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FEATURE

**Journeys From Grief to Hope:
Visual and Verbal Voices of Post-Yolanda Youth**

Arceli H. Rosario
Carthy Joy T. Aguillon
Marilyn G. Lucion

Abstract. *Despite media reports on the damage caused by super-typhoon Yolanda, which ravaged the islands of Central Philippines in 2013, there is limited information on how the victims, specifically the youth, lived their post-Yolanda lives. This study explored the post-Yolanda experiences of 10 purposively selected students from a secondary school near Tacloban City. Using photovoice, this study delved into the participants' experiences, how they dealt with their grief over their loss, and what changes they wanted to initiate. The results showed that despite the participants' tragic experiences, they were able to transcend their grief to hope. They also proposed changes for self, for the school community, and for the society at large.*

Keywords: post-Yolanda youth, natural disasters, youth resilience, photovoice, Philippines

Introduction

Typhoons in the Philippines are natural occurrences. Twenty-seven typhoons were recorded to have hit the Philippines between 2000 and 2003 and 39 between 2004 and 2007 (Virola, Lopez-Dee, Romaraog, & Halcon, 2010). In the following years, however, the frequency has increased to about 20 per year. Interestingly, the average number of strong storms has doubled. Further, according to Saro (as cited in Fernandez, 2014), there is also an observed change in the pattern of typhoon occurrences from Northern Luzon, which is in the northern part of the Philippines, to the Visayas, the country's central area.

On November 8, 2013, super-typhoon Yolanda made landfall in Eastern Visayas, causing unprecedented damage to nine regions, affecting 16 million people and displacing about 4.4 million (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2014). The super-typhoon destroyed approximately 153,495 hectares of rice paddies, corn, cassava, and vegetables, with agricultural damage to the tune of \$225 million (Rai, 2013). While the disaster physically damaged the environment and caused serious economic implications, the mental and emotional trauma it has brought on its victims cannot be denied or underestimated.

One of the areas that were badly ravaged by super-typhoon Yolanda was Tacloban City. This city is an important site not only in Eastern Visayas, being its capital city, but also in the country. At one point in Philippine history, between October 1944 and February 1945, while the country was fighting for its freedom against the Japanese, Tacloban was made the seat of the Philippine government. In 2008, it was declared as a highly urbanized city and in recent years, it has been a center for tourism.

On November 8, 2013, however, Yolanda altered Tacloban City and its surrounding areas. Over the short period of the typhoon, it was changed from a place of beauty and progress into a place of death and desolation. History reveals that Yolanda was not the first of its kind to hit Tacloban. The city suffered from two typhoons of similar intensity in 1897 and in November, 1912. About half of the population was killed during the 1912 typhoon.

As one contemplates about these natural disasters that raze through the country and recently in Eastern Samar, specifically in Tacloban and its surrounding villages, he or she may ask some questions. Among those questions one may ask are those relative to the victims' experiences, how they are making sense of their experiences, how they deal with their loss, and what changes they want to initiate. Hence, it is the purpose of this study to find answers to these questions and to raise awareness among the victims and policy makers on what can be done at the present and in the future.

Review of the Literature

Resilience is defined as one's ability to overcome the negative effects of traumatic events and adapt to present conditions in spite of adversity (Vigna, Hernandez, Paasch, Gordon, & Kelley, 2009). A resilient individual draws on innate competence and designs and executes strategies to achieve positive adjustment despite suffering from disaster-related stress and deeply distressing experiences (trauma). Resilient victims of disasters may still experience forms of transient stress reactions but these reactions, usually short-term, do not interfere with their ability to function normally as individuals (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013).

Because of the frequency of occurrences of disasters of catastrophic impact, posttraumatic growth has become an important area of research. For example, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996, 2004) developed a Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, used to reveal a specific area for growth. Most of these studies, though, have been centered on adults. Recently, however, researchers have started to give attention also to adolescents and children. Hence, the instrument of Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996, 2004) was revised and named Posttraumatic Growth Inventory for Children.

