



Navigating the Waters of Trauma: A Multiple Case Study of the Needs and Recovery Processes in Rebuilding Lives after a Devastating Flood

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Abstract: This qualitative multiple-case study explored the lived experiences of six flood survivors, focusing on the challenges and difficulties they encountered both during and after the flood. It also emphasized their shared insights and optimistic outlooks, supporting and inspiring to those facing similar circumstances. The stories of trials and successes, drawn from in-depth interviews with participants, aimed to inspire hope, positivity, and faith in God amidst the challenges of the flood. The findings uncovered several major themes in the participants' flood experiences, which include the matchless encounter, the unpredicted occurrence, acts amid the storm, the soundless threat, the thief's shadow, and the inaudible scream. These themes provided a deeper understanding of the personal and emotional aspects of their experiences. Additionally, seven major themes were identified that shed light on the coping mechanisms the participants employed to navigate the aftermath of the flood. Further, three key themes highlight the essential lessons and insights survivors gained from their experiences. These lessons not only influence future flood preparedness, response, and recovery methods, but they also motivate and guide those who may face similar challenges in the future.

Keywords: Multiple case, experiences, coping mechanism, insights, waters of trauma, recovery processes, rebuilding lives, devastating flood.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the natural disasters, floods were the most frequent and widespread because they greatly impacted the livelihoods, safety, and well-being of people and society. It was predicted that the frequency and intensity of floods would continue to increase due to climate change [1-3]. Statistics between the years 1998 and 2017 revealed that there were already 2 billion people worldwide who were affected by floods [1], and it was expected to increase by 24% if the temperature rose by 1.5°C [4]. Over the years, disaster relief programs and recovery been

done. They were still ongoing led by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in accordance with their 2030 agenda [5].

One of the most vulnerable countries in the world when it came to floods was Bangladesh, based on the country's most exposed to floods worldwide 2023 ranking [6]. Each year in Bangladesh, thousands of people are impacted by floods, and many of them lose everything they own [7]. As such, the government of Bangladesh provided healthcare services, cash assistance, and nutritional support to vulnerable populations [8]. Similarly, Sabah, Malaysia

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had been experiencing heavy rainfall since May 20, 2021, which resulted in flooding in two districts, Beaufort and Tenom. In response, the government opened 39 temporary shelters in these districts, providing food, water, and blankets [9]. In context, global efforts and interventions focused more on resource allocation, emergency shelters, financial assistance, and public health. South Africa was also hit by the power of nature when a day's worth of rain fell in some areas, submerging highways, washing away entire roads, and cutting off entire communities from the outside world because even the main power stations were submerged. In addition, over 49 people lost their lives because of the horrific and unforgettable event, and more people were still missing, causing traumatic memories in the community [10].

This issue also resonated in the Philippines, as flooding was regarded as one of the most common climate disasters that posed several threats to the lives of the people. This was mainly due to heavy rainfall influenced by the country's geographical location within the Pacific Ring of Fire [11]. Meanwhile, the Local Government Units (LGUs) were mandated to allocate 5% of their estimated revenue to local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) funds [12]. These funds were reserved for long-term precautionary measures, including constructing stronger housing and public facilities, upgrading power lines, repairing roads, and identifying evacuation areas [13].

In recent years, the Southern part of the Philippines, particularly Davao City, had been increasingly vulnerable to the devastating effects of flooding. It had been reported by the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) that over 8,000 individuals were impacted by the floods in Davao City, caused by incessant rainfall brought about by the trough of the low-pressure area (LPA) [14]. This destructive phenomenon left victims in a state of downheartedness due to the damage and loss it caused to their valuable belongings, such as their homes, leaving them without a proper place to sleep. In a news report from GMA Integrated News, one resident shared their struggles, vividly portraying the harsh realities of the flood:

"Mahirap dahil wala na kaming bahay, ma'am. Nagpapasilong nga kami pero tumutulo. Dito lang kami (natutulog), sa gilid-gilid, basta safety ang mga bata". (It is hard because we do not have a home anymore. Our temporary shelter is leaking. We just sleep here as long as the children are safe.)

This heartfelt statement from Carlota Mike, a flood survivor from Barangay Mayo, Mati City, Davao Oriental, underscored the immense hardships due to

the loss of their home brought about by the devastating flood. However, the effects of floods extended beyond infrastructure and property destruction [15]. Consequently, local support had been provided for these flood victims. Recent reports of the flooding incidents in Davao indicated that financial assistance had been given to the victims, as endorsed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. [16]. The local authorities also supported by providing food and non-food items [17].

