



Preparing Against the Odds: Criminology Graduates' Board Exam Experiences During a Global Crisis

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Article History:

Initial submission: 04 December 2025
First decision: 08 December 2025
Revision received: 22 January 2026
Accepted for publication: 31 January 2026
Online release: 06 February 2026

Abstract

This study explored the experiences of criminology graduates of school years 2019–2021 of Biliran Province State University, Biliran, Philippines in their preparation for board examination during the global crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study investigated their positive and negative experiences, how they coped with the challenges encountered, and the impact of the crisis toward their preparation. This qualitative study utilized transcendental phenomenology as its research design. A researcher-made interview guide was employed to collect the necessary data through in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. The data was analyzed using Collaizi's methodology, which involved translating the transcript and getting the significant statements, formulating core meanings, and subsequently analyzing them to develop clusters and emergent themes that described the phenomena under study. Based on the thematic analysis results, nine emergent themes were generated. Two emergent themes described the positive experiences: Strong Support System and Independence and Time Management, while three themes described their negative experiences: Mismanagement of the Review Centers, Internet and Technical Difficulties, and Mental Strain. To address the challenges encountered, two themes were elicited: Adaptability and Resilience, and Faith and Prayer. Furthermore, two themes described the impact of the crisis on the informants' preparation: Uncertainty and Anxiety, and Insufficient Learning and Experience. The results of the study has led to the following recommendations: school administrators, CHED, PRC, and parents/guardians should continue exerting effort to provide support and implement intervention programs for criminology graduates who experienced learning gaps during the crisis, particularly those who have not yet passed the board examination.

Keywords: Criminologists Licensure Examination (CLE), Covid-19 pandemic, board exam preparation, Phenomenology/Transcendental Phenomenology, coping mechanisms (adaptability, resilience, faith, prayer)



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INTRODUCTION

Criminology in the Philippines is a very demanding career dedicated to crime prevention, law enforcement, and the promotion of peace and societal well-being (Sigue, 2018). Every year, thousands of graduates try their best effort to attend review classes to make sure that they will be able to pass the Criminologists Licensure Examination (CLE) and become Registered Criminologists. Preparation for the licensure examination requires sustained academic, psychological, and logistical readiness, given its three-day duration and coverage of six major subject areas. However, the Covid-19 pandemic altered

traditional preparation methods. Lockdowns and restrictions enforced by the government caused the CLE to be postponed several times, forcing review centers to use online modalities. While important, these changes posed serious challenges, especially for examinees in locations with limited internet connection, limiting fair access to quality review and support. Aside from physical challenges, studies revealed that extended isolation and uncertainty had a negative impact on mental health, with young individuals being particularly vulnerable to stress, weariness, and decreased motivation (Volkan & Volkan, 2020; Labrague & Ballad, 2021). These psychological stressors were especially important in high-

pressure exams like the CLE, when resilience and continuous focus are required.

Although previous studies have examined the broader educational and psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is limited inquiry into the specific experiences of criminology graduates preparing for the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE). Many studies focus on disruptions in higher education, but few examine how technology barriers, institutional limitations, and psychosocial stressors influence in high-pressure licensure examinations. During the pandemic, CLE performance decreased from 44.11% in November 2019 (Professional Regulation Commission, 2019) to 34.16% in December 2021 (Professional Regulation Commission, 2021). This considerable decline shows not just individual obstacles, but also systemic difficulties in adjusting review systems, institutional assistance, and student readiness. If these challenges fail to be investigated and resolved, future graduates may continue to experience inequitable access to review resources, persistent technological barriers, and increased psychological stress. Such conditions may result in further decreases in licensure performance, decreased professional readiness, and undermined institutional credibility. More broadly, failing to address this gap undermines the resilience of criminology education and compromises the supply of competent professionals required to maintain law enforcement and public safety in times of uncertainty.

This study addresses the gap by investigating criminology graduates' experiences preparing for the Criminologists Licensure Examination (CLE) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through investigating the academic, technological, psychological, and institutional issues that graduates experienced, the study gives comprehensive understanding into how disruptions affected licensure exam preparation and performance. It also highlights coping mechanisms, support systems, and resilience factors that helped graduates overcome unprecedented challenges. It did not

only address the decline in passing percentages observed between the pre-pandemic and pandemic examinations but also contributes evidence-based recommendations for strengthening institutional support, policy interventions, and student preparedness in future crises.

