# Testimonies: Exploring Students Disasters Experience

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## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the students who experience disasters and how it effects their studies. This study explored the lived experiences and insights of the students of Misamis Occidentall Philippines in facing disasters. The study was participated by five criminology student who experience disasters such as typhoons, earthquake etc. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Interview and guide questions were used in gathering the data. The study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data and came up with four meaningful themes, namely: 1 Visual Representation of Loss and Embracing Life, 2) Underlying Emotions and Meanings in Visual Images, 3) Resonance with Broader Experiences and Challenges and 4) Personal Strengths in Embracing Life. The study concludes that the student's disasters experience is affecting their studies and mental health. The study recommends enhancing access to alternative learning modalities, such as online education platforms, can mitigate the impact of school closures.

**Keywords:** disasters experience, students, mental health, education

## INTRODUCTION

It is crucial to comprehend what happens to students during disasters for a number of reasons (Keller & DeVecchio, 2019; Ramadhan et al., 2019). First of all, research of this kind sheds light on the psychological and emotional effects of tragedies on developing brains (Guessoum, et al., 2020: Hoemann 2019). Students may experience particular difficulties, such as disturbances to their social networks, academic schedules, and general well-being. We learn more about the coping strategies students use and the long-term impacts on their mental health by exploring these experiences. It will affect their performance of the school for the reason that they are being traumatized with the disasters that they experience (Kousky, C. 2016).

Examining how students experienced disasters helps to clarify how effective the emergency response plans that are already in place in educational institutions are. (Shah et al., 2020; Murray, et al., 2019). This entails assessing the availability of support systems both during and after a crisis, as well as evacuation plans and communication protocols. To improve student safety and preparedness for future calamities, it is imperative to identify the systems' strengths and flaws. Researching students' experiences with disasters aids in the creation of focused solutions and support systems. As different people may react to disasters in different ways, it is important to customize support so that it is both effective and meaningful. (Arcaya, et al., 2020; Hoffman, 2019). This method helps children not only recuperate immediately but also develop resilience, which gets them ready for whatever obstacles they may face down the road.

Education policies and curriculum development can benefit from the understandings obtained from investigating students' experiences with disasters. (Kamil, et al., 2020; Didham, & Ofei-Manu, 2020) Including real-world instances of preparedness and resilience to disasters in the curriculum can provide students with useful information. This method promotes a culture of safety and preparedness by improving their comprehension of emergencies and giving them the tools to overcome hardship. By recording and evaluating students' catastrophic experiences, a forum is created for them to be heard. Students take an active role in the conversation about disaster preparedness and response by sharing personal stories. (Tsai, et al., 2020; Ensmann, et al., 2021). This

may result in a more inclusive and cooperative approach to developing strategies and policies, guaranteeing that the particular requirements and viewpoints of students are taken into account and given top priority.

Examining students' experiences with disasters enables us to find possible differences in how disasters affect various groups of people. Due to socioeconomic status, geography, or resource availability, some groups may be disproportionately impacted. This information is essential for creating focused interventions that cater to the unique requirements of vulnerable student populations and guaranteeing inclusive and equitable support systems (Opertti, et al., 2014).

Exploration of students' disaster experiences serves as a catalyst for fostering a preparedness culture within educational institutions. Schools and colleges can implement proactive disaster resilience measures by learning from past experiences. (Shah, et al., 2020; Sakurai, et al., 2020). Regular drills, educational campaigns, and the incorporation of emergency preparedness into the curriculum could all contribute to a more proactive and informed student body. Understanding how students cope with disasters can provide useful information to the larger community. (Afifi, et al., 2020). Students frequently serve as information conduits within their families and communities, influencing the readiness and response of those around them. As a result, learning's from studying their experiences can have a positive impact on the resilience of entire communities.

The study was conducted to understand the experiences of students in Misamis Occidental during disasters and how they coped with them. It was the aimed of the study to gather insights from students in Misamis Occidental by asking them questions related to their experiences. Through this research, we hoped to obtain the necessary answers to achieve our research objectives.

## METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological research method. It involved the process of analyzing the data from the participants of the study to obtain meaningful themes following Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This research design was suited to explore the impacts of testimonies: exploring students' disaster experiences.

Furthermore, the researchers personally retrieved all the fully completed answers from the participants. The data gathering process was expected to take place in one to two weeks.

The participants of this study were the 5 residents of Misamis Occidental, Philippines ages 18 years old above. These participants are purposively chosen by the researcher because they are the people who experience such disaster to answer the questions provided by the researchers in exploring student's disasters experience.

