

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST RESPONDERS IN CAPUTATAN NORTE DURING YOLANDA'S WRATH

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore and describe the meaning of the lived experiences of first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's outrage. This study will utilize Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach to discover and understand the true essence of the lived experiences of first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's rage (Wilson, 1987). The study was conducted in Barangay Caputatan Norte which has been badly hit by typhoon Yolanda. After the analysis of data utilizing Colaizzi's strategy, four clustered themes emerged (Shosha, 2012). Those were AWARENESS; PREPAREDNESS; INITIATIVE and ACCEPTANCE. As natural calamity arises in a certain area, the involvement of leaders and other key persons is very important. It is best to have people who will be taught on the proper disaster risk management, thus, they will be the one to help in stabilizing or pacifying the situation if an earthquake, typhoon or any other natural calamities arise. First responders to these kinds of events should be established in every area there is in the country.

Keywords: *Responders, Yolanda, Wrath*

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Background and Rationale of the Study

The Typhoon Yolanda is considered as a powerful storm ever recorded in Philippines area. The storm killed thousands of people, caused sufferings to thousands of individuals, life-threatening or life-altering physical injury. As estimated 9.5 million people are in immediate need of shelter, food, clean water, clothing, or other life essentials due to widespread destruction of homes and local infrastructure. In addition to the storm's initial, "primary" victims, countless others may also experience distress even though their exposure to the disaster is less direct (Sormanti & Yoshioka, 2013).

The first responders are bravely engaged in risky rescue operations in supporting individuals, families and communities as they manage the impact of the devastation and strive towards improved outcomes. Yet, despite increased attention to disaster response and preparedness efforts at local, national, and international levels, harmful psychological and relational consequences are commonplace. But there are

evidence of breathtaking human strength, capacity, and responsibility, always tipping the imbalance back in the direction of survival and growth (Sormanti & Yoshioka, 2013).

As there is significant diversity of vulnerabilities, stresses, and resources within and across sub-groups of a population, every individual and community may be at risk for the deleterious effects of disaster (Sormanti & Yoshioka, 2013). This does not exclude the first responders most of which are community dwellers themselves who preferred to be exposed to heightened risks for the common good.

At the height of the "monster" typhoon's wreckage, the challenges posed to the first responders to get aid to survivors were enormous. Even well-prepared and experienced emergency responders hardly made their way to the devastated site owing to damaged infrastructure, electricity and communication lines.

Therefore lived experiences highlighting vulnerabilities and heroism among first responders are remarkable as they managed to wage the catastrophe along with the survivors. However, there is very

inadequate literature available to understand the meaning of the lived experience of the first responders. Hence, it is on this premise that the study is anchored upon to serve as benchmark in addressing emerging health care needs of the first responders following a disaster.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to explore and describe the meaning of the lived experiences of first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's outrage.

Significance of the Study

Since the first responders' experiences are vulnerable during the height of Typhoon Yolanda this study will serve as benchmark in addressing emerging health care needs of the first responders following a disaster.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND STUDIES

It has been observed that the Philippines is a country that is prone to several natural calamities such as earthquakes and typhoons. Dungo (2015) noted that the Philippines is a tropical country and the weather is moderate – usual half of the year is sunny and almost half is rainy. Actually, it is one of the top countries where people chose to retire; no snow, no long winter, no cold season. On the contrary, the Philippines is also a country that is frequently visited by several typhoons and tropical depression each year. Recently, the country has been visited by what is considered to be the first super typhoon that had ever hit the country. It is called Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda).

The horrific statistics emerging from the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Yolanda were—thousands dead, millions displaced, uncountable number of homes, schools, and businesses destroyed. Ultimately, the tragedy is unique. Disaster violence and social resilience are extraordinarily noted. Digging up of water pipes and looting among others were resorted to for self-preservation. Washed-out roads and already difficult travel conditions have predictably hampered rescue efforts (Katz, 2013).

Much is expected from the first responders. Responders should also always be honest with their donors, letting them know if they actually have experience in the place

they want to work (or even have people on the ground). Donors and reporters should collect the information regarding budget allocation for revival of situation and how much money they really need to do it. Above all, responders should be accountable to the people they promise to help and always adhere to that primary principle: First do no harm. But it has been noticed that things do not happen in this manner (Katz, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized Edmund Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach to discover and understand the true essence of the lived experiences of first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's outrage. The approach attempts to understand the structures and importance of how first responders viewed the nature and quality of their experience (Wilson, 1987). The study was conducted in Barangay Caputatan Norte which has been badly hit by typhoon Yolanda. Ultimately, a multi-faceted, complex and substantial description of the first responders-to-community-members' interaction and experience will be studied in the present study.

One of the important assumptions of Husserlian phenomenology is bracketing in which the researchers will declare and subsequently set aside personal biases, assumptions and presuppositions (Gearing, 2004). Hence, the researchers intend to keep what is already known about the description of the phenomenon separately from informants' description. Expectedly, in this manner researchers commit to maintain objectivity of the phenomenon, hence, will refrain from imposing any personal assumptions throughout the data collection process so as to gain insight into the universality of the essence of the phenomenon being investigated.

