

Narratives of the Lived Experiences of Students during Super Typhoon Rai (Odette)

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Abstract

The study explored the lived experiences of students in higher education institutions affected by Super Typhoon Rai (Odette). Using Husserl's Phenomenological design, this study interviewed 11 informants through an individual interview to get their experiences before, during, and after the typhoon. Data gathering and analysis were done using Collaizi's method which produced descriptions of the informants' experiences. The findings generated five emergent themes describing the lived experiences as unprepared, underestimated the strength of the typhoon, feeling of hopelessness, and slow government response. The themes generated described the distinctive experiences of students in higher education during a disaster. The findings will serve as benchmark and baseline data in addressing the emerging needs of people and issues during a disaster. Lastly, this can also be used by future natural disaster planners and researchers to improve response efficacy when preparing for typhoons.

Keywords: Typhoon Rai (Odette), lived experiences, higher education students, phenomenology, narratives

Introduction

Typhoons are the most prevalent natural disaster in the Philippines, causing injury, death, and property damage (Mideksa, 2021). As reported by UNICEF, the Philippines is one of the world's most dangerous countries to live in because of the various natural disasters that occur every year. Super typhoon Rai (local name Odette), badly hit Mindanao and Visayas, Philippines. On December 16, international weather monitors upgraded Typhoon Rai to Category 5, the highest level. It made landfall on December 16. Hitting areas in Visayas and Mindanao. According to PAGASA(Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) Dec 16, 2021, 8 AM report, Odette has maximum sustained winds of 165 km/h around the center, gusts up to 205 km/h, and a central pressure of 90 hPa, according to the bulletin. Odette, or Rai, saw winds of up to 230 kph, according to later data from international weather stations. The term gust, according to Pagasa, refers to "a sudden, transient rise in wind force." (inquire.net). Before exiting the Philippine area of responsibility on December 17, typhoon Rai (local name Odette) brought torrential rains, violent winds, landslides, and storm surges to the provinces of Surigao del Norte and Dinagat Islands in Mindanao, five provinces of Visayas, and the island of Palawan in Luzon (UNHCR). Moreover, According to the UN, Super Typhoon Rai, which hit the Philippines on the 16th and 17th of December, wreaked havoc in 11 of the country's 17 regions. Houses and roads were damaged, electricity lines were downed, trees and crops were ruined, and fishing boats were broken. A total of 10.8 million people are affected throughout 11 regions in 10,100 barangays or villages as of February 11, 2022. More than 133,000 people are still displaced,

with 77,000 in evacuation centers. A total of 1.9 million homes have been damaged, with 427,000 of them being demolished. According to government records, it was the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippine archipelago in 2021, disrupting the lives of more than seven million people (UN). However, there is no literature to comprehend the situation from the lens of students as residents of Surigao City and Siargao. Hence, the study is founded on this view that exploring and describing their stories and experiences can provide us with baseline data in addressing disaster issues.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of students during, at the height, and after typhoon Rai's (Odette) fury.

Significance of the Study

This study will serve as benchmark and baseline data in addressing the emerging needs of people and issues during a disaster.

Research Methodology

The study relied on Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. It is utilized to uncover true meanings by delving deeply into reality. It emphasizes the importance of focusing on people's personal experiences and interpretations of the world. That is, the researcher wants to understand how a world appears to others (Trochim, 2008). Using phenomenology, one may get a clear picture of how students experienced the storm and comprehended the significance of these events. Phenomenology, according to Husserl, suspends all presumptions, is linked to consciousness, and is founded on the meaning of an individual's experience (Reinier, 2012). Further, Descriptive phenomenology is a strategy for investigating and reporting people's lived experiences that is widely used in research in the social sciences. In an attempt to develop a philosophical technique that was distinct from natural philosophy, Husserl established phenomenology as a research method. Disciplines that could provide insight into people's experiences (Christensen, 2017).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Surigao City. The city has been hit by a typhoon which also hit many provinces in Mindanao and Visayas on Dec 16, 2021.

Research Informants

The researchers used purposive sampling with students who had been affected by Typhoon Rai (Odette). Criteria include college students, who live in Surigao City or Siargao and those who consented to participate. Saturation was attained with 11 informants. This signifies that the researchers ceased collecting data after 11 people since data analysis revealed no new information, and redundancy tells researchers that the data is saturated (Guest et al., 2006).

