – Writing the inclusive description of the study, utilizing all the themes that was produced at step 4.

Step 6. Producing the Fundamental Structure – Condenses the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon.

Step 7. Seeking Verification of the Fundamental Structure – The researcher returns the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience. He or she may go back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in the light of this feedback.

Settings and Selection of Samples

The participants were selected based on their qualifications as currently employed LCC flight attendants registered in the Philippines. Snowball sampling will be used as other prospective participants may be recommended by the interviewed participants. Snowball sampling is a technique where researcher make a questionnaire that enables respondents to distribute the questions to respondents voluntarily and not mandatory. This enables the researcher to gather as much as information to be needed.

This study focuses only on the lived experiences of selected flight attendants in the new normal. Likewise, it will explore on the challenges they faced during this new normal as well as the opportunities and outlook in the airline industry. The study utilized the qualitative approach and data gathering was done using online platforms. There were seven (7) participants of the study, and This study was conducted in September 2020 to January 2021 while approaching the new normal. This is limited to the views and insights of the selected participants of the study, who are a current flight attendant in a low-cost carrier during the time of data gathering process. Other views were not observed and will be part of the future recommendation of the paper.

Development of Instrument

The research instrument utilized an interview guide question comprised of 15 open ended questions regarding the identified problem statements. Development of instrument A self-made interview guide question based on related literature was developed, which was aligned with our study. The instrument consists of section that questions the lived experiences of flight attendant during their pre-pandemic and the new normal, challenges of flight attendants, opportunities that can be explored and the outlook on the airline industry. The letter of Qualitative Assessment of the Research Instrument was sent to two jurors that worked in the airlines. The first validator was a flight attendant employed to a local low-cost carrier while the second validator works in a prestigious international airline. Weeks after the letter was sent, the research instrument was returned with a few important remarks. Finalization of the instrument was made with amended changes.

Data Gathering Procedure and Ethical Consideration

The proponents sent a letter requesting permission to interview the workers. Upon confirmation of their consent to be interviewed, the proponent set the schedule for the on-line interview. An online interview will be conducted using a web conference software. Before the actual interview starts, the interviewer will ask permission to record the session. Interviewer's front camera is open

while wearing the college shirt to look presentable. An online answer sheet form was made to consider those participants who agreed to be interviewed but do not have enough time. Bearing its motto, Veritas et fortitude, Pro Deo et Patria or Truth and Courage, for God and Country. Lyceum of the Philippines University upholds the virtue of honesty in every way possible, may it be on research supporting new ways of obtaining, explore and expand knowledge for the betterment of the society and assure that the fundamental ethical principles are being considered and followed. This researcher recognizes the participants' well-being, rights, and confidentiality. Participants' rights are legal, moral, and ethical principles humans have. Participants of this research also have rights to be followed or obeyed. Every participant has the right to be asked for consent to take part, rescind from, or refuse to take part in research activities, right to confidentiality wherein personal information and such should not be published nor used without the participant's consent, right to data privacy; data obtained shall be kept privately and secured and right for safety; participants shall not be subjected to any level of risks. Data Analysis after conducting the interview, the participant's recorded statements were transcribed. Each participant is identified as Participant AG. All their statements including the two flight attendants who answered through an online answer sheet form were categorized according to the statement of the problem. The researchers thoroughly read and familiarized the statements. Thematic analysis was utilized which is useful to gather the similar statements and of the participants by formulating a theme. Rights are legal, moral, and ethical principles humans have. Participants of this research also have rights to be followed or obeyed. Every participant has the right to be asked for consent to take part, rescind from, or refuse to take part in research activities, right to confidentiality wherein personal information and such should not be published nor used without the participant's consent, right to data privacy; data obtained shall be kept privately and secured and right for safety; participants shall not be subjected to any level of risks.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interview, the participant's recorded statements were transcribed. Each participant is identified as Participant AG. All their statements including the two flight attendants who answered through an online answer sheet form were categorized according to the statement

of the problem. The researchers thoroughly read and familiarized the statements. Thematic analysis was utilized which is useful to gather the similar statements and of the participants by formulating a theme.

