

# Exploring the Disaster Resilience of Adult Survivors of Typhoon Odette

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## Abstract

Disaster resilience refers to an individual's mental and physical capacity to endure ongoing challenges while continuing to function and contribute to their community's recovery and personal well-being. This paper aims to identify and analyze the common themes of disaster stressors, coping strategies, and self-care practices among adult survivors in a local context following a disaster. Over a hundred adult participants participated in focus group discussions. Participants consisted of public school teachers and local government unit personnels from the Municipality of Del Carmen, Siargao Island in the province of Surigao Del Norte, Philippines. They participated in psychosocial interventions, training and workshops. The data gathered from the Focus Group Discussion were derived through subgroup reports and presentations to the assembly. The results highlight themes such as financial issues, work, and family as the most significant sources of stress among the adult survivors while the frequency in which themes like friends, music, and listening suggests that their self-care practices place a high value on social contacts and auditory engagement. Furthermore, the results indicate that adult survivors employ unique coping strategies, potentially influenced by cultural factors such as the support of family and friends which reflects a strong sense of resiliency among Filipino adult survivors based on the thematic analysis. Therefore, these analyses conclude that disaster resilience comes from the experiences of adult survivors including disaster stressors, coping strategies, and self-care practice.

*Keywords:* disaster related stressors, coping strategies, self-care, disaster resilience

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## Introduction

On December 16, 2021, Typhoon Rai (local name Odette) hit the Philippines, causing significant destruction in Surigao Del Norte, Dinagat Islands, Southern Leyte, and other provinces. Siargao Island, part of Surigao Del Norte, experienced extensive devastation, with 19 lives lost (IFRC, 2021). Various organizations, including the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD, 2022), the Philippine Red Cross, and Oxfam Pilipinas, provided critical aid such as cash subsidies, water, and communication items (Staff, 2021). Despite these efforts, there was a noticeable lack of mental health services for survivors.

Before leaving the Philippine area of responsibility on December 17, 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Philippines reported that Typhoon Rai struck the country, unleashing “torrential rains, violent winds, landslides, and storm surges” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). The hardest-hit regions included Surigao del Norte and Dinagat Islands in Mindanao, five provinces in the Visayas, and the island of Palawan in Luzon. The typhoon left a trail of devastation in the affected areas, particularly in Surigao del Norte, Dinagat Islands, and Southern Leyte, which were among the regions that bore the brunt of its impact (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

This study aims to gather data by documenting and studying disaster resilience through the identification of the stressors, coping strategies and self-care activities among adult survivors. It seeks to highlight the importance of psychosocial interventions vis-a-vis physical aids, focusing on mental health needs during a post-disaster. The study will also categorize and analyze these stressors, coping strategies and self-care while addressing the limited documentation on mental health assistance in the aftermath of Typhoon Odette.

The behaviors and reactions people employ to deal with stressful situations especially after upsetting events, are known as coping mechanisms. While Supe (1998) defines coping strategies as evolving cognitive and behavioral attempts to control demands regarded as overwhelming, Wechsler (1995) defines coping behavior as a response to adverse events.

Individuals handle stress in different ways, either by confronting it head-on or minimizing its consequences. The purpose of this study is to examine disaster resilience as they experienced stressors, the application of coping strategies and self-care activities used by adult survivors of Typhoon Odette and to pinpoint special significance that these mechanisms have that aren't often covered in the literature.

In this paper, the author aims to explore several key questions: What stressors do survivors experience after a disaster? What self-care activities do survivors employ to endure and recover? What coping strategies are used by adult survivors in the aftermath of a natural disaster like Typhoon Odette?

It also aims to study adult survivors' disaster resilience in the form of rooting out the stressors, coping strategies and self-care activities they engaged in following a disaster. It hopes to present the importance of psychosocial interventions following a havoc not only to physical aspects, but to every adult survivor's mental health as well. It is this gap that the author would like to address, to gather the findings, identify said stressors and coping strategies and self-care activities as well.