In a recent study, this Posttraumatic Growth Inventory for Children instrument was administered to 46 children and adolescents who were displaced from their homes due to Hurricane Floyd. The study found that growth after the natural disaster was existent among the participants (Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2006). Using a different instrument called the Perceptions of Changes in Self scale, researchers interviewed adolescent cancer survivors and revealed that 32% of the participants claimed four or more positive changes while others reported at least one positive change. The researchers also found posttraumatic growth to be positively associated with age, perceived life threat, and perceived treatment intensity (Barakat, Alderfer, & Kazak, 2006). In a review of studies related to posttraumatic growth, Kilmer and Rivas (2010) concluded that although survivors reported positive changes because of their traumatic experiences, they still experienced distress in the aftermath of trauma, suggesting that growth may coexist with distress.

For many years, disaster and posttrauma growth studies dealing with the devastating effects of the phenomenon on its victims have become distinct research fields. Specifically on the area of disaster studies, researchers have conducted studies on the negative effects of natural disasters (Gaffney, 2006; Osofsky, Osofsky, Kronenberg, Brennan, & Hansel, 2009; Rhodes, Chan, Paxson, Rouse, Waters, & Fussell, 2010). Although this area still continues to be investigated (Lowe, Manove, & Rhodes, 2013), some researchers have already shifted their focus to the positive outcomes that disaster victims experience (Clay, Knibbs, & Joseph, 2009; Cryder et al., 2006). One study was conducted by Langan and Palmer (2012) 4 years after Hurricane Katrina. This study focused on older adult survivors. The researchers recruited their participants from churches and senior centers. Their results revealed that the participants experienced positive outcomes such as (a) giving advice to others how to survive, (b) spirituality and faith as revealed in one's recognition of the goodness of God in spite of the tragedy, and (c) manageability which refers to how the victims were able to meet their needs. The researchers acknowledged that these positive themes especially spirituality and faith could be explained by the participants' faith-based background. This present study, which explored the experiences of post-Yolanda youth who were studying at a faith-based school when the super-

typhoon hit, aimed to contribute to the growing literature on the positive outcomes brought about by natural disasters such as typhoons.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the experiences of the youth during the wake of super-typhoon Yolanda and immediately after it?
2. How did they deal with their grief over their loss?
3. What changes in themselves, their school, and society do they want to initiate?

Methodology

This study aimed to give the youth a voice so that their points of view and perspectives about a life-changing phenomenon, such as the super-typhoon Yolanda, could be heard. This section discusses the research design, the research setting, the sample and how they were chosen. Also the data collection procedures are detailed.

Research Design

Photovoice was used in this study. It is a participatory-action research methodology that uses photography to generate data (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004). Through the use of camera, participants could capture their worldviews and realities (Wang et al., 2004). This methodology proposes that “images carry a message, pictures can influence policy” (Wang et al., 2004, para. 5). Wang, Yi, Tao, and Carovano (1998) propose that “to have a camera is to have power” (p. 84). Based on Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, which espouses awakening the critical consciousness of the people, photovoice provides a venue for participants to “seek to act upon . . . conditions that contribute to personal and community problems” (Wang et al., 2004, para. 6). The participants are usually part of a marginalized group. Photovoice “helps to look at and study the lived experiences of the participants, and in fact, look through their own eyes, see what they see and what sense they make of that” (Tomar, 2013, p. 3). The participants are empowered and become active agents of change to improve their conditions.

According to Wang et al. (1998), as a method of data collection and analysis, photovoice follows a four-step process. The first step is implementing method and analysis, which includes conducting a photovoice training, devising the initial theme for taking pictures, taking pictures, and facilitating group discussion. The second step is participatory analysis: critical reflection and dialogue, which includes selecting photographs for discussion; contextualizing and storytelling; codifying issues, themes, and theories; writing down stories; and

conducting formative evaluation. The third step is disseminating findings, which includes selecting slides and stories for presentation and writing journal articles. And the fourth step is advocating policy, which includes recruiting policy-makers, reaching policy-makers, policy decision-making, implementing policy, and conducting the participatory outcome evaluation. The first, second, and third steps of photovoice were done in this study. The fourth step will be done at a later time.

Research Setting

This study was conducted in a boarding secondary school operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The school is located in a rural area an hour and a half ride from Tacloban City. When the study was conducted, the school had a population of 228 students and 18 faculty, staff, and administrators.