Result

Low-cost carriers are traditional services that is not included as part of the fare, meaning passengers will expect less from the services (TravelPerk, 2021). Low-cost airlines are also the first to recover globally (Watson, 2021). The purpose of this research is to assess the challenges, opportunities, and outlook of the participants in the new normal. Participants ages from 23 to 30 living in the Philippines. Five female and two male flight attendants. Five of the participants was interviewed through an online live interview. Two of the seven participants requested for an online answer sheet. We interviewed them with consent for our qualified participants. The researchers identified that the participants are in permanent contract with Cebu Pacific and PAL express. All their statements were based on the guide questions we sent.

Theme 1: Challenges and Fears of the Flight Attendant on Their Job

The challenges in the work environment are described as the unstableness of the work environment that is beyond the control of the flight attendants and employees. These are caused by irresponsible passengers, delays in flights caused by weather disturbance, cancellation of flights due to pandemic. These are the realization on how tough the job is. The challenges and fears of the flight attendants were further discussed hereunder.

Change in Operational Standard

With the onset of the pandemic, the work routine of flight attendants changed drastically. They must adapt with the new normal. As a result of the pandemic, some precautionary measures must be made such as social distancing and other regulations (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020). Compliance with the safety protocol limits their job and cannot do their usual excellent service anymore the way they used to. This is reiterated in the sharing of participant as follows: "Flying time had been reduced from 90 hours to less than 30. We had to wear headto-

toe personal protective equipment. We had to simplify our service and lessen our interaction with passengers and colleagues. It makes me sad, thinking about the current situation at my workplace. We can no longer practice our usual “Buong pusong alaga” that makes this job worthwhile. This pandemic added more challenges in the workplace. It made me realized how tough our job is.” (Participant B) This further shows the participant commitment to provide excellent service to the customers. Living by their credo of “Buong pusong alaga” is the pride of every flight attendant participant. Limitations brought by the pandemic hindered showing their love and concern to their passengers and brought sadness to their heart.

Health and Safety Protocols

The Personal Protective equipment (PPE) is indeed beneficial as it prevents the flight attendants from getting infected and vice-versa. But it has a disadvantage likewise, the difficulty in communication with their passengers. Wearing of face mask included in the PPE can be uncomfortable. It reduces the ability to communicate, interpret, and mimic the expressions of the people they interact are. It is hard for people show positive emotions. Showing a positive emotions became less contagious (Spitzer, 2020). The flight attendants stressed that they must make an adjustment to be easily say the message clear to the passenger. Several participants shared the same views on this matter. Participant A mentioned that: “You have to talk louder and more repetitive, as well as demonstrations of certain equipment cannot be done because of the PPE. Such as the donning of oxygen mask and life vest during a live demonstration.” (Participant A) Participant F, added that: “While talking to the passenger, the passenger cannot see your face so it’s hard to express yourself. You must rely on your tone of voice. PPE blocks your smile, which is an important part in customer service.” Challenges in communication brought by the PPE was further reiterated with this statement: “As simple as communicating and providing services to passengers had been challenging. We also have to think about not just the safety and security of the passengers but even their health has to be taken care of.” Flight attendants always exert their effort to be communicate with the passengers loudly. Unfortunately, flight attendants may encounter a difficulty to hear their passenger who wears a face mask and speaks in low tone. “Getting used to wearing mask

is very challenging, overcoming stress and worrying about everything. With all those PPE, communication is really tough, you cannot breathe properly, and passengers speak in very low volume. Information is not clear.” (Participant E) “Sometimes you do not easily understand what your passenger was telling you, but it is understandable. You also feel uncomfortable wearing it, but you need to.” (Participant D) The flight attendants may encounter passengers who do not follow the health protocol. Wearing of face mask is a must for passengers and often removed to breathe comfortably but they are putting the other passengers onboard at risk. Like the study of (Rucinski, 2020), when passengers are served with food and hot drink, the passengers will remove their mask to eat and to blow their drink. It is feared that it can cause the spreading or infecting with the COVID-19. Experiences were shared by the participants on this theme. According to Participant G, “Handling passengers is a challenge during the pandemic. There are passengers who do not want to wear face shield, they are removing their face mask. I need to remind the passengers to wear it properly. It annoys me when they are taking off their protection if they are away from us.” Enforcing the wearing of facemask is the most difficult part of the job of a flight attendant (Kaur & Osipova, 2021) and it can be the source of stress if the passenger is disobedient. In the study conducted by (Yang & Yang, 2019) flight attendants who are in constant stress can lead to depressive moods if not relieved. In relation with the stress experienced by the flight attendant, workload is seen to cause fatigue because they need to expand their duties, handle the complaints of the passengers, they are being pressured to meet the service expectation of the airline (Berg et al., 2020). Most of the Flight Attendants works double shifts to earn and to fill the spot of the people who left their job (Compton, 2020).