The reviewed literature and recent reports revealed that prior studies had extensively researched the effects of floods on people's lives, as well as the continuous support provided through flood interventions. However, there had been an insufficient record of the personal accounts of experiences or challenges on the side of the victims. In this regard, it was important to delve into their coping mechanisms for building resilience, and their personal takeaways that could serve to inspire others who were facing similar problems. Thus, first-hand information from people who had personally experienced flood events was essential.

METHODS

This study was qualitative research in nature and employed multiple case analysis. In addition, qualitative research focuses on ideas, viewpoints, and personal encounters to understand people's experiences, emotions, and behaviors in their natural settings [18;19]. This approach emphasizes the participants' ability to express emotions, thoughts, and experiences, highlighting human insights [20;21]. A multiple case study was an approach to research used to provide a more thorough understanding of a particular phenomenon [22]. In addition, it stood out as particularly favored in social research [23]. Hence, it offered researchers a valuable avenue for analyzing diverse situations, revealing commonalities and differences [24] enriching the literature with insights and providing robust evidence [22]. Its distinctive characteristics, including particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic elements, were also noted. The descriptive feature spoke of the end product, while the particularistic feature concentrated on a particular incident. The last characteristic was heuristic, using the reader's experiences to improve comprehension of a reality [25].

In conducting this study, the researchers first sought approval from the institution. Afterward, collaboration was established with local authorities in flood-prone areas of Davao City, including Matina Aplaya, Gravahan, and Bangkal. This collaboration aided in identifying potential participants who could offer valuable insights for the study and were subjected to snowballing, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. After the list of potential

participants was established, we conducted a character investigation to ensure that participants met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A formal letter of invitation was provided to all prospective participants, outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their rights as participants. Once suitable participants were identified, they were invited to an individual orientation session. This session ensured informed consent by explaining the study's goals, participant expectations, and their rights [26]. During this session, the participants were also informed about the fifty to sixty-minute interview. Additionally, participants who agreed to participate received an interview guide outlining the process and had the opportunity to address any concerns. Hence, structuring the interview with a guide allowed the researchers to be confident that all crucial questions were asked, and in-depth information was gathered on each topic [27]. Moreover, the interview guide was thoroughly evaluated to ensure it accurately gathered the essential information while staying clear, understandable, and relevant to the participants. Further, throughout the recruitment and consent process, strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained to ensure the well-being and rights of all participants. Significantly, the interview time and format were decided collaboratively to ensure participant comfort and maximize participation. In the interview proper, semi-structured interviews were utilized to obtain the information needed for the study. This type of interview involved asking open-ended questions related to the study's objectives and follow-up questions to clarify the interviewee's speech and ideas [28]. Hence, vernacular translation was included to guarantee participants' understanding of the questions. Additionally, video recordings were utilized for all participants with their permission to capture nonverbal cues along with verbal responses. Moreover, triangulation was employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. It also included a debriefing of the participants by a psychology graduate to offer support to and ensure they did not leave the study feeling distressed.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Essential Information of the Participants

Information	Anxiety	Joy	Embarrassment	Nostalgia	Sadness	Fear
Age	29	33	63	51	60	40
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F
Address	Sto. Niño, Buloso,	Prk. 2 Gravahan,	Sto. Niño,	Prk. 2 Gravahan,	Teachers' Village,	Teachers' Village,

Information	Anxiety	Joy	Embarrassment	Nostalgia	Sadness	Fear
	Bangkal, Davao City	Matina, Davao City	Buloso, Bangkal, Davao City	Matina, Davao City	Matina Aplaya, Davao City	Matina Aplaya, Davao City
Years of Residency	29	33	14	18	23	26
Number of Children	3	3	3	2	0	4
Owner of the house or renter	Owner	Owner	Owner	Owner	Owner	Owner
Number of experiences of flood up to shoulder level and above	3 times	4 times	6 times	More than once	2 times	5-10 times

The first participant, Anxiety, is a 29-year-old mother who has three children and resides in Bangkal, Davao City. She has lived in a house along the dike since birth, and up until now, they still choose to stay there even after experiencing multiple dangerous floods, three times to be exact. She currently works at a gasoline station near their place, and her husband is a part-time motorcycle mechanic. Since then, when she was a teenager, she had already seen the problem of their community, which is that they are prone to flooding. Whether it is shallow or deep, those floods still cause traumas, problems, and even diseases. However, they decided not to leave their house because it is the only one that they owned and they do not have enough money to buy or build one or to rent another place for their family.

The second case features the story of Joy, a mother of three and a 33-year-old tailor who has been a lifelong resident of Gravahan, Matina, in Davao City. Joy proudly owns the house where she lives. It was where she and her family experienced countless floods, four of them were severe and others were minor, each bringing its own set of challenges and unforgettable moments. Despite suffering significant losses of belongings and damage to her home due to recurring floods, Joy has shown remarkable resilience. She has managed to rise above these hardships, fighting through each ordeal and gaining invaluable life lessons along the way.