On November 8, 2013, the school was one of those areas that were ravaged by Yolanda. The greatest loss sustained by the school was its P20M gymnasium, which was leveled to the ground. In addition, other buildings such as the cafeteria, the science building, the administration building, and faculty homes were damaged.

Participants and Sampling

The participating school and the student participants (SPs) were purposively selected. The criteria for the participating school were the following: (a) it is a faith-based school; (b) it was hit by Yolanda; (c) its students must come from places that were badly ravaged by the super-typhoon; and (d) the administration must consent to participate. Based on these criteria, a boarding secondary school in a rural area near Tacloban City was chosen. The 10 SPs were purposively selected from among the 228 high school student population. The criteria for their selection were the following: (a) he or she should be a student of the participating school; (b) he or she must have lived, and was, in the area which was badly ravaged by the super-typhoon; (c) he or she must be willing to participate; and (d) his or her parents must give consent for his or her participation. Other participants who also gave their consent to participate included the officers of the student government, the faculty and staff, the guidance counselor, and the principal. In total, 30 participants took part in this study.

The participation of several groups at the different stages of this research is a typical feature of photovoice. Biggs (as cited in Wang et al., 1998) expounds that the “collegiate participation . . . [of] community members, local policy-makers, and . . . academics bring different talents to the table” and hence, “maximizing efficiency and the appropriate use of people’s expertise” (p. 85). In this case, the students, school administrators, faculty, and staff were recognized as valued members of the school community and as part of the policy-making group.

Data Collection Instruments

To gather data, we, the researchers, used different interview guides for the SPs, administrators and selected faculty, focus group discussion (FGD) with the student body, and FGD with the faculty. We also wrote journals and field notes. More so, the photos taken by the SPs were sources of primary data.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to our onsite visit for data collection, we secured the permission of the school administration. Through email and over the phone, we discussed with the principal the purpose of the study and how the school would be involved. The principal referred us to the guidance counselor who assisted us in recruiting the participants.

Day 1. We met the SPs during the morning break and informed them about the purpose of the study, the procedures, and their involvement. We also trained them how to use the camera and how to take different kinds of photo shots, and explained to them the importance of photos and the ethics of taking pictures. We asked the 10 SPs to pair themselves and issued one camera to each pair. We instructed them to take the first set of pictures based on the initial theme, which was anything that captured their interest and attention and to use “their own best judgment in choosing what to photograph” (Wang et al., 1998, p. 84). They had to take their pictures during the day, and after their classes in the afternoon, they had to submit the best five of their photos. With their partner, the SPs discussed their pictures and chose those that they liked best or those that they thought revealed their realities (see Wang et al., 1998). For each of their photos, we asked them to tell “stories about their own photographs” (Wang et al., 1998, p. 80) and “describe the meaning of their images” (Wang et al., 2004, p. 1). The showing of and telling about the pictures by each SP took approximately 30 minutes. To elicit picture description, we used SHOWeD as the analysis framework (Wallerstein, as cited in Wang et al., 1998). To use the SHOWeD framework, we asked the SPs the following questions (Wallerstein, as cited in Wang et al., 1998): (a) What do you See here? (b) What’s really **H**appening here? (c) How does this relate to **O**ur lives? (d) **W**hy does this problem or this strength exist? (e) What can we **D**o about this?

Day 2. During our second meeting with the SPs, we instructed them to take their second set of pictures during that day. The theme of the second set of pictures was any object or scene that best captured their thoughts and feelings during the super-typhoon and immediately after it. We instructed them to submit the best five of their pictures after their classes in the afternoon and to describe to us the meaning of each of their pictures.

During the day, we scheduled individual interviews with the SPs. Each interview took 1 hour to 1 hour and half. We also interviewed the principal. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. All interviews were conducted in English. In instances when the SPs shifted to their native language, we translated their native language into English using the meaning-based framework which posits that the meaning of the source language text should be transferred into the receptor language (Larson, 1998).

Day 3. We did an FGD with the student government officers. We also interviewed the guidance counselor. We met with the SPs and trained them how to do a photo essay. We divided them into two groups, five SPs for each group. Each of them had taken 10 photos, so each group had a total of 50 pictures. We gave them two hours to prepare their photo essay. In the evening, we had a photo exhibit and each group presented their photo essays before an audience of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. After the presentations, we did an FGD with the administrators, faculty, and staff. In the evening of the third day, like the previous evenings, the research team reviewed the data; reflected on their experiences with the participants; and noted significant highlights of their experiences and recurring themes from the photos and interviews.