Research Locale

The study will be conducted in Barangay Caputatan Norte which has been badly hit by typhoon Yolanda.

Research Informants and Sampling Technique

Research informants will be the first responders at the time of disaster who voluntarily consented to be part of the study. The number of informants will be determined after reaching data saturation point. The informants will be identified primarily through

snowball sampling technique.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Researcher-made interview guide will be utilized to capture the essence of the lived experiences of the first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's devastation.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data gathering will be done solely by the researchers through semi-structured one-on-one interview of the informants using pre-prepared interview guide. The informants will be afforded the opportunity to elaborate their responses freely using their own vernacular. Follow will be done whenever deemed necessary. Prior consent will be sought regarding the use of audio-recorder to document the details of the expressed thoughts and feelings of the informants and will be substantiated with data through direct observations, field notes and field diaries. The duration of the interview will be for 30-45 minutes per informant at a time and venue mutually agreed upon. At the end of each interview, the researchers reminded the informants about the need for a second contact either by phone call or personally to discuss the study findings do ensure that the study findings reflect their own experiences. The level of data saturation will be determined by the project leader and by the consensus among the team leader and member researcher. The whole interview process will be transcribed. The eventual transcripts will be double-checked by an external researcher who has experience in qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis, as cited by Shosha (2012), will be employed in extracting, organizing and analyzing narrative data set. The following steps will be pursued:

Step 1: Each transcript was read and re-read several times in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. At this point, any thoughts, feelings and ideas that will arise by the researcher due to prior knowledge with disaster experience will be added to the bracketing diary. This will enable the researchers to explore the phenomenon as experienced by the research informants themselves.

Step 2. For each transcript, significant statements and phrases that pertain to the phenomenon under study will be extracted from each transcript. These statements

must be recorded on a separate sheet and coded based on their "transcript, page and line numbers." After extracting the significant statements, the researchers will come together to consensus.

Step 3. These significant statements are then analyzed. Each underlying meaning will be coded in one category as they will reflect an exhaustive description. Researchers compared the formulated meanings to maintain consistency of descriptions.

Step 4. When agreed-upon formulated meanings was sorted into categories, clusters of themes and single themes. Each clustered theme was coded to include all formulated meanings related to a group of meanings. Then, group of clustered themes that points to a particular issue was incorporated together to form a distinctive construct of theme. The researchers ensured that the formulated meanings should belong to one theme only that is distinguished in meaning from other structures. Comparison of clustered themes among the researchers was done thereafter to check the accuracy of the overall thematic map along with having assistance from the expert researcher in qualitative research.

Step 5. The findings of the study were integrated into exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. After merging all study themes, the whole structure of the lived experience of first responders at the height of typhoon Yolanda's devastation was collected. Then, they will seek an expert researcher who reviewed the findings in terms of its comprehensiveness to provide sufficient description and to confirm that the exhaustive description reflects the perceptions of the informants.

Step 6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. At this stage, a reduction of findings will be done in which repeated, misused or overestimated descriptions will be eliminated from the overall structure.

Step 7. Finally, validation of the findings using "member checking" technique was done. This was undertaken personally by going back to the informant or through a telephone call so as to discuss the results as well as to seek to compare with the informants the researchers' descriptive results with their experience and thus secure their approval. The eventual transcripts will be double-checked by an external researcher who has experience in qualitative research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Results and Discussion:

After the analysis of data utilizing Colaizzi's strategy, four significant themes emerged from the shared experiences of the participants being involved in this study. The four clustered themes that emerged were: AWARENESS: Before and After its Aftermath; PREPAREDNESS: Plan, Prepare and Mitigate; INITIATIVE; ACCEPTANCE: Realizing that Life Goes On. This study enlightens our minds that survivors start to live again. In time, they begin living a new life, believing that life is worth living and that most of all, despite tragedy life goes on. The effect of a disaster or traumatic event goes far beyond its immediate devastation. Just as it takes time to reconstruct damaged houses, it takes time to grieve and rebuild our lives. Life may not return to normal for months, or even years, following a disaster or traumatic event. There may be changes in living conditions that cause changes in day-to-day activities, leading to strains in relationships, changes in expectations, and shifts in responsibilities. These disruptions in relationships, roles, and routines can make life unfamiliar or unpredictable.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1. AWARENESS: Before and After its Aftermath

The key to reducing loss of life, personal injuries and damage from natural disasters is widespread public awareness and education. People must be made aware of the natural hazards they are likely to face in their own communities. They should know in advance what specific preparations to make before an event, what to do during earthquake, flood, fire or other likely event, and the actions to take in its aftermath. Equally important are the public officials and the media-television, radio and newspapers. They must be fully prepared to respond effectively, responsibly, and speedily to large-scale natural emergencies. They need to be aware, in advance, of procedures to follow in a crisis that threatens to paralyze the entire community they serve, and they need to know how to communicate accurate information to the public during a natural disaster.

Special efforts must also be made to reach and plan for the care of particularly vulnerable segments of the population- latch-key children, the elderly, individuals

in health care and correctional facilities, and people with disabilities with information about possible disasters and what to do in an emergency.