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored from the Competence Motivation Theory of Harter (1978) and supported with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus & Folkman (1984), and Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1977). Competence motivation, according to Harter (1978), is a multifaceted concept that represents interest, curiosity, and a desire to prove one's ability. It centers on people's desire to prove their abilities and become proficient at a task. People are inherently driven to look for chances to show off their proficiency in a range of tasks and activities. Each person is motivated by the need to feel capable and competent, which is an important motivating factor behind their participation and perseverance in activities (Kusumawati et al., 2023). The theory asserts that people are motivated to participate in activities that help in their growth and competence demonstration. This concept is particularly pertinent to board exam preparation since graduates aim to improve their knowledge and abilities to pass the exam. During the COVID-19 pandemic, competence motivation was vital for sustaining exam preparedness amid the challenges of remote learning, social isolation, and heightened stress.

Meanwhile, in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a dynamic process that arises from a transaction between a person and their complicated environment. To cope with stressful situations, it places a strong emphasis on evaluation to assess harm, threat, and challenges (Walinga & Stangor, 2014). Based on this theory, stress is a result of intricate interactions between a person and their surroundings rather than just an outside force working on us. It highlights how our perception

and reaction to possible stressors are influenced by cognitive appraisal. This model provides insights into why different people may respond differently to the same stressful circumstance, with broad implications for psychology, healthcare, and daily life. Covid-19 pandemic is a vivid example of how pressures involving risks to one's health, well-being, and financial stability affected people across the world. Stress levels were heightened by the sudden shift to remote learning, social isolation, and exam scheduling uncertainty, requiring the use of efficient coping strategies to keep motivation and focus. The theory is a comprehensive lens for examining how graduates navigated stress during the Covid-19 pandemic when they prepare for board examination. Their ability to effectively identify stressors and apply adaptive coping mechanisms can significantly impact their preparedness and success for the board examination.

Furthermore, Self-Efficacy Theory of Bandura (1977) is a cornerstone of modern psychology, emphasizing the belief in one's ability to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations effectively. Self-efficacy is a key component of Bandura (1977) which is a larger social cognitive theory and influences people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to achieve specific goals or handle tasks. It determines how individuals approach challenges, how much effort they put out, and how resilient they are in the face of difficulty. Self-efficacy influences performance, academic perseverance, and resilience, all of which are critical elements in preparation for a board exam. It was a key factor in determining how graduates adapted to distance learning, managed stress, and maintained their motivation in the face of first-time challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. Traditional board exam preparation was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which made the graduates to rely more on digital platforms and self-directed learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Philippine Criminology Profession Act of 2018 (R.A. 11131) provides the legal framework for regulating criminology practice in the Philippines and underscores the Criminologists Licensure Examination (CLE) as a central mechanism for ensuring professional competence and ethical standards. Administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) through the Professional Regulatory Board of Criminology, the CLE functions as a gatekeeping and quality assurance tool, certifying that only qualified individuals shall enter in criminology-related professions such as law enforcement, corrections, crime prevention, public safety and criminal justice administration.

Empirical studies have documented persistent challenges in CLE performance even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Albina et al. (2021) reported an average national passing rate of 32.87% from 2015 to 2019, attributing outcomes to academic preparedness, demographic variables, and examination difficulty. Similarly, Espartero (2022) identified student-, family-, school-, review center-, and personal-related factors as significant determinants of CLE performance, with examinees rating preparatory challenges as serious across domains. These findings reinforce the need for institutional interventions, curricular alignment, and early remediation strategies to improve licensure outcomes.

Beyond academic factors, licensure examinations have profound psychosocial and career implications. Bangaysiso et al. (2024) found that CLE non-passers experienced emotional distress and unmet personal and familial expectations, compounded by age restrictions imposed by tri-bureau agencies (PNP, BFP, BJMP). These constraints underscore the importance of support systems for non-passers and a broader understanding of licensure outcomes beyond pass-fail metrics.