Fear of Getting Infected

Characterized when a flight attendant feels uneasiness and worry about themselves and their family. They fear of getting infected with COVID-19 or they might infect their family members. Uncertainty about the passengers, people they interact might have a virus too. Emotions experienced by the flight attendants when in distress. Flight attendants are willing to take a huge risk for the safety of the passengers. One of the changes they need

to face is the resumption of essential flights. Passengers came from different places. They are afraid interacting with them because they do not know if they are infected with COVID-19 or not. It affected their mental health (Compton, 2020). The participants shared their perceived vulnerability in terms of health risk, which, is being infected of the COVID-19. The following verbatim statements supported this claim. “My greatest fear is getting infected with COVID-19 because we encounter and talk to different people. We do not know if they are cautious or not with COVID-19. (Participant G) “They’re implementing effective measures, but we can’t control who can and who cannot travel, if they’re carriers or not.” (Participant C) “I was worried about my personal health and safety and the people around me. It makes me anxious and sad about the possibility of being exposed to the virus.” (Participant B) “Every time we report for duty, we have to accept that there will be a high chance that you will get the virus, but you just have to be extra careful and pray before you leave your house.” (Participant E) Flight attendants are afraid of getting infected because they might infect their family members too. In the result from the previous studies (Compton, 2020), one of the participants in that study mentioned that their anxiety for every flight has been drastic, had a thought about if he would get the virus or will the flight steward will be returning home to his family carrying the virus. Participant G reiterated that: “It is difficult if you did not follow (the health protocol) because you will go home and interact with your family and what if I am infected and they will get infected too. And now that we work in an airport where there are a lot of people from different places”. This was further supported by the comment of Participant D. “It makes me sad because sometimes if I get infected by COVID-19 my family will also be affected, it is a risk but if you love your job you need to fight for that possibility. Just be careful all the time and follow the health protocols.” Health and safety are really on the top priority of the selected flight attendants as this will not involve only themselves but their family and loved ones as well.

Job Security

Airlines will fall into debt because there will be fewer passengers. Airline operators need to pay price of fuel. The decline of passengers will make the airline to reduce other variable and fixed costs (Slotnick, 2020). A study (Ramelli & Wagner, 2020) revealed that a Chicago-based

airline warned to cut out jobs such as flight attendants to leave work unpaid. Unfortunately, airlines will be keeping few cabin crews for their essential flights (Bowen & Laroe, 2006). With the pandemic, job security was one of the top threats felt by the flight attendants. Listening on the news on retrenchment of different companies as well as their actual experiences in their workplace concerning their co-employees affected them both mentally and emotionally. This is further noted by Participants D, and G. “Everything was affected, the flights were lessened, and a lot of employees lost their job. During the pandemic, our work was stopped so I do not have a choice but to stay at home. I tried to do business but sadly, it was not successful. After the lockdown, I looked for a job near my house and I am hired as an office staff. After two months, I am glad that we are called to get to our work back in airline industry.” (Participant D) Participant G, shared his current sentiment on this when he mentioned that: “We do not know maybe we lose our job, or we might get retrenched. Because we knew that the airline continues to lose profit.” Flight attendants are concerned about having a stable job and the fact that they are on the front line of an infectious disease. They do the safety and health precautions to avoid getting contracted with COVID-19. Having a secure job this pandemic is difficult (Slotnick, 2020). Despite their effort to implement the safety protocol, flight attendants do not get a hazard pay even though they are considered as an essential worker (Kaur & Osipova, 2021).