Ethical standards were always observed by the researchers. The researchers observed Data Privacy in the entire process of the study and adhered to the guidelines set by the Republic Act No. 10173, known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012." The participants' names and other non-essential information were always kept private and confidential throughout the entire process. The researchers also strictly observed the voluntary participation of all the participants involved in the study. The interview was not carried out without their consent, which was obtained by having them sign a consent form prepared by the researchers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 5 students participated in the study through a face-to-face interview. The participants' ages range from 18 years old and above. All of them are college students of Misamis University. All of the participants have experience disasters while they are in their studies.

**Table 1. Profile of the Participants**

| Code Name | Age | Year Level |
|---|---|---|
| P1 | 22 | College |

| P2 | 22 | College |
|----|----|---------|
| P3 | 23 | College |
| P4 | 21 | College |
| P5 | 21 | College |

**Visual Representation of Loss and Embracing Life**

The participants share common sentiments regarding the emotional and practical challenges they face during and after disasters, particularly in relation to their academic pursuits. Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 express how the disaster affects their ability to attend school regularly and focus on their studies. Participant 1 mentions the difficulty in commuting from Lanao due to weather conditions, while Participant 2 highlights the loss of essential school supplies in floods, making it challenging to concentrate on their academic responsibilities. Furthermore, both Participant 4 and Participant 5 articulate the overwhelming fear and uncertainty experienced during floods, emphasizing the lack of safety amidst such calamities (Andrén, 2024; Donato, & Lorica, 2020). These shared responses underscore the profound impact of disasters on individuals' academic endeavors, highlighting the need for support and resilience in navigating through such challenging circumstances. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

*"So, my emotions or challenges that I felt about the disaster that happened... is that it affected my ability to attend school regularly, especially considering the difficulties in commuting from Lanao due to weather conditions." (P1)*

*"The emotions and challenges that I commonly experience during and after a disaster... make it difficult to focus on studies, especially when essential school supplies are lost in floods." (P2)*

*"My emotions During disaster is so afraid because of floods... It's overwhelming to deal with the fear and uncertainty of flooding, especially when there's nowhere safe to go." (P4)*

*"My emotions During disaster is so afraid because of floods... It's terrifying to face floods, especially when our house is vulnerable to flooding due to its construction." (P5)*

The narratives provided offer a poignant reflection of the intricate relationship between disasters and academic pursuits, resonating with existing literature on the subject. Disasters, whether natural or human-induced, frequently disrupt educational activities, a phenomenon extensively documented in scholarly research(Righi, et al., 2021 ; Mir, et al.,2023).  Adverse weather conditions, such as those cited, often impede students' regular attendance at school, particularly in regions susceptible to extreme weather events like heavy rainfall or flooding. Transportation infrastructure disruptions and safety concerns during such times significantly hinder students' access to education, amplifying the challenges they face in maintaining academic continuity.

Furthermore, the emotional upheaval experienced during disasters, including the overwhelming fear and uncertainty expressed, reflects a common thread in disaster literature (Morganstein, & Ursano, 2020 ; Bertolini, 2021). Studies have consistently highlighted the profound psychological impact of disasters on individuals, manifesting in heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and trauma. Particularly in the context of flooding, individuals grapple with a sense of vulnerability and a lack of safety, exacerbating their psychological distress. The mention of vulnerability due to housing construction underscores the intricate interplay between socio-economic factors and disaster risk, aligning with scholarly discourse on the social determinants of vulnerability. This emphasizes the imperative for holistic disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts that address socio-economic disparities and prioritize mental health support in disaster-affected communities.

The narratives provided by the individuals shed light on the multifaceted implications of disasters on academic pursuits and mental well-being. Firstly, the challenges highlighted, such as transportation disruptions and the loss of essential school supplies, underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to ensure educational continuity in disaster-affected areas. Efforts aimed at enhancing infrastructure resilience and providing adequate

support to students, including access to alternative learning modalities and psychological assistance, are imperative (Tarricone, et al., 2021; Sato, etal., 2023). Secondly, the profound emotional toll experienced during disasters emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental health support in disaster response and recovery efforts. Implementing community-based interventions that promote resilience and provide psychosocial support can help mitigate the long-term impacts of trauma and foster post-disaster healing and adaptation. These insights underscore the necessity for holistic approaches that integrate educational, infrastructural, and mental health support mechanisms to bolster the resilience of individuals and communities in the face of disasters.