According to the participants:

Before the typhoon arrived we went to my father's place who was the barangay captain before. (SS2, Participant 1)

When the world gets gloomy and dark we were informed ahead of time that this typhoon is very strong, so we were forced to go to our neighbor but the wind was already strong at that time. (SS1, Participant 5)

We were informed by the barangay councilor that we have to vacate and evacuate to the barangay hall. (SS1, Participant 4)

Theme 2. PREPAREDNESS: Plan, Prepare and Mitigate

Essential preparedness comprises of planning and mitigation to ensure that historic properties are properly identified, evaluated and treated immediately after a disaster, during the recovery period afterwards. While disasters may be unpredictable, important steps can be taken before a disaster occurs to minimize the threat of damage. Disaster preparedness is everyone's responsibility. Although it is important for local governments and jurisdictions to implement planning and mitigation measures before a disaster or emergency occurs, many of these measures should also be implemented proactively by local communities or neighborhood organizations or by individual owners of historic properties.

According to the participants:

That is why we asked kap if we can stay in the barangay hall together to avoid accident and prevent harm if the house will collapse.(SS2,Participant 1)

Theme 3. INITIATIVE

Initiative is all about taking charge. An initiative is the first in a series of actions. Initiative can also mean a personal quality that shows a willingness to get things done and take responsibility. An initiative is the start of something, with the hope that it will continue. Government and business personnel create initiatives all the time. You can also talk about initiative as a personal quality. A person with initiative is motivated to do things. If you take the initiative, you're willing to get things done on your own. Taking initiative can be risky.

If you do something on your own initiative, then there's nobody you can blame if it goes wrong.

According to the participants:

That is why we asked kap if we can stay in the barangay hall together to avoid accident and prevent harm if the house will collapse. (SS2, Participant 1)

When the typhoon strikes, I told them if the house will be destroyed we have no choice but to stay in the cave. (SS3, Participant 2)

It was risky to transfer since we saw the coconut trees were already swaying so we decided to stay in the house and I took the old clothes for the people to change since they were wet and felt cold. (SS3, Participant 4)

The following day, my husband picks up some galvanized iron being blown by the wind and replaced those roof of ours also being blown by the wind. (SS4, Participant 4)

Theme 4. ACCEPTANCE: Realizing that Life Goes On

Natural traumatic events are strong reminders of how vulnerable we are to the powerful unexpected forces of nature. Whether the loss of a home or the loss of loved one, sudden traumatic events shatter a person's world, destroy their familiar surroundings and upset the normal sense of safety and stability. Viewing images of destruction, waiting and worrying about safety of family and friends in these areas, have left many witnesses, observers and others feeling shaken and unsure. Survivors are left splintered, shaken and denuded. Equally damaging effects are observed among the survivors in their overall health and wellbeing after these disasters. The emotional impact of a traumatic event may be felt for years, and for many whom have lost everything—for a lifetime.

It is human nature to want to answer the questions "Why?" "Why me?" and "Why did this happen?" yet it may be impossible to ever find an answer. Asking "Why" may be counterproductive, especially when working on recovering and rebuilding. Perhaps the more worthwhile question to ask is, "How do I pick up the pieces and go on living as meaningfully as possible?" Picking up the pieces of a shattered life and finding ways to keep on living is a challenge. Many survivors discover an internal core of strength, others rely on their faith, and still others cope by making sense of or finding meaning in these events. They view the

event as a chance to be reborn, a turning point or a wake-up call in their life. In time survivors come to cope with the difficulties and the challenges, integrate the loss, and begin to rebuild a new life—a life forever change by the events. Integrating traumatic events into a new life involves giving up on old dreams and not spending a lifetime mourning about might have been. Survivors learn to accept what their life is now.

According to the participants:

What we can do since we don't have a house, I told our neighbor to build a small house to live in so they can rest and make sure the children will not get wet from the rain.(SS1, Participant 1)

The following day, my husband picks up some galvanized iron being blown by the wind and replaced those roof of ours also being blown by the wind.(SS4, Participant 4)

CONCLUSION

As natural calamity arises in a certain area, the involvement of leaders and other key persons is very important. With the consecutive occurrences of natural calamities in the country, it is best to have people who will be taught on the proper disaster risk management. Thus, they will be the one to help in stabilizing or pacifying the situation should an earthquake, typhoon or any other natural calamities arise. First responders to these kinds of events should be established in every area there is in country.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the study findings, the researchers would like to recommend the following:

1. Individuals must be better equipped with the necessary knowledge and relevant skills that will aid those experiencing the calamity or natural disaster.
2. They must develop a healthy community vision for disaster recovery. The researchers recommend that state and local elected and public officials must incorporate a vision for a healthy community into community strategic planning and disaster recovery planning.
3. They must facilitate the engagement of the whole community in disaster recovery through simplified and accessible information and training. To facilitate the engagement of the whole community in building

healthier communities after disaster, should lead an inter-agency effort centered on increasing the

accessibility and coherence of information related to disaster recovery and the provision of relevant training.

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