Consistent with Palomar (2017), professional board examinations serve as indicators of competence, yet performance is shaped by external conditions such as institutional support, economic circumstances, and personal stressors.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these longstanding challenges. Examination postponements, transitions to online learning, and limited access to review programs disrupted traditional preparation pathways and raised concerns regarding equity and effectiveness. Studies across professional fields reported heightened anxiety, logistical barriers, and reduced access to learning resources among examinees during the pandemic (Dacanay et al., 2021). Evidence from bar examination takers similarly revealed increased psychological distress linked to uncertainty and schedule changes (Cabatbat, 2022), suggesting parallel experiences among criminology graduates. Moreover, concerns over financial stability, employment prospects, and an uncertain post-pandemic future further compounded examinees' stress (Hawley et al., 2021).

Collectively, the literatures demonstrate that CLE performance is influenced by an interplay of institutional quality, review mechanisms, psychosocial resilience, and external disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified these factors, exposing vulnerabilities in licensure preparation systems. Understanding graduates' experiences during this period is therefore critical to informing responsive policies and support structures that uphold the standards of Republic Act No. 11131 while ensuring fairness, accessibility, and examinee well-being during future crises.

METHODS

Research Design. This qualitative study utilized transcendental phenomenology as its research design to explore the experiences of Criminology graduates in preparation for the licensure examination during the crisis brought by the Covid-19. Transcendental phenomenology

(TPh), largely developed by Husserl (1997), is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Pure TPh is grounded in the concept and conditioned upon setting aside all preconceived ideas (epoché) to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity (Sheehan, 2014). The selected research design was appropriate for generating the necessary data, which were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis to extract themes that represented the problem and served as the basis for deriving practical implications.

Research Environment and Informants. The study was conducted in Eastern Visayas, Philippines, specifically in Biliran Province and Ormoc City, Leyte, where the informants reside and work. The informants were the Bachelor of Science (BS) in Criminology graduates of Biliran Province State University (BiPSU), school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. BiPSU, being the premier and only state university offering BS Criminology Program in the province, had 140 students who graduated in the school year 2019-2020 and 70 students during the school year 2020-2021. Out of the 210 graduates, twenty (20) of them were picked as research informants. Eight (8) undergone in-depth interviews, while twelve (12) participated in two sessions of focused-group discussions, with six (6) informants per session.

Research Instrument. The research instrument was a researcher-made interview guide utilized to gather the needed data and ideas from the selected informants through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Before the conduct of data gathering, the interview guide was presented, validated, and approved by the panel members of the University of Cebu-Graduate School and by the Research Ethics Committee of the university. Aside from the interview guide, the researcher also utilized informed consent form with provisions that include voluntary participation and confidentiality of information that was

explained to each informant prior to the start of the interview. After obtaining the approval of the instruments from the panel members and ethics committee, the researcher started the data collection process.

Data Collection. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focused-group discussions with identified informants. Prior approval to conduct these activities was secured from the Dean of the School of Criminal Justice Education via formal letter request. Following approval, informed consent forms were distributed and explained to participants, ensuring voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted in a language familiar to the informants and held in their residences to maintain privacy. Each session was documented through audio recordings and field notes, which were later transcribed and translated. To ensure accuracy and reliability, the audio files were preserved and made available for verification by examiners or panel members

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis in qualitative research is the main approach to analyze data. Research requires rigorous methods for data analysis; this requires a methodology that can help facilitate objectivity. For this study, the researcher used Colaizzi's method in analyzing the data. With this methodology, significant statements that relate to the phenomenon under study were extracted from transcripts. Then, formulated meanings were derived from significant statements, and these formulated meanings were organized into clusters of themes. Next, the researcher integrated all the resulting ideas into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This was achieved by combining all the cluster themes, emergent themes and formulated meanings into a description to create an overall structure. Lastly, findings were reduced to avoid repetitions and to make a clear and concise description of phenomenon (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021).

Ethical Considerations. This study adhered to established ethical standards to safeguard

participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. Informed consent was obtained after clear explanation of objectives, methods, risks, and benefits, ensuring voluntary participation without coercion. Privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained through anonymization of data, with participants retaining full control over the information they chose to disclose. Questions were carefully designed to avoid triggering anxiety or distress, particularly given the heightened pressures of board exam preparation during the pandemic. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty, and their autonomy was respected throughout. The research complied with national and international guidelines, ensuring ethical acceptability while generating accurate and meaningful insights into graduates' experiences.