Data Analysis

The main sources of the data were the photos, the participants' descriptions of the photos, and the interviews with the 10 student participants. Supporting data came from the FDGs with the student government officers and with the faculty and staff; the individual interviews with the guidance counselor and the principal; the researchers' journal and field notes; and the SPs' demographic data. From these data, the researchers extracted themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) and organized them according to the research questions.

Results

This section presents three main subsections that are directly related to the research questions. The research questions are addressed here. The answers to the questions are organized according to the emerging themes. To support the development of the themes, selected quotes are included.

Experiences of the Youth During and After Super-typhoon Yolanda

Participants' vignettes. When the school declared on Wednesday, November 6, that there would be no classes and that boarding students should go home because a super-typhoon would hit Central Philippines, all the SPs said that they were excited. Some of the SPs thought that the typhoon would just be one of the

usual storms. In the next paragraphs are selected narrations of the SPs' experiences during the storm and immediately after it.

At 5:00 a.m., the winds became very strong. When I looked outside, I saw the glass walls of our factory shattered. . . . My father asked me to go down and tie the gate. . . . I was pushed by strong waters. I held on to the grills of the gate. I was hit with glass and nails. . . . A car pressed me. I got hold of the trunk of a coconut tree and found a rope hanging from one of the coconut leaves. I held on to it and swung myself back to the house. (SP1, Interview Transcript, para. 6)

Food was not enough. We kept on praying. One person, we didn't know him, came and gave us food. (SP7, Interview Script, para. 6)

Emerging themes. From the SPs' narration of their experiences, there were four themes that emerged. These themes were (a) death and destruction, (b) God's saving power, (c) family solidarity, and (d) sense of community. The first theme spoke of the reality of the phenomenon. The youth, for the first time in their lives, witnessed that death and destruction could happen on such a massive scale and within so brief a time. Below are some excerpts of the SPs' descriptions of how this theme unfolded before them:

I saw dead bodies all over, in different positions. I pitied them especially that may be some of them had not yet known the truth. (SP9, Interview Script, para. 5)

We went out and we saw the destruction around us—the gym, the cafeteria, the ramps, [and] some buildings. We cried and wondered how our school could rise again. (SP2, Interview Script, para. 5)

When I was at the rooftop, I saw water all around us. I saw the houses floating in the water. I saw boats floating by. I thought they were rescue boats but they were commercial boats carried by the storm surge. (SP1, Interview Script, para. 8)

The other three themes, however, revealed that positive things could come out of tragedy, that within the backdrop of death and destruction were stories of God's saving power, family solidarity, and sense of community. The experience of SP4 is a classic example of God's saving power, how God has power over waves and raging waters.

When I climbed to the rooftop, the wind was very strong that I fell into the water. I felt the rain was like needles. When I fell into the water, it twirled me like a washing machine. The debris hit me from different directions. . . . I felt like a big surfing wave covered me. But then I felt the wave push me up and I got hold of a wall. And then I climbed to the rooftop where my parents were. (SP4, Interview Script, para. 4)

The experiences of the other SPs were not in any way less dramatic and how they were saved was not less miraculous. Their experiences show that God has a thousand ways to save. SP3, for example, related that while balancing herself with her three-year-old brother in her arms as she was crossing the firewall to go to a three-storey house, she prayed, “Lord, please save my brother and me.” And just when she got to the house, the wall collapsed. Below are photo presentations that support the theme.

I was very grateful that the steel bars (SP3, Picture 8—*Steel Bars*) in the building did not give way. There were so many people that took refuge there and the steel bars provided us protection.

I remember holding on to a tree. I felt like I was clinging to God and God was holding me. I felt that the tree was God-sent so I wouldn't be swept away. (SP1, Picture 9—*The Tree*)

Their narrations of God's saving power were not confined only during the storm. Even after the tragedy, they confessed that they were witnesses of God's miraculous providence. As they struggled for shelter, food and water, clothing, medical care, and other needs, they testified that God supplied their needs.