Theme 2: Opportunities of the Flight Attendants

The flight attendant participants were able to share the opportunities that were open during this pandemic, which, include learning of new skills set and an opportunity to become an advocate of implementing strict hygiene practices and health protocol. Skills learned during the pandemic. There are skills that are gained by the flight attendants during the pandemic. It is either a profession-related skill, a newly discovered hobby, or a soft-skill. Flight attendants were assigned other jobs and eventually learned the skills needed there. Multi-tasking was the norm; hence, multi-skills is a necessity. They learned these skills through continuous application in their workplace or practiced intentionally. The result shows that participants discovered new hobbies during the pandemic. They use

their free time to improve on their skill. Participant B mentioned that: “We were trained to wear different hats at our workplace. This helps us to be more flexible and learn more skills that can help us be productive and hopefully monetize it in the future.” Further, the participants also discovered new hobbies during the pandemic. They use their free time to improve on their skill. This is the case of Participant B, who mentioned that: “I discover cooking, candle making, and editing photos in Photoshop this pandemic and the only way to improve those newly discovered skills is to just keep on practicing until you’ve gained enough knowledge about.” For the soft skills, learning new language and improving one’s character and attitudes were the changes exhibited by the flight attendant during this time. Participants shared that becoming more patient and understandable is what they learned during the pandemic. They learned it while working. It shows a character development for them. Their experiences made them stronger. Participants can apply their skills learned on their profession. A similar study that during the pandemic, it shows that flight attendants became more attentive, occupied, and devoted to their work (Puckett, 2020). According to Participant G, “I do not know if being more understandable and strong patience is considered as a skill but that is something that improved me ever since I started working. I am impatient before I work. I became understanding for other people.” Further, the value of patience was raised by Participant E. “Definitely having more patience with the passengers while maintaining all the safety precautions.” Hawaii Airlines has reconsidered another qualification barrier for employees or flight attendants. They believed that taking another training will help them be ready for any problem under circumstances. Getting one step ahead to the New Normal will give them advantage in the future to come. If the flight attendants fail to meet the given standards on qualification, they will not be able to get hired (Villegas, 2020). Participant G mentioned that service excellence and interpersonal skills were improved during the new normal. “I am able to talk to a lot of people. I experienced angry passengers. They blame me for their delayed flights. You cannot fight back to the passengers and shout back to them. All you have to do is make them calm. I guess that is one thing that changed me. And I learn how to get along with other people I just met because when I applying for

airline. I do not know anyone. I learned how to adjust easily without being shy.” (Participant G) As advocate on implementing strict hygiene practices and health protocol. Flight attendants emphasize their mandatory obedience to the strict health protocol implemented by the government such as practicing social distancing and regular hand washing. Participant B and Participant G combat their fears by following health protocol such as wearing of PPE and practicing personal hygiene such as washing of hands as mentioned in the verbal sharing of Participants B and G. “I practiced proper health and safety protocols. I would also take vitamins to boost my immune system.” (Participant B) “Before we go to work, we just have to pray. Because that way of protecting yourself. We have to follow safety protocols like wearing a facemask, face shields and PPE.” (Participant G) Participant A and Participant F is aware that they are exposed to the virus in their workplace. Therefore, doing hygiene practices is very much important. Other participants reiterated the importance of following the health protocol, which includes wearing your PPE, washing your hands, proper social distancing and taking your own precautions. This is heightened by the cleanliness in the airport and aircrafts. This will enhance the feeling of trust and confidence to the said airlines. The flight attendant spends most of their time in long hours of air travel and most likely to develop a cancer and other diseases after a long exposure to the harmful agents such as radiation. These pre-existing risks made it more complex and severe when if they caught up with COVID-19. (Toprani et al., 2020) Protecting the flight attendants from COVID-19 is challenging. (Toprani et al., 2020) However, ensuring their safety is the responsibility of the company. Being distant with one another has been a requirement especially in airplanes or any other source of transportation. The passengers should be willing and respect the given seating arrangement strategy for the reason of social distancing. Instead of suggesting general safety precautions that the passengers already considered known as compliance, assigned by the airline companies, they decided to focus on providing much better seating arrangement for the passengers. (Salari, Milne, Delcea et al., 2020) This will gain the gradual trust of the passengers as they implement social distancing to reduce the risk of infection. The airlines did measurements for the safety and well-being of their passengers (Patel, 2020).