The third participant is Embarrassment. She is 63 years old and a mother of three. She owned a house and lived in Bangkal, Davao City, for over 14 years. During their 14 years of residing, they already experienced a lot of flooding, whether major or minor floods, however, she recalled six of them as the most devastating. There was even one time that her son was almost swept away by a raging flood because they did not expect that a simple rainstorm would cause a raging and severe flood in their area. However, decided to stay there due to financial constraints because she only relies on their small sari-sari store as a source of income.

Nostalgia, the fourth participant, a 51-year-old widow, embodies the resilience of a Manila girl transferred to Davao. For 18 years, she owned a house in Gravahan, Matina, Davao City, where she raised her two teenage children while running a small eatery. Her life, however, was irrevocably altered by the devastating floods that swept through Davao. She remembered two flood experiences that left a shoulder-high mark of water and a chilling

Commented [VJE2]: birth, and up...

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Commented [VJE4]: place, and ...

Commented [VJE5]: part-time

Commented [VJE6]: problems, and

Commented [VJE7]: her family

Commented [VJE8]: remove space before the period

Commented [VJE9]: City, for over...

Commented [VJE10]: flooding, whether **commented [VJE11]:** them

Commented [VJE12]: "raging" is a more appropriate term to use

Commented [VJE13]: ... City, where...

memory of loss. The love of her life, her husband, died due to the aftermath of the flood, leaving a gaping hole in her world. Despair threatened to drown her, but she refused to surrender. Her two children became her anchor, fueling her resilience. Her small eatery business became her battleground to survive. She served smiles, a testament of her strength and resilience, inspiring generations to come.

Sadness, the fifth participant, was a 60-year-old single woman who owned a house and a small eatery in Matina Aplaya. Her restaurant was in Teacher's Village, a neighborhood near the river. She had lived there for over 23 years, moving from her hometown of Nangkaan with her siblings to start raising pigs. They were able to purchase a place in Matina Aplaya, but her siblings eventually left the area after getting married, leaving her alone. Sadness had experienced numerous floods over the years, but certain incidents left her deeply traumatized, two to be exact. Having no choice, she still stayed.

Fear, the sixth participant, was a 40-year-old woman who had lived in Teacher's Village, Matina Aplaya for 26 years. She is a mother of four. She moved there after marrying her husband and now raised their four children in a two-story house near the dike. Her family had settled in Matina Aplaya after her mother purchased a lot there when she was young. Years later, she met her husband, and they eventually inherited the house from her husband's brother, who passed away two years ago. The family had endured countless floods, having more or less five to 10 flood experiences, water reached up to shoulder level and beyond, leaving their home in a state of muddy disarray.

CONCLUSION

The whole journey of the paper allows to see the different angles of the lives of six different personalities who are coming from diverse backgrounds but shared a common problem of flooding. They all experience not just a single time but multiple times of both tolerable and devastating flood events. In addition, they all settled there for a long time, averaging 14 years to be exact, but all of them decided to stay there and continue living there, given the fact of facing numerous floods and risking their lives and their families on the hazards and dangerous effects of floods. This study also shares the process and progress of them getting up from those times of difficulties and hardship, and the motivating and encouraging stories.

As they faced a lot of destructive floods, they encountered various unexpected flood experiences, just like when water reached above the person and even over their houses. This implies the significant role of constant preparation in lessening the vulnerability of the population living in flood-prone areas. Stocking emergency supplies such as food, medicines, and other essentials when combined with being mindful of the early signs of flood will lessen, if not eradicate, the impact of floods in every facet of their lives. Reversing the common mentality of the flood subsiding before it even rises will serve as its foundation; while staying positive and calm can strengthen the preemptive measures mentioned above.

Additionally, this indicates the essence of true humanity in the form of unity within the community. Extending a hand to those in need, especially after a huge disaster, allows one to be a channel of blessing, giving way to the creation and strengthening of relationships and connections within the community. This direct act will indirectly ignite the spirit of bayanihan, a type of Filipino culture that depicts how Filipinos help each other in times of need, in the hearts of individuals.

These realities underline the interplay between individual and collective action and the overarching systems that influence disaster response. Observing the response to these flood events reveals not only the resilience of the community but also the implicit expectations placed on structures like government agencies. These experiences subtly point to the layered needs of the affected population, where visible efforts such as infrastructural projects coexist with intangible, yet equally critical, emotional and psychological support. This underscores how

Commented [VJE14]: flood, leaving ...

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Commented [VJE16]: experiences, water reaching up to...

deeply rooted challenges extend beyond physical damage, reflecting the necessity of multifaceted approaches to sustain recovery and resilience in flood-prone areas.

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