Data Gathering Procedure

Colaizzi's approach of phenomenological analysis was applied by the researcher. A semi-structured one-on-one interview with the researcher was used to collect data. Using the guide questions, the informants were given the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences

using the vernacular. Permission from the Student Affairs Office and from the Office of the Campus Director was sought prior to data collection. Purposive sampling was employed. Students from Surigao and Siargao were interviewed after giving their consent to the interview. The consent obtained from students prior to the interview included the audio recording of the interview. Following the conversations, the researchers conducted a follow-up interview to clarify points and obtain further information. The researcher reminded the informants of the need for a second contact, either by phone or through email. This is to ensure that the study's findings are representative of their own experiences.

Data Analysis

The researcher used Colaizzi's approach to phenomenological analysis. Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis approach is rigorous and resilient, making it a qualitative method that ensures the results' credibility and reliability. It allows academics to spot new trends and their interconnections. Researchers who use a descriptive phenomenological approach should think about how to use this method as a clear and logical way to investigate the core structure of an experience (Wirihana, 2018). Also, Colaizzi's method instructs the researcher to validate the findings by returning to the study participants, (Reiners 2012). As concluded by Wirihana (2018), Researchers who use a descriptive phenomenological approach should think about how to use this method as a clear and logical way to investigate the core structure of an experience. Hence, in descriptive phenomenology, the researcher employed Collazi's data analysis steps. Step1: Getting a sense of each transcript in general: The researcher directly conducted the interviews in the study of students' lived experience with typhoon Rai, which helped to acquire a holistic understanding of the situation referring to all of the informant's experiences. Step 2: Extracting important statements: The researcher then extracts important data, reads and re-reads the transcript to identify significant statements, Step 3: Formulation of meanings: The meanings of key statements are formulated after they are obtained. They were grouped into themes by the researcher. These clusters of themes then shrank into emergent themes, Step 4: Organizing articulated meanings into themes and themes clusters, Step 5: Integration of the findings into an exhaustive description, the researcher brings everything together in the fifth stage of analysis all of the thoughts that resulted into a thorough description of the occurrence. Step 6: Description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, Step 7: Validation of the findings from the study participants (Praveena K 2021).

Results and Discussion

The following guide questions were used in the individual interview:

1. Where were you during and a day after the typhoon?
2. Narrate to me the preparations you did before the typhoon.
3. Narrate to me your experiences during the typhoon.
4. Describe to me your feelings after the typhoon.
5. Describe to me the situation after the typhoon.

Following the data analysis, five primary themes emerged:

Theme 1 Unprepared

According to Mideksa (2021), despite the substantial effort put into public hazard education, society's disaster preparedness is low. This was evident when unanimously the informants mentioned that they did not prepare for the typhoon. No emergency tool kit and no Go Bag

for disasters. They all thought it was just like any other typhoon of the past. The preparation was just limited to the next meal if there was some sort of preparation. In terms of communication, they were all aware that it was a super typhoon but it did not push them to prepare. This was what Altavas (2015) emphasized regardless of the technology or human communication employed, the information conveyed to inhabitants must be understandable. In their case, they were all aware but disregarded the information.

“We did not prepare anything because we thought it was not that strong”

“We are not ready at that time; we just get anything we can grab because we thought it will just pass by”

Theme 2: Under-estimated the Strength of the Typhoon

People did not want to evacuate and did not understand the need for pre-evacuation preparations as one of the causes for this slow but persistent acceptance of danger. People frequently justified their refusal to evacuate by claiming that they did not want to leave their personal belongings (Altavas2015). In the study of Zhang (2017), he accentuated that property damage was the most concerning concern, followed by health and life. This was corroborated by Estebanan (2013) which was the same experienced described by the informants who experienced typhoon Rai (Odette) that despite the fact that storm surge warnings have been issued, it appears that many residents and local governments "under-estimated" the threat they figured they'd be able to leave at a later time or during the actual storm (Estebanan, 2013). This was true in the experiences of the students in which the flood during the actual storm pushed them to evacuation centers or neighbors with concrete and two-story houses. Flooding is one of the worst natural catastrophes that can result in the loss of life and the destruction of a huge number of properties and locations around the world. The lack of rain data and information in terms of time duration, the volume of rainfall, and places is a critical component that leads to major flooding. As a result, developing tools or systems to monitor rain conditions is reasonable in order to prevent losses and severe situations (Muangthong & Wangpimool 2018).