Theme 3: Outlook on the Airline Industry

There were similarities in the viewpoints as raised by all participants. A positive disposition and optimism are prevalent on the data gathered from the interview. The discussion starts with the perceived outcome of the pandemic, the positive disposition and optimism that a bright future is seen for this industry. Perceived outcomes of COVID-19 pandemic to the airlines There were lots of outcome brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to the airlines and it affected the flight attendants. Discussions here includes changes in the system of the company and how the employees and flight attendants lost their job. Participant F mentioned that: "Flights have become less, I rarely fly anymore, and there is more health protocol to preserve. Like health declarations, you must complete before the flight. We have to do new training in smaller aircrafts. They downsized the fleet in order to save money." A study revealed that (Wood, 2020) the airline will reduce their usual capacity. Airlines have a high percentage of fixed cost, and they are negotiating with the airports to have an arrangement to reduce their fees in utilizing the airport. Furthermore, in the previous study the common response of the airline to survive the pandemic is to reduce the number of workers and reconfiguration of destination networks (Sun & Wandelt, 2020). A major employment is affected by job loss. Airlines will endure the decline of passengers because of uncertain shocks caused by the pandemic (Alessandri & Mumtaz, 2019). Positive disposition of Flight Attendants Though reports of losses and retrenchment due to the pandemic were rampant, majority of the participants have a positive disposition on the current condition of the company. They truly believe that this is just a temporary occurrence, and the airline industry will rise again soon. This is supported by the sharing of Participant G that: "Right now, there are airlines with a lot of loss, it is not just millions but billions. I have no idea about the future of the airline. All I know is once the pandemic is gone. It will return to normal, and all their loss will return. All the employees who lost their job can return. All the airlines will recover in the world." Participant G further mentioned that: "The airline cannot handle the rising cases of COVID-19. What they can do is to cancel flights and refunds takes longer because it is too many. If the quarantine measure became less strict, the cases will start to rise again. We do not encourage people to travel for leisure. It

will be better of the focus in on the domestic flights because they lose their job before. There are a lot of provinces that are GCQ, but it is okay to open other domestic flights. Eventually the jobs and works like tour guiding, hotel staff will rise again." Traveling outside the border is restricted, that made the airline industry caught in a significant net loss in the year 2020 (Dunn, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic is costly to the airlines (Clausen et al., 2010). IATA revealed that there is a significant drop of airline passenger revenue compared in the year 2019. Several governments gave a financial aid to the airlines that are affected (Kirby, 2020). Rising optimism to the future of the airline industry The flight attendants have a positive views and insights of the airline industry. Optimism in the future of the aviation industry is exhibited from the sharing of the participants. Controlling the pandemic was one of the top priorities of the country and this may be possible with the existence of the vaccination. Hence, Participant A reiterated that: "Now with the onset of the vaccinations, have grown immensely to pre-pandemic levels. Demands for international flights are also increasing. The current situation, with the demand on flying back, job security is no longer an issue. Moreover, employees that have been furloughed have been recalled and the demand for pilots and flight attendants have returned for rehiring." Participants are getting happy and expressing optimism now that vaccinations are taking place all throughout the country. They are hoping that they will see increase in flights and passengers and hoping that they will meet countless passengers every day without the fear of getting infected and spreading disease. They are also happy that they will no more worry about losing their jobs now that they see increase in flights. The positive outlook of the flight attendants was further shown in the following statements: "I feel like this is just a temporary setback for the commercial aviation and once this is over, we will be back on track stronger than ever. We just need people to start flying once this is over." (Participant B) "At the moment aviation is really down. But it will surely be back to where it is before the pandemic. Opportunities are always there; you do even need to be in the hospitality industry you just have to have the courage and goal if you really want to be in." (Participant E) and lastly, "There are a lot of opportunities in airline industry before the pandemic because there are a lot of airlines that caters a lot of flights so they in need of I know that a lot of people will be travelling again. As soon as

restrictions are gone, the industry will start to rise again.” (Participant D) The airline industry may be down now, but participants expressed excitement that they will soon find and meet passengers soon. Increase in passengers are also the things that they are looking forward for. Some of them says that before the pandemic there were countless opportunities in airline industry but since the COVID-19 made an appearance, the opportunities became less and limited. But once all this thing is over, everything will be back, and they are stronger than ever. This happy disposition can be shown by the following statements of the participants. “Cheap flights will be available in the future, and it will excite the passengers to travel again. It is one thing that they might do. Airlines will somehow recover from the pandemic with their discounted fares.” (Participant G), and “The future it’s still bright, it will return back to normal. People will travel no matter what happens.” Everyone will start flying cheaply again and choosing budget airlines. They will recover because the demand for flying is always there.” (Participant F) Participants are also expecting for lower prices in flights to make a boom in tourism. This could also help rebuild the economy and gain confidence in traveling again. The demand for flying is always present but due to COVID-19 many are scared to get infected. They are positive that with the lower prices, they will see many passengers in the future. Low-cost and regional airline employment has a least impact. (Alessandri & Mumtaz, 2019). There was a poll that was conducted in a virtual event and the result shows that the domestic travel will recover more than international flights. Leisure is not a priority and able to have an alternative travel option (Leigh, 2020). Ticket prices became cheap as the demand for air travel became stiff. This will gain the gradual trust of the passengers as they implement social distancing to reduce the risk of infection. The airlines did measurements for the safety and well-being of their passengers (Patel, 2020). The recovery of the airline industry is estimated to take between 4 to 6 years (Alessandri & Mumtaz, 2019). The Philippines continues their effort to reduce the infection. The airline industry will remain unprofitable (Mercurio, 2020). Advancement of technology in the airline industry, Hope of having an improved technology in the airline industry, in the aircraft, airport and customer service is a must. Flight attendants are seeking for touchless based technology that will reduce the spread of diseases, faster process-