Adult survivors of the typhoon Odette could face an array of disaster-related stressors that have an important impact on their mental health and overall health. After such intense and difficult circumstances, various kinds of these stressors may manifest in various forms. The following are only a few: bereavement of a loved one, health problems and bodily harm, destruction of assets and means of subsistence, homelessness, displacement, psychological pain, and trauma.

### **Loss of Family Members**

It is possible for typhoons to cause the death of friends, relatives, or acquaintances. In an interview on December 19, Governor Matugas brought up the 15 locals who perished in the typhoon Odette (Catoto, 2021). For the survivors, the loss-related sadness and grieving can be a major source of stress and emotional distress.

### **Physical Injuries and Health Issues**

Physical injuries sustained by typhoon survivors can intensify stress levels and require extended recovery periods. It has been documented that recovery from injuries sustained during Typhoon Haiyan could last up to 30 months (Hugelius et al., 2017). Survivors reported experiencing pain and discomfort throughout the healing process, although these symptoms were generally not incapacitating.

### **Damage to Property and Livelihoods**

Typhoons cause severe damage to communities. According to the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), typhoon Odette destroyed over 2 million houses, damaged over a thousand infrastructures, and disrupted power, water, and communication lines in nine provinces (ADRC, 2021). The agricultural sector suffered significant losses, with over 60,500 hectares agricultural land amounting to PhP2.6 billion (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021).

Survivors faced financial difficulties and increased stress due to the loss of homes, properties, and income sources.

### **Displacement and Homelessness**

Typhoon-affected residents were typically ordered to leave their homes and relocate to safer areas that might not have been able to accommodate hundreds or thousands of families. Damaged homes cause great distress for older adults in their 40s who have invested their time and energy to build a home for their family. Survivors are unable to return to their homes, resume their livelihood, and continue with their children's education when their municipality and place of residence are partially or completely destroyed (Lavenda et al., 2017). Furthermore, it was found that among disaster survivors, the loss of basic facilities, homelessness, financial stress, and lack of social isolation significantly aggravated pre-existing common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Rocha et al, 2021).

### **Emotional Distress and Trauma**

A category 5 typhoon like Odette had an enormous impact on the survivors. They would often experience emotional distress such as anxiety, survivors' guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hugelius reports that in some cases at least half of the people who

experienced a severe typhoon had suffered from mental health problems after 30 months (Hugelius et al., 2017). Truly, the emotional impact of the disaster can persist long after the event itself.

Although numerous humanitarian organizations provide substantial assistance to address the physical needs of adult survivors, the author emphasizes the critical importance of mental health and psychosocial support. Several studies highlight the significant role of psychosocial interventions for disaster survivors. For instance, a European study by the EFPA Standing Committee on Disaster, Crisis, and Trauma indicates that adequate psychosocial intervention can help address mental health issues and foster resilience among survivors when properly applied (Dyregov & Yule, 2008). NATO's strategic preparedness model supports psychosocial resilience, which addresses the psychosocial needs, mitigates vulnerabilities, and improves mental health among survivors (NATO/EAPC, 2008).

Additionally, the use of interpersonal psychotherapy is a tolerable and safe intervention that reduces suicidal ideation, death ideation, and depressive symptoms among older individuals at risk for suicide (Heisel et al., 2015). Consequently, psychosocial intervention is crucial in applying appropriate measures to prevent further mental and emotional deterioration.

Typhoon Odette survivors may use a variety of coping mechanisms to manage the pressures previously stated. Although such strategies might vary from person to person, some typical ones are outlined below.

### ***Seeking Social Support***

Connecting with family, friends, and support groups can provide a sense of belonging and emotional comfort. According to an author published in the National Library of Medicine, "the therapeutic quality of support groups and social exchanges are at the heart of self-help group processes" (Brown et al., 2014).