My father found a store open and he was given bottled water. He also found a warehouse of canned goods and they gave out canned goods so my father and uncle got lots of them. We were also given rice. . . . My *yaya* [governess] and me went to a mall. She asked for some clothes and we were given some. . . . My father got some materials and built a makeshift house so we had a place to stay. (SP3, Interview Script, para. 4)

SP3 confessed that immediately after the tragedy, she asked, “Why did this happen to us?” But her questions were changed to the affirmation of her trust in God: “When many helped us, I did not doubt God anymore. He showed that He loved us” (SP3, Interview Script, para. 4). SP7 also affirmed, “We felt God's presence at that time. When I worried that we did not have food, a person we did not know came to give us food (Interview Script, para. 8).

Other stories were about family solidarity, about how the family came together for prayer. All the SPs related how they prayed as a family for protection and for thanksgiving. Further, in the stories of the other SPs, they revealed praying and calling on to God for help.

Aside from prayer, family members assisted each other in many ways. Even relatives extended help. SP3 mentioned how she and her family went to the bus terminal after the storm and waited for their relatives to come from the province. Due to difficulty in communication and travel, it would be after several days that their relatives could come to take them to the province. Below are excerpts of stories that reveal family solidarity.

Our mother [in Malaysia] instructed us to go to a certain place at six in the morning. . . . Our uncle was there and he facilitated that we could take a boat to Cebu. . . . Our relatives met us and somebody donated us plane tickets so the five of us flew to Manila and there we met our mother. (SP7, Interview Script, para. 6)

My mother, my cousin, and my brother were covered by a cement wall. My sister saved my brother but my mother and cousin were still covered. . . . I tried to lift the cement but could not do it. . . . My big brother, my father, and a neighbor helped to lift the wall but the wall was too heavy. Another neighbor came and he helped. Later, my mother and cousin were taken out. (SP6, Interview Script, Para. 4)

I did not eat and drink water for three days. I prioritized my mother and my one-year-old nephew. . . . When I felt very thirsty, I drank soft drinks. (SP1, Interview Transcript, para. 12)

The narratives of the SPs showed how, in the face of crisis, they banded together as families. Walsh (2006) affirms that families who weathered crises together came out with enriched relationships and they became more loving to one other. These families said that “a crisis can be a ‘wake-up call,’ heightening our attention to what really matters in our lives” (Walsh, 2006, p. 8).

While a human being belongs to his or her family, he or she also belongs to a larger family, that is, a community of neighbors, friends, and even strangers. It is not only during times of celebration that the human is joined by his or her community but during times of tragedy and sorrow as well. Thus, during Yolanda, when men and women were struggling to save their lives, snapshots of people’s goodness and sense of community shone through the otherwise bleak reality. SP1 shared how he was inspired by one man, who, in spite of his confrontation with the cruelty of nature, took time to wave a flag for others to see.

I saw a man at a distance; he was holding on to a flag and raising it . . . the flag was like freedom encouraging us that we can carry this problem. I felt that while the flag was being waved, I was not alone, just like one for all—all for one. (SP1, Picture 10—The Flag)

There were also testimonies of the kindness and generosity of people in the face of scarcity.

There was one man. We didn’t know him. He came and gave us food. He said we could not buy food. . . . Because of that we had food for many days. (SP7, Interview Script, para. 6)

After Yolanda we received many blessings. We received relief goods. We did not experience being hungry or thirsty. (SP3, Interview Script, para. 8)

Further, SP10 gave a picture of how comforting the outpouring of help was from the community of nations and the local community. She mentioned also how the residents in her barangay cleaned the debris after the storm.

After Yolanda, there were many beautiful things that happened. There were relief goods and some blessings that came to us. After Yolanda, people helped each other. (SP10, Picture 6—*The Rose*)

The narratives of the SPs are supported by Ferguson and Zimmerman (2005). They propose that external factors such as support of family and community help the youth achieve a positive adjustment. The youth in this study attested to the value of family and community solidarity.

Youth's Coping Strategies With Grief and Loss

When asked what loss they and their families incurred, all of the SPs paused for a few minutes to think deeply. The interviewers had to repeat the question and give examples of loss. From their initial reaction, the SPs seemed to show that their loss during Yolanda had not been prominent in their minds. In fact, when pressed, one of the SPs said, "I do not have a sense of loss. . . . Our car was carried away. But I do not count it a loss" (SP4, Interview Script, para. 5).