“We did not evacuate because we thought it’s not that strong and our house is concrete”

“We transferred to the evacuation center during the actual storm while the roofs are flying”

Theme 3: Feeling of Hopelessness

Natural disasters can result in the destruction of houses, neighborhoods, and personal items, as well as the death of family members and friends. When people are subjected to potentially life-threatening situations or scenarios that involve substantial loss or grief, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can affect their lives for years until they recognize the symptoms and seek help (Harwood, 2017). Informants were traumatized by what they witnessed during the storm. They thought they would die and there is no hope of surviving. An informant mentioned that after the typhoon she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a term used to describe a group of mental problems that develop slowly and last for a long time after experiencing unusual or traumatic life events. Re-experience of the trauma is accompanied by emotional irritation and avoidance behavior in the clinical manifestations (Guo, 2016). Moreover, it was a term used to describe persistent mental

illnesses in people who have been influenced by abrupt, scary, or devastating life events. Its clinical signs include reliving the trauma, as well as unstable emotion and avoidance behaviors, all of which demonstrate profound social and familial perniciousness. Psychological symptoms like sadness, anxiety, fear are some of the risk factors for PTSD (Guo, 2016). Adolescents with PTSD experienced more severe depression, internalizing, externalizing, social, thinking, and attention issues than those who did not have PTSD (Yang 2011). According to Tandoc (2016), residents were able to engage in the social construction of their experience using social media. Finally, Survivors used social media to cope with their feelings and memories by documenting — and memorializing — their experiences and plans for the future.

“I thought I would die when the entire roof of our neighbor fly towards us. I experienced trauma, I would wake up at dawn crying and would shout let’s go, let’s go. I do not want to stay in the house after the typhoon. I had a session with a psychometrician and I was diagnosed with PTSD”

“It seems there is no chance to live”

Theme 4: Complacency

The findings of Dalisay and De Guzman (2016), revealed that hesitancy to evacuate was not just attributed to hard-headedness and ignorance but, could also be attributable to other important factors and priorities. It's also because people believed in the information and techniques they were able to build through time by interacting with dangers. This was also corroborated by Tandoc (2016) on the subject of evacuations; many individuals are hesitant to leave their homes during disasters, even when they are aware that serious threats are approaching, for fear of being robbed or losing their belongings. The informants were confident that the typhoon is not that strong and it will just be another typhoon that used to hit the province and would just pass by.

“We did not evacuate before the typhoon because we thought it was not that strong. It was only during the typhoon that we evacuate. This time the water rises already and the roofs are flying We can no more see the road, and it was so dark already, though it was still 3 PM. “Our house is concrete, hence we did not evacuate, but, we were trapped because big logs were in our door already”

Theme 5: Slow Local Government Response

According to Tandoc (2016) when a catastrophic calamity strikes, people's priority is to locate their family members; this is typically a more pressing need than food or shelter. By the second or third day, they are in desperate need of basic life-saving aid, such as food, water, and shelter. People become enraged when they do not obtain the fundamental aid they require. They have every right to be enraged. I sincerely hope that the Philippines' government and the world community reflect deeply on this horrible catastrophe. I agree with Santiago (2016) that implementing cooperation arrangements between government agencies and non-governmental organizations will necessitate a paradigm shift in the government's catastrophe response (NGOs).

Further, the researcher concurred with Feris (2013) in the hope that the Philippine government and the world community reflect deeply on this horrible catastrophe.

“We received help from Local Government unit LGU only after five days already.”

“There was no equal treatment, we received help after one week, and were asked to who are we gonna vote.”

Conclusion:

This study explored the lived experiences of higher education students during a disaster particularly Typhoon Rai (Odette). The study's findings indicated that students' lived experiences were really a life waking process. Students should be aware that they are vulnerable to catastrophe and that their complacency puts their lives in peril, as evidenced by their experiences.

Recommendations

1. The need to have a psychological rescue strategy, a post-disaster psychological crisis intervention mechanism in schools.
2. Provide simple and easy-to-understand procedures, knowledge, and training for school community disaster preparedness and recovery.
3. Cooperation arrangements between government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on disaster response.
Stories from students suffering from the harshest effects of climate change should be given far greater weight in fora that decide about their future.
4. Emphasized the need for an emergency tool kit and Go Bag for disaster.

Notes

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Ethical Approval

As per ethical standards, approval has been collected and preserved by the author. Permission from the Student Affairs Office and the Office of the Campus Director was sought before data collection. Students were interviewed after giving their consent to the interview. The consent obtained from students before the interview included the audio recording of the interview.

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