Another author in ScienceDirect noted that "as psychosocial interventions, support groups and mutual aid, self-help (MASH) show a great deal in common" (Gottlieb, 2001). These groups often address similar issues, such as health concerns, role transitions, or chronic stressors, allowing participants to learn from each other's different types of support through face-to-face interactions. This helps survivors develop a strong awareness and understanding of personal and collective coping strategies. Sharing experiences and feelings with others who have gone through similar situations can be beneficial.

### ***Engaging in Self-Care Activities***

It is essential to take part in activities that boost both physical and mental well-being. According to SANE (2023), "research suggests that being compassionate towards ourselves and others helps build our confidence, increases resilience, and promotes good mental health." It involves causing a healthy lifestyle, meditating, deep breathing, and practicing other relaxation techniques, as well as taking up hobbies and getting enough sleep and rest.

### ***Establishing a Routine***

Establishing a regimented daily routine may provide a sense of security and command amidst unpredictability. Setting a schedule for everyday chores and activities might assist survivors in feeling more normal and purposeful.

### ***Seeking Professional Help***

Seeking assistance from mental health specialists may be helpful if trauma and distressing feelings continue or get worse. Effective coping skills can be developed and trauma can be processed with the help of therapies like eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).

### ***Engaging in Community Rebuilding and Volunteering***

Engaging in rebuilding and recovery-focused initiatives in the community can give one a sense of empowerment and purpose. Volunteering may contribute to the general health of the community by offering survivors a feeling of control over their circumstances.

It is important to remember that the coping mechanisms mentioned above are only ideas; they might not work for everyone. In addition to tracking stresses and identifying coping mechanisms used by adult Typhoon Odette survivors, this article also aims to identify self-care practices. As previously said, its goal is to examine the themes and points of similarity for both typical and unusual strategies for each. This is due to the fact that, depending on their individual circumstances, and level of disaster resilience, different people may prefer alternative ways that are more beneficial.

### ***Self-Care Strategies***

The ability of people, families, and communities to maintain health, avert disease, and manage illness and disability with or without the aid of a health worker is termed by the World Health Organization as *self-care*. (World Health Organization, 2024). Although taking care of oneself can be perceived as a selfish indulgence, doing so is actually very beneficial to one's general wellbeing (Bottaro, 2023). It has been observed that during the reporting of their experiences, adult survivors are able to employ their own ways of taking care of themselves. Indeed, self-care is an important aspect for individual particularly for adult survivors following a disaster because it could mitigate developing further serious mental health issues brought about by the stressors. Doing so can somehow have impacts on their general wellbeing in the long run.

### ***Disaster Resilience***

For the purposes of this discussion, “disaster” refers to any event that causes widespread harm to a community (Gilbert, 2010). By contrast, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNDRR, 2009) defines resilience as

the ability of a system, community, or society vulnerable to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions. (UNDRR, 2009)

Thus, in my own definition, disaster resilience means an ability or a state of the mind of an individual to withstand the on-going challenges while still be able to function and help rebuild his community towards recovery of one's personal disposition to go on with one's life.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Natural calamities like typhoon create a lot of hardships for people as well as the community. This theoretical framework focused on the psychological, social, and environmental aspects of coping mechanisms used by survivors of natural disasters. In order to better support survivors in their recovery process, the theoretical framework strives to inform future research, intervention efforts, and policy development.

One theoretical framework that can be applied to understanding the coping strategies of survivors of natural calamities is the Stress and Coping Theory, originally proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). This theory suggests that individuals engage in a cognitive appraisal process to evaluate the potential harm or threat posed by a stressful event, and based on this appraisal, they choose and employ coping strategies to manage the stressors as cited in by (Biggs et al., 2017).

According to the Stress and Coping Theory, there are two primary types of coping strategies: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

#### **Problem-Focused Coping**

This type of coping strategy focuses on actively addressing the practical aspects of the situation and finding solutions to the problems caused by the natural calamity.