Although most of them answered that they did not lose anything, seven of the SPs' houses were destroyed. Three of them lost their family car, the store of one family was washed out, and the food factory of another family was damaged. Instead of highlighting their personal loss, one of them answered that she felt sad for the loss of "the beauty of Tacloban" (SP8, Interview Script, para. 7). All of them confessed that they mourned for the loss of lives.

There was another loss for which all the participants shared deep sorrow—the loss of their school's gymnasium. This sorrow was not borne by the students alone. Even the faculty and the alumni (some of whom we had opportunity to meet) testified their deep sense of loss.

I feel sad for the damage incurred by the school. I think of the gym. We loved that place. We socialized in that place. We learned how to do many things there. (SP2, Interview Script, para. 6)

We miss the gym because we have lots of happy memories there. . . . It's a place where we met together. (FGD-SP7)

How did the participants deal with their grief? The participants, in their narration of their experiences and through their photos and their descriptions, revealed several ways. Among these, they highlighted (a) faith in God, (b) Bible reading and prayer, (c) support of family and community, and (d) modeling of their parents and teachers.

Faith in God. Every human, whatever his or her religious orientation, must “have deeply engaged their minds and occupied their hearts with the perplexity of human suffering” (Rosario, 1993, p. 9). This exercise of thought is especially heightened when people come face to face with tragedy. The SPs in this study were prematurely subjected to this kind of questioning. They were confronted with inexplicable realities; they saw with their eyes gruesome pictures of death, devastation, and human suffering. Before Yolanda, their questions were what clothes to wear, which place to go, which girl or boy to befriend. During and after Yolanda, their thoughts were transformed and they realized that there were deeper questions with which to deal.

SP3 voiced the classic question: “Why did this happen to us?” This was not only SP3’s question. This, too, was the question of the other SPs, as well as of suffering humanity. As the SPs grappled with this question, they launched into a journey of faith. According to Rasi (1993), faith has five ingredients: choice, obedience, confession, trust, and hope. In the case of Job, as he dealt with the mystery of his suffering, his speeches as recorded in the book of *Job* reveal how he engaged himself from choice to hope. Rosario (1993) traces his faith journey starting with his choice: “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10). Then he expresses his obedience: “Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me” (Job 27:5, 6), and confession: “But now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5), and trust: “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:5), and hope: “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25).

Choice. In the same manner, the SPs, in their faith journey, experienced the five ingredients of faith as outlined by Rasi (1993). SP2, through her photo of a *makahiya* plant, explained her choice to accept whatever God gave. SP8 expressed the same theme—that people can choose to see beauty in spite of the ugliness around them.

We should not only accept the good things that come to us and be happy and thankful. We should not be like the *makahiya* (it is a characteristic of the *makahiya* that when it is touched it shrivels) that when bad times happen we shrivel and sulk from God. (Picture 6—*The Makahiya*)

If only we can overcome our struggles, if only we can think positively, if only we can say, ‘I will not give up.’ Then our life will show beauty. Life without trials will not be beautiful like this rose. (SP2, Picture 3—*Rose of Sharon*)

All around the flower is barren but it is blooming. Even though it is the only one growing and blooming, it gives beauty. A person may see what is bare, what is withered, but he can choose to look for something beautiful. (SP8, Picture 1—*Alone and Beautiful*)

Gottlieb (2013) expounds that when a human being is confronted with crisis, one way he or she could bounce back is to engage himself or herself in spiritual virtues such as gratitude and generosity. Being grateful, he says, “in the midst of difficulty” (Gottlieb, 2013, p. 26) is a difficult exercise but is extremely beneficial. Further, he suggests to always find something to be thankful for and to choose to respond positively even to negative situations (Gottlieb, 2013).

Obedience. As Job pledged before God to preserve his integrity in the face of his trials, half of the SPs noticed the significance of the Law Tablet that stood beside the school chapel and took a photo of it. In their descriptions, they underscored that God’s Law brings about discipline and harmony.