## Underlying Emotions and Meanings in Visual Images

The responses provided by Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 highlight common emotional responses and challenges experienced during and after disasters, particularly in relation to their academic endeavors. Across the responses, a sense of devastation, frustration, and helplessness emerges as individuals grapple with the loss of essential school supplies washed away by floods (Nanud, 2023; Arora, S. 2020). This loss not only hampers their ability to engage in academic activities but also elicits feelings of powerlessness in the face of natural calamities. Moreover, the overwhelming fear and uncertainty associated with floods permeate the narratives, leading to feelings of paralysis and unsettlement. Participants 4 and 5 express how this fear impacts their academic pursuits, creating a sense of turmoil as they navigate the delicate balance between academic commitments and ensuring personal safety. Additionally, confusion and stress emerge as common emotional responses, complicating Participant 3's ability to prioritize between family responsibilities and academic obligations amidst the chaos of disaster situations. These shared emotional experiences underscore the profound impact of disasters on individuals' emotional well-being and academic journeys, highlighting the need for comprehensive support mechanisms to address both practical and emotional challenges in disaster-affected communities. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted.

*Participant 2: "The emotions and challenges that I commonly experience during and after a disaster was being devastated, frustrated, and not knowing what to do... It's heartbreaking to see essential school supplies washed away by floods, leading to feelings of frustration and helplessness."*

*Participant 3: "My academic journey has been impacted by a variety of emotions and challenges that I have faced both during and after the disaster... The emotional toll of disasters, including confusion and stress, made it difficult to prioritize between family responsibilities and academic commitments."*

*Participant 4: "So afraid because of floods... The fear and uncertainty of floods can be paralyzing, especially when safety is compromised."*

*Participant 5: "So afraid because of floods... The fear of floods and their impact on academic pursuits is overwhelming and unsettling."*

The responses presented highlight a common theme of emotional distress and practical challenges experienced by individuals in the aftermath of disasters. This aligns with existing literature documenting the psychological toll of natural calamities, such as floods, on individuals' well-being. Studies have shown that the loss of essential belongings, including educational materials, can exacerbate feelings of frustration and helplessness, contributing to post-disaster distress (Clissold, et al., 2021; Nanud, et al., 2023). Moreover, the overwhelming fear and uncertainty expressed by the participants resonate with research on the emotional impact of disasters, which underscores the pervasive sense of vulnerability and unsettlement experienced by affected individuals. Such emotional responses not only disrupt academic pursuits but also underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms to address the psychological needs of disaster survivors.

Furthermore, the narratives highlight the complex relationship between emotional and practical challenges in navigating the aftermath of disasters. Participant accounts of struggling to prioritize between family responsibilities and academic commitments underscore the complex decision-making processes individuals face in disaster situations. This resonates with scholarly discourse on the competing demands placed on individuals during times of crisis, where the need to ensure personal safety often clashes with academic or professional

obligations (Adisa, et al., 2022; Pradies, et al., 2021). Moreover, the participants' expressions of confusion and stress underscore the cognitive burden imposed by disasters, which can hinder individuals' ability to make sound decisions and effectively manage their academic responsibilities. These insights underscore the importance of holistic approaches to disaster preparedness and response, which integrate psychological support alongside practical assistance to foster resilience and facilitate effective adaptation in disaster-affected communities.

The results reveal significant implications for disaster response and recovery efforts, especially in addressing the emotional and practical challenges faced by individuals in disaster-affected communities. Understanding how emotional distress and practical obstacles intersect is crucial for creating effective support systems. These insights emphasize the need for comprehensive approaches that provide both emotional support and practical assistance to help disaster survivors (Dückers, et al., 2022; Pacheco, 2021). Additionally, the narratives underscore the importance of building resilience and finding ways to cope effectively with the long-term impacts of disasters on individuals' well-being and academic pursuits. By implementing community-based interventions such as service learning, community mobilization, and policy changes that prioritize mental health support and ensure access to educational resources, we can facilitate recovery and promote lasting adaptation in areas prone to disasters.