Trustworthiness of Research. The credibility of this study was ensured by grounding findings in the lived experiences of graduates during pandemic. Participants reviewed interpretations to confirm accuracy, while comprehensive descriptions of the research environment, participants, and results allowed readers to assess transferability to similar contexts. Detailed documentation of methodology, data collection, and analysis supported auditability and replication. Conclusions were strictly based on participant data, minimizing researcher bias. Direct quotations were incorporated to substantiate findings, ensuring interpretations remained firmly rooted in the authentic voices and experiences of the informants.

Bracketing and Reflexivity. The researcher practiced reflexivity by setting aside personal preconceptions and assumptions to focus exclusively on informants lived experiences. This approach fostered an authentic understanding of graduates' perspectives, allowing their voices to emerge without interruption. Throughout the process, the researcher critically considered her role, potential biases, and influence on data collection and interpretation, ensuring transparency and minimizing undue impact.

Data analysis was firmly grounded in the informants' own views and interpretations, reinforcing the credibility and authenticity of the findings.

RESULTS

The gathered data from the informants were comprehensively reviewed and thoroughly evaluated to get the descriptive substance of sentiments from the informants' experiences. Significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts and given formulated meanings. Similar formulated meanings were clustered together to form cluster themes, then emergent themes were generated from these concepts. These emerging themes addressed the study's problems, specifically the informants' experiences in preparing for the licensure examination during the pandemic, the coping strategies they employed to address encountered challenges, and the overall impact of the pandemic on their preparation.

In the process of thematic analysis, nine (9) emergent themes were developed. Five (5) emergent themes described the experiences of the informants, in which two (2) emergent themes described their positive experiences and three (3) described their negative experiences. Furthermore, two (2) emergent themes described the informants' coping to address the challenges encountered and lastly, two (2) emergent themes described the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their preparation for the board examination.

Experiences of the Informants in the Preparation for Board Examination during Covid-19 Pandemic. The first problem this study explored was the experiences of the informants in their preparation for board examination in the pandemic period. It was ascertained that there were positive and negative experiences.

Positive Experiences. The following are the emergent themes generated and described as the positive experiences of the informants in their preparation for board examination during pandemic.

1. **Strong Support System.** The strong support system to the graduates from their family, friends, and most especially from the review center they enrolled in is very crucial in their preparation for the board examination during pandemic. This helped them to be motivated not only in their preparation but to pursue their dream profession. Informant 1 shared his positive experience with the review center he enrolled in during pandemic:

Ang ako lang makuan sa mga positive experiences Maam sa akong usa ka review center is bisag lisod sa pandemic, ang ilang review center nakapangita gihapon ug way nga dili nimo mafeel nga mayda pandemic like regular days la nga kuan (IDI1:SS1). (The positive experience that I can share about my first review center is that they find a way like it was no pandemic. We didn't feel there was a pandemic, it feels just like regular days).

Informant 20 also shared his experience with the lecturer in his review center:

During sa review classes, ang review class is online... Pero di sya bitin sad ug damo sad ka mabaluan na topic kang maminaw ka... Naa silay lecturer na dati sad moassist sa mga reviewee na ma challenge sad sa time sa schedule na giset nila (FGD12:SS362). (Our review classes were online, but it was worth it because you can learn many topics if you will just listen. They also have lecturers that would challenge us with the time or schedule they set).

Because of the challenges during pandemic, some of the lecturers made sure to give adequate knowledge and support to the reviewees while they prepare for the board examination. Aside from the support given by the review centers, the support from the family and relatives was also crucial especially during the pandemic where unprecedented stressors were present. Informant 8 shared his experience about it:

Pag graduate nako ato Ma'am, katong mga nagsupport sa akona na mga cousins nako,

nagpasalig man sila sa pagreview...nagpasabot ko sa ilaha nga bisan ang sa review center nalang ang tabangan kay sa akoang personal nga needs, pagkaon, ing-ana...ako nala mangita ug paagi...kahit papaano, naa man mi didtoy mga kabilin sa parents namo...na pwede maging source of income...so mao to sya nga income ato, akong pagkaon, ana...then sila sa review center nako...so far financially, murag okay ra kato nga time...kay wala gyud koy problema (IDI8:SS1640). (My cousins who supported me during college assured to support me for my review center and I would be the one to find ways in supporting my needs. Somehow, I had my parents' inheritance, so I used it as my source of income for my needs like food. So far, financially, I didn't have any problem).