If there are no Ten Commandments, . . . then people will be like wild animals, which do not have discipline and a sense of right and wrong. (SP9, Picture 4—*The Ten Commandments*)

Because of the Law, I feel peace. There is harmony in everything. (SP7, Picture 5—*The Law Tablet*)

Confession. The SPs confessed that God is Creator, Preserver, Saviour. Further, that He is loving and righteous. The following quotes reveal that they acknowledged Him as One who is Supreme above all and yet compassionate and loving. SP1 capsulized the essence of who God is when he said: “Only God . . . can save us” (Picture 5—*The Church*).

God made mountains. . . . I realized the beauty of God’s creation and how perfect His design is. (SP2, Picture 5—*The Far Distant Mountains*)

During Yolanda, I was thinking about buildings especially churches. I thought that this church (the school’s church) had already crumbled . . . , but I was wrong. God preserved this church. (SP9, Picture 9—*The Church*)

Trust. White (1952) suggests that a human being needs faith and that he or she gains “the sustaining strength of God . . . through an abiding trust” (p. 255). The SPs revealed a consistent expression of trust in God in their narratives. SP2, for example, credited God as the only One she could trust:

We should have full trust in the Lord even though our life is full of sorrows. Our faith should be bigger than our discouragements. (Picture 8—*Dead Leaves*)

Another participant, SP9, did not despair in spite of his family's loss. He said, "Even if we lose something, God will give us again what we have lost" (Interview Script, para. 6). His declaration is an evidence of his trust based on his knowledge of who God is—One who is trustworthy.

Hope. According to Walsh (2006), "Hope is a future-oriented belief; no matter how bleak the present, we can envision a better future" (p. 65). The SPs' manifestation of hope is shown in the following photo presentations.

I can see that life has beauty. . . . I forced myself to look at the beautiful things in chaos—like appreciating whatever is left for us. . . . Despite what we have lost, I became optimistic to see the beauty of another chance that God has given us. (SP7, Picture 10—*The Door*)

When we are inside a tunnel, what we see is darkness. But . . . there's light at the end of the tunnel. (SP6, Picture 3—*The Tunnel*)

The SPs viewed hope as one that is not only for their own benefit. They said they must have hope so that they could share hope to others and inspire them to look at the positive side of life. Below are some quotes:

One who is discouraged will become an example, an inspiration to others (SP2, Picture 9—*A Rose Against the Sky*).

We are like stones. We should stay strong because if we show that we are weak, others will be affected and will follow our negative thoughts. We should show that we would not give up and that we can overcome. (SP10, Picture 8—*The Stones*)

Bible reading and prayer. The SPs testified to the comfort that they had drawn from Bible reading and prayer. SP9 said he read his Bible and was comforted. "Blessed is the Lord who gives and who takes" (Interview Script, para. 7). "I prayed to God to help me . . . learn to trust" (SP10, Interview Script, para. 6). "The only thing that could comfort me is to pray" (SP1, Interview Script, para. 11). "We need to pray for ourselves and for others. We need to trust God . . . because there is no problem too big for Him" (SP2, Interview Script, para. 8).

Support of family and community. In the narratives of the SPs, they shared that the presence and support of family and community had a healing effect on them. Walsh (2006) expounds, "Meaningful kin and community connections are lifelines in times of distress. Investment in affiliation and collaboration increases our potential to surmount overwhelming challenges" (p. 56). SP6 related his family's plight during the super-typhoon—how their house fell, how his mother and other members of the family were trapped under a cement wall and the great difficulty they went through to rescue them, how they ran for their lives because of the storm surge. At the end of his story, he simply said: "We rejoined our relatives and I was comforted" (Interview Script, para. 8). One participant whose

family lost their house, their store, and their car, said: “I was very sad but my father told me not to worry. He encouraged me to hope and trust in God” (SP3, Picture 8—*The Wheel*). SP10, whose house was badly damaged, expressed how she grieved upon seeing their house being destroyed: “I felt sad because we’d just built our house and my parents sacrificed so much to build it.” But she emphasized how comforted she was when her father said that it was okay, that as long as they were alive they would carry on (Interview Script, para. 5).

Modeling of parents and teachers. The SPs gained strength from the example shown by their parents and teachers. SP9 recalled how his father stayed calm during and after the storm, how both his mother and father were resourceful in meeting the needs of the family. Also, SP10 spoke how his father reacted when he saw their house being hit by a coconut tree and how he comforted his family that they could rebuild their house and their lives again. During the FGD with the student government officers, the participants echoed the same note, that was, the example of their teachers.