**Resonance with Broader Experiences and Challenges**

The responses provided by Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 highlight common challenges and experiences faced in the aftermath of disasters, particularly in relation to their academic journeys. Across the responses, a recurring theme emerges regarding the exacerbation of academic challenges due to the financial strain caused by flood damage. Participants express how the need to prioritize repairs over studies underscores the difficult choices individuals must make in the wake of disasters. This financial burden not only hampers their ability to focus on academic pursuits but also adds another layer of complexity to their post-disaster recovery. Moreover, the narratives underscore the resilience and determination exhibited by participants in the face of adversity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a steadfast commitment to education despite the challenges posed by natural calamities. These shared experiences shed light on the broader impact of disasters on academic trajectories and highlight the need for comprehensive support mechanisms that address both the immediate and long-term needs of individuals in disaster-affected communities (Fu, & Zhang, 2024; Nava, 2022). These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

*My academic journey has been impacted by a variety of emotions and challenges... Despite the challenges, maintaining resilience and determination to pursue education has been crucial." (P3)*

*"After that, the disaster's impact on my academic journey worsened because of the flooding... Financial difficulties resulting from flood damage forced me to prioritize repairs over studies, exacerbating the academic challenges." (P4)*

*"After that, the disaster's impact on my academic journey worsened because of the flooding... The financial strain caused by flood damage made it impossible to focus on studies, further complicating academic pursuits." (P5)*

The responses provided by Participant 3, Participant 4, and Participant 5 resonate with existing literature on the intersection of disasters and academic pursuits, particularly in highlighting the financial strain caused by natural calamities. Studies have consistently shown that disasters, such as floods, not only disrupt individuals' immediate living conditions but also impose significant economic burdens, complicating their ability to pursue education (Houston, et al., 2021; Yu, et al., 2020). The participants' accounts underscore the difficult choices individuals must make in allocating limited resources between essential repairs and academic endeavors. This echoes research findings that emphasize the detrimental impact of financial strain on individuals' educational attainment and overall well-being, particularly in disaster-affected communities where economic resources are already constrained.

Moreover, the narratives elucidate the resilience and determination exhibited by individuals in the face of adversity, aligning with scholarly discourse on coping mechanisms in disaster contexts. Despite the challenges

posed by natural calamities, participants express a steadfast commitment to education, highlighting its significance as a pathway to recovery and long-term resilience (Kayyali, 2024). This resilience is a key factor in individuals' ability to navigate the complexities of post-disaster recovery and underscores the importance of fostering adaptive coping strategies in disaster-affected communities. The participants' accounts provide valuable insights into the broader impact of disasters on academic trajectories and underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms that address both the immediate and long-term needs of individuals striving to pursue education amidst adversity.

The results showed significant implications for disaster response and recovery efforts, particularly in relation to supporting individuals' academic journeys. The financial strain resulting from flood damage emerges as a critical barrier to education, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address economic vulnerabilities in disaster-affected communities (Fu, & Zhang, 2024; Yu, et al., 2020) . Moreover, the participants' resilience and determination in maintaining their commitment to education despite adversity highlight the importance of fostering supportive environments that empower individuals to pursue their academic goals amidst challenges. These findings emphasize the necessity of comprehensive support mechanisms that integrate financial assistance, educational resources, and psychosocial support to facilitate the recovery and resilience of individuals striving to pursue education in the aftermath of disasters.

## Personal Strengths in Embracing Life

The responses provided by Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4 illuminate a common theme of personal strengths and resilience in embracing life, particularly in the face of adversity and disaster. Across the responses, a shared emphasis on maintaining a positive outlook, cultivating gratitude, and embracing persistence emerges as crucial strategies for navigating challenges. Participant 1 and Participant 2 highlight the importance of positivity and appreciation for life's lessons, underscoring how these attitudes contribute to resilience and forward movement. Similarly, Participant 3 emphasizes the value of persistence and resilience in overcoming obstacles and pursuing one's dreams, reflecting a proactive approach to adversity. Moreover, Participant 4's focus on remaining calm and resilient during disasters underscores the significance of these qualities in not only surviving calamities but also in facilitating the process of moving forward and rebuilding. These shared responses exemplify the power of personal strengths in fostering resilience and adaptation in the face of life's trials, offering valuable insights for individuals and communities grappling with adversity. (Chen, 2024; Clemons, 2024).  These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

*"For me, just have a positive and appreciative mind... Despite the challenges, maintaining a positive outlook and appreciation for life's lessons has been essential for moving forward." (P1)*

*"Just have a positive and appreciative mind... Cultivating positivity and gratitude in the face of adversity can help in navigating through difficult times." (P2)*

*"Just want to say never give up on every challenge that you may encounter... Persistence and resilience are key in overcoming challenges and pursuing dreams." (P3)*

*"My experience during disaster stay calm and survived what will happened during calamities... Remaining calm and resilient during disasters is crucial for survival and moving forward." (P4)*