- 2. Independence and Time Management.** One of the positive experiences of the graduates is that they learned to become independent and were able to manage their own time while they prepare for the board examination during pandemic. Informant 4 shared his positive experience about it:

Siguro ang akong pinakapositive nga nakuan ana Maam kay wala man koy review center, kapot nako ang oras ug kanus-a ko ganahan magstudy makabasa ko kung kanus-a nako gusto (IDI4:SS62). (For me Ma'am, the most positive thing since I didn't enroll to a review center, I handled my own time. I could study and read anytime I want).

Informant 13 also shared that this was also one of her positive experiences, handling own's time in reviewing for the board examination.

Ang positive nako na experience during sa pag review kapot nimo ang oras..... mao nah ang pinakapositive na experience kay ikaw rah magbuot sa imo. Maayo pod sya kay para di hassle sa imong time (FG5:SS222). (The positive experience that time was, I hold my time, so I could set my own schedule for my review).

Informant 10 also shared how favorable the pandemic situation was on her part as she chose the online platform to review and while she was reviewing, she had the opportunity to work and have her own income to support herself in preparing for the board examination.

Sa amoang gienrollan na review center pwede ka moadto ug face to face or either mag online raka. Mas ok sya mas advantage toh para sa akoa labi na working ko ...tapos sa online same rah sa face to face pero mas damo sa online ilang instructions and lectures (FGD2:SS186). (In the review center that we enrolled, you could have either face-to-face or online. It was advantage on my part because I was working and there were more instructions and lectures in online than in face-to-face).

Negative Experiences. Aside from the positive experiences, the informants also encountered negative experiences as they prepared for the board examination. These experiences were as follows:

- 1. Mismanagement of the Review Centers.** Despite the efforts made by some review centers in helping the graduates in their preparation for the board examination, some graduates also encountered mismanagement by some review centers including the review class schedules. This is proved by the statement of Informant 2:

Mufollow up mi nga, "Maam, when ang kuan...kanang ang atong klase?" Oo...schedule nga magkuan unya muingon napod sila nga, "maghuwat-huwat lang ta kay atong instructor kuan pa...oo...di pa available... kanang naa pa sila sa lain nga review center...ana. unya muingon nga, "sige ngari lang mo"...pero magquiz lang mi. tagaan rami nilag mga kanang...questions answeran namo (IDI2:SS29). (We still need to follow-up them regarding our schedule then they will just tell us to wait for the availability of the instructor because the instructor is still at the other review center. Then sometimes,

they will just tell us to go to the review center but we will just have a quiz, they will give us questions to answer).

The statement of Informant 19 described the inconsideration of some review centers to the reviewees when it comes to the payment, even if it was during the global crisis:

Ang akong sad ma'am negative experience sa payment sad kay di ka proceed sa teaching kung dili ka makabayad ug full. Kay kaditong ako kay partial lang sya, tungod kay pandemic nya problem ang financial wala ko kabayad gitangal ko sa final list sa enrolled para makaproceed sa uban (FGD11:SS342). (My negative experience was also about the payment. We cannot proceed with the review if we cannot fully pay. I only paid partial that time because it was pandemic and financial was a problem, so I was removed from the final list of enrollees who can proceed to the other materials or lectures).

Informant 15 also shared his negative experience about the delay of the delivery of their review materials:

... and then the delivery time of notes from Luzon to Visayas it takes time about two weeks nareceive ang mga notes. Nakapagfull payment nako sa first week sa May ning abot sa ako is second week to third week duol nalang ang exam (FGD7:SS258). (The delivery time of the notes from Luzon to Visayas would take time like about two weeks. I fully paid on the first week of May, but I received my materials on the second or third week when it was almost the conduct of the examination).