Survivors may engage in problem-focused coping by seeking information, making plans, and taking concrete actions to alleviate the impact of the calamity. For example, they may engage in activities such as rebuilding damaged homes, restoring infrastructure, or participating in community initiatives for disaster recovery.

#### **Emotion-Focused Coping**

Emotion-focused coping strategies aim to regulate and manage the emotional distress caused by the calamity. This may involve strategies such as seeking social support, expressing emotions, engaging in religious or spiritual practices, and finding positive meaning or acceptance in the situation. Emotion-focused coping helps survivors process their feelings, reduce anxiety, and restore emotional well-being. For instance, survivors may join support groups, engage in therapy or counseling, practice relaxation techniques, or engage in creative outlets like art or music to express their emotions.

It is important to note that individuals may employ a combination of both problem- focused and emotion-focused coping strategies depending on their appraisal of the situation and available resources. Additionally, the coping strategies utilized may also be influenced by various personal and contextual factors, including cultural beliefs, social support networks, prior experiences, and the severity of the calamity.

Another relevant theoretical perspective is the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by Dr. Stevan E. Hobfoll (2017bro), which suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and

protect resources to meet their needs and cope with stressors. In the context of natural calamities, resources such as physical assets, social support, financial security, and psychological well-being may be significantly affected. Survivors may employ coping strategies that aim to restore and acquire new resources, as well as protect existing resources from further loss. This may involve seeking assistance from governmental or non-governmental organizations, engaging in income-generating activities, or developing social connections for support and collaboration (Brown et al., 2014).

In conclusion, the Stress and Coping Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory provide essential frameworks for comprehending how survivors cope with natural disasters. These theories highlight the cognitive appraisal process, the significance of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, and the influence of personal and contextual factors on coping responses. Utilizing these frameworks can aid researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in creating targeted interventions and support systems to improve the coping skills and resilience of survivors confronting natural calamities.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The methodology utilized in this study, referred to as qualitative research, was created to understand and analyze social phenomena by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting non-numerical data. The goal was to examine how adult survivors of natural disasters particularly typhoons, understand their own subjective experiences, viewpoints, meanings, and social situations in relation to disaster resilience and coping mechanisms.

The information gathered was rich and detailed, with descriptive and narrative elements. It was coded, transcribed, and subjected to theme analysis. The goal of the study was to find themes, trends, and connections in the data in order to create a comprehensive understanding of the disaster resilience coping mechanisms and self-care activities used by adult survivors of strong typhoons.

### **Participants**

Teachers from Department of Education (DEPED) and certain selected employees of the local government from Del Carmen, Siargao Island, participated. The Local Government Unit (LGU), Mayor Coro, required them to undergo psychological therapies. Principals and teachers from other divisions and locations were among the teachers that made up the group. Every participant was an adult survivor of a different gender. In accordance with ethical guidelines, the age range will be decided upon at a follow-up meeting that will also address permission to publish the results. Although the focus group discussion participants came from a variety of backgrounds, it is presumed that they were all qualified for work with DEPED and the LGU due to their degrees.

### **Instruments**

To facilitate data collection, this study developed a discussion guide consisting of open-ended questions to steer the focus group discussion. These questions were designed to elicit participants' thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. The guide was structured to flow naturally and allowed for follow-up probing questions to encourage deeper exploration of the

topic. It was prepared with the flexibility to adapt and modify the questions based on the dynamics and responses of the participants during the discussion.

### Procedure

During the psychosocial interventions training and workshop on mental health literacy for a selected group of DEPED teachers and LGU personnel in Del Carmen, Siargao Island, data were gathered through focus group discussions. Convenient data collection was made possible by this discussion, which provided an opportunity to interact with a broad group of participants who had already assembled for the training.