The responses provided by the participants underscore the significance of personal strengths and resilience in confronting life's challenges, particularly in the aftermath of adversity and disaster. Research in resilience psychology emphasizes the pivotal role of maintaining a positive outlook and cultivating gratitude in navigating difficult circumstances. Studies have shown that individuals who adopt a positive mindset and express gratitude often demonstrate higher levels of resilience and psychological well-being, enabling them to bounce back more effectively from setbacks. (Arslan, & Wong, 2024; Waters, et al, 2022) Furthermore, the emphasis on persistence and resilience aligns with scholarly discourse on the importance of these qualities in overcoming obstacles and pursuing goals. Research suggests that individuals who exhibit perseverance and resilience are better equipped to cope with adversity and adapt to changing circumstances, enhancing their overall psychological and emotional well-being.

Moreover, the responses highlight the importance of remaining calm and resilient during disasters, reflecting the principles of disaster resilience theory or the study of how communities and societies can adapt to and recover from natural disasters. This theoretical framework emphasizes the significance of individual and community-level capacities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disasters (Uddin, et al., 2020; Haque, & Hostetler, 2021). Central to this approach is the notion of building psychological resilience, which enables individuals to maintain composure and adapt effectively in the face of adversity. The participants' responses underscore the importance of cultivating these personal strengths not only for survival but also for facilitating the process of moving forward and rebuilding in the aftermath of disasters. Overall, these responses provide valuable insights into the power of personal strengths and resilience in navigating life's trials, offering important lessons for individuals and communities facing adversity.

The participants' responses underscore profound implications for fostering resilience and adaptive coping strategies in the face of adversity and disaster. Emphasizing the cultivation of positive outlooks, gratitude, persistence, and resilience can serve as valuable tools in empowering individuals and communities to navigate through challenging circumstances. These findings highlight the importance of integrating psychosocial support and resilience-building interventions into disaster preparedness and response efforts. By prioritizing the development of personal strengths and resilience, stakeholders can enhance individuals' capacity to cope with and recover from adversity, ultimately fostering greater well-being and adaptive outcomes in disaster-affected communities.

# CONCLUSIONS

The narratives underscore the importance of comprehensive disaster preparedness and response strategies. It is evident that addressing the disruptions to education and the emotional toll of disasters requires holistic approaches that prioritize educational continuity, infrastructure resilience, and mental health support. These findings highlight the need for proactive measures to mitigate the adverse effects of disasters on individuals and communities.

There is an urgent need for comprehensive support mechanisms that address both the emotional and practical needs of individuals in disaster-affected communities. By recognizing the complex interplay between emotional distress and practical obstacles, stakeholders can design more effective disaster response and recovery strategies tailored to the diverse needs of survivors.

There is an urgent need for targeted interventions that address economic vulnerabilities in disaster-affected communities to support individuals' educational aspirations. Moreover, the resilience and determination exhibited by participants highlight the importance of fostering supportive environments that empower individuals to persevere in their academic pursuits despite adversity.

There is a value of integrating psychosocial support and resilience-building interventions into disaster preparedness and response efforts. By prioritizing the development of personal strengths and resilience, stakeholders can enhance individuals' capacity to cope with and recover from adversity, ultimately fostering greater well-being and adaptive outcomes in disaster-affected communities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Investing in resilient infrastructure and alternative transportation by sending it to the students the module are solutions can help ensure educational continuity during disasters. Enhancing access to alternative learning modalities, such as online education platforms, can mitigate the impact of school closures. Implementing community-based psychosocial support programs can address the psychological needs of individuals affected by disasters, promoting resilience and facilitating effective adaptation.

To prioritize the integration of psychosocial support alongside practical assistance in disaster response and recovery efforts. Community-based interventions such as online learning, modular phasing in school that promote resilience and provide access to educational resources should be implemented to facilitate the long-term recovery and sustainable adaptation of individuals and communities in disaster-prone regions.

It is imperative to implement comprehensive support mechanisms that integrate financial assistance, educational resources, and psychosocial support to facilitate the recovery and resilience of individuals striving to pursue education in the aftermath of disasters. Additionally, policymakers and stakeholders should prioritize investments in disaster preparedness and mitigation strategies to mitigate the economic impact of disasters on individuals' academic trajectories such as programs that combine academic study with community engagement to help students learn and develop skills.

Stakeholders may prioritize the implementation of programs and initiatives aimed at promoting positive mindset, gratitude, persistence, and resilience in disaster-affected communities. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure accessibility and inclusivity in accessing psychosocial support and resilience-building interventions, especially for vulnerable populations disproportionately impacted by disasters.

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