- 2. Internet and Technical Difficulties.** Adapting to the new mode of learning, which was online, also gave challenges to the informants in their preparation for the board examination. This was the challenge encountered by Informant 7:

Ang negative na akong na experience Ma'am is katong sa signal bitaw ...kay sa among

lugar kuan man, medyo sudlunon man sa highway...unya hinay ang signal, wa pajod koy Wi-Fi...data-data lang ko ato unya hinay gyud...naay time Ma'am nga magZoom, mag lecture, magawas rako ug kalit...unya mubalik ko Ma'am, behind na kaayo ko (ID17:SS137). (The signal was my negative experience that time, Ma'am. Because our house is located far from the highway, so my signal was weak, and I just only used data since we didn't have Wi-Fi. There were times that if I attended our Zoom meetings, I would suddenly log out and if I logged in again, I was already behind).

This was also supported by the statement of Informant 20:

Online review man ko ma'am ang problema nako kay akong cellphone... Then akong cellphone kay full storage... Naay times na mag hung ako napod sya ioff para marefresh lang gyud sya. Tapos muhatag mana sila ug link so step by step na pod kog balik tapos medyo langay ko. Dali rah sad malowbat kini. Mao ni akong bad experience ma'am (FGD12:SS370). (My review was online Ma'am and my problem that time was my cellphone because it already has a full storage. There were times that it would buffer, so I would turn it off just to refresh it then I would repeat their step-by-step process again. The battery also was weak, so that was my bad experience Ma'am).

The difficulties with the internet connection and technicalities experienced by the graduates caused the next emergent theme which is mental strain.

- 3. Mental Strain.** Due to the adjustment of the graduates to the new mode of learning, some of them experienced mental strain which affected their preparedness to take the board examination. This theme was supported by the statement of Informant 3:

Sa pagtake nako sa...during I'm taking the board exam, lisod kaayo kay tungod na-adapt nako ang bag-o nga pamaagi sa pag review

kay tungod online. sa time sa nga nagtake nako sa exam, aduna gyud mga doubt gyud sa akong kaugalingon kay tungod kulang ko sa preparation or kulang pod ko sa knowledge nga akong nahibaw-an kay tungod sa pamaagi sa klase kay na-adapt naman nako ang online classes. So difficult gyud kaayo nga sa akong pagtake ug exam...kay medyo kuwang or kuwang gyud kaayo sa preparation (ID13:SS53). (When I took the board exam, I got a hard time because I have adapted the new way of reviewing since it was online. I doubted if I can pass the exam because for me, I lack preparation and knowledge because of the new mode of learning. It was difficult for me because my preparation was not enough).

Informant 6 also shared his experience of how pressured he was when he took the examination because they were the last batch to take the exam before R.A. 11131 will be implemented. The pressure he felt made him worried:

Kuan siguro Maam kauban na diha ang pressure siguro Maam... Oo, pressure kay kanang kami man gud ang last nga...last batch nga...kumbaga kadto nga board exam mao to ang pinakalast nga kanang dili pa makaabot sa R.A. 11131 Maam... so pressure para sa amoa, gibuhad jod namo tanan ato nga makapasar kay ug mabagsak mi, ma under naman mi sa R.A. 11131 so mao to Maam, pressure (ID16:SS117). (Maybe, pressure is included Ma'am because we were the last batch to take the exam before the R.A. 11131 will be implemented. So, we really did our best during review because we didn't want to fail and we feel pressured because of that).

Coping with the Challenges Encountered by the Informants in the Preparation for Board Examination during Covid-19 Pandemic. The second problem this study explored was the coping strategies made by the informants to address the challenges they encountered while they prepared for the board examination during pandemic. As mentioned, there were 2

emergent themes developed to describe their coping strategies.

1. **Adaptability and Resilience.** Due to the restrictions implemented during pandemic, the graduates adapted to the new mode of learning which is online. Adapting to the new mode of learning somehow helped the graduates to cope with the absence of the traditional face-to-face review classes since it lessened their expenses especially when it was the time of a global crisis. Informant 8 shared that:

Ah yes Ma'am, affordable ra kaayo...syempre kung online less lang kay naa raman ka sa balay unya expenses nimo dako na gyud kaayo ug deperensya unlike sa face-to-face magrent paka, mudayo paka. Then less gyud kaayo, dako jod ug savings kay ga-online nala, naa ra sa balay (ID18:SS153). (Yes, Ma'am it was affordable since it was online. Your expenses would be lesser because you would just stay in your house rather than in face-to-face that you needed to travel to be in the review center).