During the focus group discussion, participants were randomly assigned to subgroups, each led by a moderator who was knowledgeable about the research topic and capable of fostering a comfortable and respectful environment for open discussion. Participants were asked to write their responses on a chart, and later, the designated spokesperson from each group was asked to present the highlights of their discussion in a plenary session. The written responses on the charts were then coded, with emerging themes and patterns identified. A word cloud was created to highlight the key themes for each research question.

### Ethical Considerations

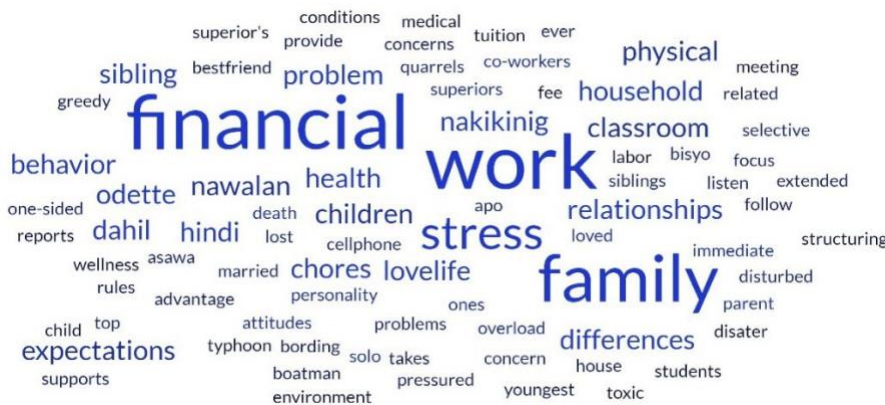
The study explicitly outlined and stated each participant's rights. It clarified that they are not required to participate in the research and may withdraw at any moment without incurring any consequences. The findings remain confidential; however, it was emphasized that no personally identifying information will be disclosed if the research is presented or publicized.

### Finding and Discussions

After conducting a survey via workshop using the following questionnaires such as what are the common stressors experienced by the adult survivors, their coping strategies and what the self-care strategies they engaged into. The author used a word cloud generator to summarize the responses of the said participants. Those responses which stemmed from their activities seem to form as part of the adult survivors' disaster resilience.

### Disaster Stressors

**Figure 1**  
*Survivors' Stressors*







interventions should aim to strengthen social networks, facilitate community engagement, and support individual coping mechanisms, ultimately enhancing the overall resilience of disaster survivors. In essence, the integration of relational support, community activities, and personal resilience strategies forms the cornerstone of effective disaster recovery and long-term well-being.

In summary, the survey reveals that some coping strategies also function as self-care activities. This overlap suggests that these strategies may intertwine over time, highlighting the individuality of each adult survivor's approach to managing stress and maintaining well-being.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion, several recommendations for further study can be proposed.

#### **Longitudinal Studies on Social Support and Resilience**

Undertake long-term research to investigate how disaster survivors' resilience and mental health are affected over time by ongoing social support from friends, family, and community activities.

#### **Impact of Community Activities**

Examine which particular kinds of community activities are best for helping disaster survivors cope while upholding their emotional health. This can entail examining variances among different disaster types and cultural contexts.

#### **Interventions to Strengthen Social Bonds**

Establish and assess programs meant to strengthen community involvement and social ties after an accident. These interventions could be created to promote contact in formal contexts, like organized group activities, as well as casual ones, like social occasions.

#### **Personalized Coping Strategies**

Examine how coping tactics can be personalized, keeping in mind that the overlap between self-care and coping activities reveals the individuality of each person's approach. Research could concentrate on creating support networks that are customized to meet the various requirements of survivors.

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### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author declares that Chat GPT, QuillBot, Microsoft Co-pilot and Grammarly were used to refine and improve sentence structure and clarity in some of the paragraphs and citations. NVIVO was used to generate the word cloud to compile and compare data. All ideas, research design, procedures, analyses, findings and discussions are derived from the author's independent study.

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