ing and transaction and innovative solutions needed. For an airline to recover, participants stated the following: “I hope more on advance technology to make the process faster.” (Participant D) “Traveling with more high-tech facilities, amenities, and services that they can offer to passengers.” (Participant E) In the aviation sector, COVID-19 faces an unparalleled challenge. Many airline passengers may have trouble reserving flights to their desired destination. They intend to improve and search for the potential of airport user experience in this study, which will benefit both passengers, staff, and stakeholders (Tuchen, Arora & Blessing, 2020). Participant displays their knowledge about the technology inside the aircraft as Participant A mentioned that: “Hopefully, the cleanliness will continue, such as the HEPPA filter that are used in the airlines, hand sanitizers during boarding, and sanitizers outside the bathrooms. The HEPPA filter, keeping the air clean in the cabin and air circulation. Finally, the technology of touchless based technology from checks in to also purchasing items for sale in the cabin. We are already recovering from the pandemic by providing a clean and safe environment and using touchless based technology.” Poor air cabin quality can also contribute to the development of a long-term workrelated ailment (Wei, 2013). The weariness of flight attendants is exacerbated by their physical work environment. Lower oxygen levels or airflows, confronting malfunctioned equipment, and an uncooperative coworker all contribute to their exhaustion (Berg et al., 2012). To meet a projected increase in demand, airlines and airports must be prepared. To guarantee that rebound demand is effectively captured, airlines and airports must be prepared to start operations on a scaled basis (Wood, 2020).

Discussion

Challenges in the work environment are described as the unstableness of the work environment that is beyond the control of the flight attendants and employees. These are caused by irresponsible passengers, delays i flights caused by weather disturbance, cancellation of flights due to pandemic. These are the realization on how tough the job is. The challenges and fears of the flight attendants were further discussed hereunder.

Change in Operational Standard

With the onset of the pandemic, the work routine of flight attendants changed drastically. They must adapt with the new normal. As a result of the pandemic, some precautionary measures must be made such as social distancing and other regulations (Amankwah-Amoah, 2020). Compliance with the safety protocol limits their job and cannot do their usual excellent service anymore the way they used to.

Health and Safety Protocols

The Personal Protective equipment (PPE) is indeed beneficial as it prevents the flight attendants from getting infected and vice-versa. But it has a disadvantage likewise, the difficulty in communication with their passengers. Wearing of face mask included in the PPE can be uncomfortable. It reduces the ability to communicate, interpret, and mimic the expressions of the people they interact are. It is hard for people show positive emotions. Showing a positive emotions became less contagious (Spitzer, 2020). The flight attendants stressed that they must make an adjustment to be easily say the message clear to the passenger. Several participants shared the same views on this matter.

Job Security

Airlines will fall into debt because there will be fewer passengers. Airline operators need to pay price of fuel. The decline of passengers will make the airline to reduce other variable and fixed costs (Slotnick, 2020). A study (Ramelli & Wagner, 2020) revealed that a Chicago-based airline warned to cut out jobs such as flight attendants to leave work unpaid. Unfortunately, airlines will be keeping few cabin crews for their essential flights (Bowen & Laroe, 2006). With the pandemic, job security was one of the top threats felt by the flight attendants. Listening on the news on retrenchment of different companies as well as their actual experiences in their workplace concerning their co-employees affected them both mentally and emotionally. The flight attendant participants were able to share the opportunities that were open during this pandemic, which, include learning of new skills set and

an opportunity to become an advocate of implementing strict hygiene practices and health protocol.