When the graduates adapted online learning while they review for the board examination, they looked for ways to cope with the internet difficulties to still learn despite the challenges. Informant 7 shared:

...mao na lage to nga mumata ko ug kadlawn kay kusog man ang signal ana inig ka kadlawn Maam unya ako ng idownload kay paspas man ang downloading speed. Mao rato akong pamaagi Maam, idownload nako unya inig ka buntag, by schedule mana among klase Maam, naay time nga wala miy klase, mao na ang time akong pagreview, ireplay nako (ID17:SS141). (So, I would just wake up early in the morning because the signal is strong, the downloading speed is fast. I would download the lectures then in the morning, if we didn't have class schedule, I would replay the recorded lecture).

2. **Faith and Prayer.** During pandemic, one of the most coping mechanisms the informants

have done is to have faith and to pray. Having faith and prayer helped them overcome the challenges they faced. Informant 8 shared how this coping helped him to overcome his doubtfulness:

...unya ampo sa Ginoo... kadto nga time man pod gud murag syempre naa koy kuan sa akong kaugalingon, murag wa koy gana ba pero...kay mura ba ug wa koy kompyansa sa sarili pero nag ask kog sign sa Ginoo nga kuan...kung para gyud ni sa akoo nga degree, makapasar ko even one take lang. Oo, nangayo kog sign nga para ba gyud ni sa akoo...then if makapasar ko, ipursue gyud nako ang kuan kay murag sign naman na syempre diba...gitagaan gyud ta ug kuan sa Ginoo...mao nato sya (IDI8:SS155). (Then I also prayed to God. That time, I doubted myself because I lost interest, and I didn't have confidence. I just asked sign from God that if this degree was for me, He would let me pass the exam in one take. I could pass the exam; I would pursue it, and He gave it to me).

This was also supported by the statement of Informant 14:

Although damo ug struggles, I was praying that na mopasar even ang review naay mga adjustments. Pero I was also reviewing while praying ko to guide me hangtod exam ma'am (FGD6:SS237). (I was praying that I could pass that even if I had adjustments during review and faced many struggles. I was reviewing and praying for guidance until examination, Ma'am).

Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Preparation for Board Examination of the Informants. The last problem that this study explored was the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the preparation of the graduates for the board examination. Two (2) emergent themes were developed to describe this problem.

1. **Uncertainty and Anxiety.** Due to the crisis brought by the pandemic, the financial struggles faced by the informants that time

affected their mental well-being and made them confused to pursue for their dream profession, especially that the board examination was postponed for several times at that time. Informant 2 supported this theme by stating that:

Dako siya ug impact kay ug wa...makahuna-huna jod mi diato Maam nga ug...ug wa to mapostpone ang mga exam siguro...syempre sa kuan...fresh pa ang mind ato... Tingali ug kanang...nakapasar na...wa sabti. Kadtong pagfirst kuan ato sa board exam...pasar...ana ba pasar mi tanan unya siguro karon...naa nami tanan sa...kanang...men in uniform. ug wa siguro muabot ang pandemic, maayo na siguro mi ug career...mga men in uniform na siguro... Wapa ma kuan ang mga huna huna...labi na diadtong kuan...ang iba, trabaho...trabaho na dayon kay kanang pandemic, way kwarta...way ikasupport sa review (IDI2:SS42). (It has a big impact because we realized that if the first board exam schedule was not postponed, and our minds were still fresh, maybe we already passed the board exam. Maybe by now, we are already men in uniform, and we already have our own careers. Our minds would still not confuse because some of us were working already because it was during pandemic, and the money that time was tight and cannot support for review).

The pandemic also affected the informants by giving them anxiety of getting infected by the virus while they prepare for the board exam. Informant 13 gave a statement about it:

... nya ang pangduha bahin sa mental kay negative effect sya sa akoo tungod kay damo nag ingon na once mahawaan ka madali lang imong kinabuhi. Kung sa ako pa nakapahadlok sya nako ma'am nadugngan akong stress tungod sa pandemic. Nahadlok ko ato ug take kay baka ba matakdan ko adto sa review center. Mao lang toh ma'am (FGD5:SS235). (Secondly, it has a negative effect on my mentality because I was scared to be infected that time since many have said that it could cause to death. I was confused

to take the exam that time because I was scared to get infected in the review center, that's all).

2. Insufficient Learning and Experience. This theme was also developed from most of the answers of the informants. Because of the restrictions during pandemic, they lack learning and practical experiences since they were in their 3rd or 4th year in college when the lockdown was implemented and the learning modality that time was through online. Missing the in-person education in their senior years affected their preparation for the board exam since most of the professional subjects were taught in these year levels. Informant 6 shared:

...especially kay kami nga batch naabtan man mi ug pandemic unya kadtong time sa pandemic Maam kay kuan man gud to, dili jod ingon nga proper jod ang education ato... kumbaga online tanan so bale ato nga time instead nga review nalang, murag balik jod unta... kumbaga studyhan jod namo to nga wa namo natakple ug maayo katong 4th year mi (ID16:SS108). (...especially that our batch was affected by the pandemic, and during that time, the education was likely not proper. So, instead that we should only review, we had begun from the very start during review for those that we haven't tackled during our 4th year in college).

Informant 5 also shared her sentiment about how they haven't experienced on-the-job training on which they could also gain knowledge that could help them prepare for the board examination. Their lack of practical experience made them uncertain for their profession in the future:

Sa OJT, muadto mi sa police station pero mangayo rami Maam ug sample sa katong mugshot-mugshot...mao rato Maam ning adto ra mi ug police station para lang ato. Mao ng nakaingon nalang mi nga puhon diay nuh mura rata ug walay alamag pahimuon ta ani wa ta kasabot ug unsaon (ID15:SS105). (In our OJT, we would just go to the police

station just to ask for a sample like mugshots. We would just go to the station just for that. Then we realized that someday if we are already working, we didn't learn anything, if they will tell us to do this, we wouldn't know how to do it).

DISCUSSION

The findings emphasize the necessity of support systems in ensuring that criminology graduates are prepared for licensure examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic. Peer collaboration, institutional assistance, and emotional support were crucial in maintaining motivation, confidence, and persistence despite the disruption of traditional review techniques. Simultaneously, self-regulation abilities, particularly independence and time management, emerged as essential competences, allowing graduates to adapt to online learning environments and continue their preparation in the face of uncertainty.

However, the findings also indicated systemic constraints that hampered licensure preparation. Ineffective review program administration, as well as weak institutional capacity to adapt to virtual modes, revealed gaps in resource allocation and education. These difficulties were worsened by unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to digital tools, showing the continued existence of the digital divide. Such challenges affected examinees' confidence, preparedness, and perceived exam performance, emphasizing the need for improved technology infrastructure and institutional support.

Another notable result of pandemic preparation was mental stress. Graduates reported increased anxiety, interrupted study patterns, and emotional isolation, which is consistent with previous research on crisis-induced academic stress. Despite these demands, many examinees demonstrated adaptation and resilience by using coping techniques such as flexible learning approaches and relying on spiritual practices such as faith and prayer to manage stress and maintain hope.

The disruption of practical training emerged as a major concern, especially in a practice-oriented profession like criminology. Limited practical experiences linked to perceived competency gaps and decreased confidence in licensure examination and professional preparedness. This conclusion emphasizes the significance of institutional interventions that include alternate practical learning modalities, such as simulations and guided mentorship, during times of limited physical engagement, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the findings highlight the importance of a coordinated, multi-level approach to licensure preparation during crises. Graduates have to employ flexible, self-directed learning methodologies supported by digital resources and peer networks, while institutions and regulatory agencies must offer equal access to technology, mental health services, and adaptive review programs. Strengthening such measures is important for ensuring justice, resilience, and competency in licensure exam results during both emergency and post-crisis situations.

Author contributions. Karlotte Mae M. Paquiz – conceptualization, introduction, methods, data gathering, data analysis, results, institutional ethics, discussion, references; Paulino V. Pioquinto – conceptualization, abstract, data analysis, institutional ethics, discussion, references.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding source. This research received no external funding.

Artificial intelligence use. AI-assisted language editing was performed using Quillbot; authors reviewed approved all content.

Ethics approval statement. This research was approved by the University of Cebu Academe Research Ethics Committee, with approval number: GS (1)-2024-03-083.

Data availability statement. All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript and its supplementary materials.

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