Skills Learned during the Pandemic

There are skills that are gained by the flight attendants during the pandemic. It is either a profession-related skill, a newly discovered hobby, or a soft-skill. Flight attendants were assigned other jobs and eventually learned the skills needed there. Multi-tasking was the norm; hence, multi-skills is a necessity. They learned these skills through continuous application in their workplace or practiced intentionally. The result shows that participants discovered new hobbies during the pandemic. There were similarities in the viewpoints as raised by all participants. A positive disposition and optimism are prevalent on the data gathered from the interview. The discussion starts with the perceived outcome of the pandemic, the positive disposition and optimism that a bright future is seen for this industry.

Perceived Outcomes of COVID-19 Pandemic to the Airlines

There were lots of outcome brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to the airlines and it affected the flight attendants. Discussions here includes changes in the system of the company and how the employees and flight attendants lost their job. A study revealed that (Wood, 2020) the airline will reduce their usual capacity. Airlines have a high percentage of fixed cost, and they are negotiating with the airports to have an arrangement to reduce their fees in utilizing the airport. Furthermore, in the previous study the common response of the airline to survive the pandemic is to reduce the number of workers and reconfiguration of destination networks (Sun & Wandelt, 2020). A major employment is affected by job loss. Airlines will endure the decline of passengers because of uncertain shocks caused by the pandemic (Alessandri & Mumtaz, 2019).

Positive Disposition of Flight Attendants

Though reports of losses and retrenchment due to the pandemic were rampant, majority of the participants

have a positive disposition on the current condition of the company. They truly believe that this is just a temporary occurrence, and the airline industry will rise again soon. Traveling outside the border is restricted, that made the airline industry caught in a significant net loss in the year 2020 (Dunn, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic is costly to the airlines (Clausen et al., 2010). IATA revealed that there is a significant drop of airline passenger revenue compared in the year 2019. Several governments gave a financial aid to the airlines that are affected (Kirby, 2020). Rising Optimism to the Future of the Airline Industry. The flight attendants have a positive views and insights of the airline industry. Optimism in the future of the aviation industry is exhibited from the sharing of the participants. Controlling the pandemic was one of the top priorities of the country and this may be possible with the existence of the vaccination. Participants are getting happy and were expressing optimism now that vaccinations are taking place all throughout the country. They are hoping that they will see increase in flights and passengers and hoping that they will meet countless passengers every day without the fear of getting infected and spreading disease. They are also happy that they will no more worry about losing their jobs now that they see increase in flights. There were already initiatives being done by innovative airlines worldwide. Here in the Philippines, airline companies imposed strict guidelines to ensure safety of both passenger and crews. Based on the summary of findings and conclusion, the following are recommended for proper action. The flight attendants follow proper health and safety protocol as set by government. Laws are already in place. Hence, it is recommended by the proponents that strict implementation be observed by the authorities and the stakeholders, and regular review of the guidelines be conducted to ensure safety of all. The airline company should review current operational standards as well as align and upgrade their brand of service mantra and delivery to address current scenario of today. Reorientation and retraining should be conducted on topics of safe service excellence in the new normal. Raise awareness amongst passengers on the significance of strict compliance on health and safety protocols through continuous playing of health and safety videos on different places in the terminals and the plane. Ensure that videos will elicit interest of the public. The airline companies should invest on advance technologies that will best promote the health and safety of the stakeholders. Airline

crews should capacitate themselves by attending trainings and webinars that will produce new and relevant skills sets such as entrepreneurial mindset. For future research, other stakeholders should be included as participants such as managers, passenger and government representatives and conduct triangulation of their responses.

Conclusion

The airline industry is one of the industries that is truly hit by the pandemic. Airline companies and their employees were greatly hit causing great concern most especially to the flight attendants. Based on the summary of findings we can deduce that the flight attendants right now experience several challenges and fears pertaining to the conduct of their job. The difficulties derive from the COVID-19 Pandemic and my current duties as a frontline worker. In addition their anguish originates from the difficulties they have in delivering their well-known brand of service quality, as well as concern for the safety of their loved ones. Despite the hurdles, opportunities developed in the shape of new skill sets or enhancements to current skill sets, as well as a new business model. The pursuit of an advocacy towards health and safety was also another prospect in this time of pandemic.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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