The teachers . . . showed us that they are strong even though some of the faculty houses lost their roofs. They also suffered but they kept on. So . . . we imitated their modeling. (FGD-SP4)

How did the participants deal with their grief over their loss? The participants’ answers are summarized in the exposition of Gottlieb (2013) about suffering and people’s response to it.

In all these settings of suffering, disappointment, or emotional unease, we are instructed to practice what I call the ‘spiritual virtues’: mindfulness or awareness, acceptance and equanimity, gratitude and generosity, compassion, and loving connection to other people, nature, and God. The core spiritual belief is that these virtues are the only way to achieve enduring contentment and goodness in the face of life’s challenges and that they will benefit both the person who manifest them and everyone around her. Spiritual virtues have this power, it is taught, because they are in some deep sense right for who we are. (pp. 8-9)

Central to the youth’s ability to cope with tragedy were parental support and adult mentoring (Ferguson & Zimmerman, 2005). The comforting power of a parent’s assurance was highly evident. In addition to a parent’s words, his (especially the father’s) calm reaction to the tragic situation gave the youth a sense of stability.

Changes That the Youth Want to Initiate

Giving the youth a venue to share their perspectives about certain phenomena and issues and initiate change is an important feature of photovoice (Wang et al., 1998). Hence, in this study, the SPs were encouraged to envision the future for themselves, for their school community, and for the society. To answer this question, the SPs proposed three levels of change. These levels were (a) change in the person, that is, the self; (b) change in the school community; and (c) change in the society.

For change in one's self, three themes emerged. These themes were (a) engaging more in spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and prayer; (b) overcoming bad habits; and (c) reassessing, reaffirming, and redirecting priorities such as valuing life and every opportunity, working hard, and valuing family and other people.

Before I did not read the Bible. . . . But after Yolanda I was encouraged to read the Bible. . . . Before I would get mad easily. I had bad habits but now I am learning to overcome them. . . . I should repent of my sins and change my ways. (SP3, Interview Script, para. 6)

I have learned to live like I'm dying. . . . Yolanda is a reminder that this is my second chance to life so I should not waste my opportunities (SP7, Interview Script, para. 9)

Higgins (as cited in Walsh, 2006) revealed that in his study of resilient adults, he found out that "they became more substantial because they were sorely tested, endured suffering, and emerged with strengths they might not have developed otherwise. They experienced things more deeply and intensely, and placed a heightened value on life" (p. 7). Similarly, it was evident that the SPs had gained a heightened sense of direction for their lives. One SP mentioned that in spite of some family financial challenges, he would become a minister or an engineer. SP4 shared, "I have forged a closer relationship with my mom now. I have also understood my dad better. I know that he is trying to connect to us" (Interview Script, para. 7).

For changes in the school community, the SPs spoke only of one theme which was the reconstruction of damaged buildings. As one voice, they emphasized that the rebuilding of the gymnasium should be prioritized because it was a place that held the school community together.

All the damaged buildings . . . could be restored. Especially the gym. I grieve for its loss. . . . It held many beautiful memories. I expect that the gym should be rebuilt first. (SP7, Interview Script, para. 10)

Except for one SP who mentioned some incidents of bullying, the rest expressed pride for their school and affirmed the close and positive relationships among the teachers, students, alumni, parents, and other school constituents. Overall, there was an evident satisfaction among the SPs in almost all areas of school life. Hence, the SPs recommended their school to continue to serve young people, give courage to the people who are affected, and encourage me to keep on studying in spite of my problems. (SP3, Interview Script, para. 6)

The SPs suggested many changes in the society. The emerging themes of their proposed changes were (a) reconstruction and renewal, (b) better and additional support services to the people as a whole, and (c) responsible stewardship and social responsibility. For reconstruction and renewal, the SPs mentioned the need to renovate damaged buildings, provide housing for displaced families, clear affected areas of debris, and repair traffic and street lights. For better and additional support services, among those mentioned were electricity in some barangays and provision of basic needs to those who were financially disadvantaged.

The SPs further stressed responsible stewardship on the part of the people by being “conscious of their garbage” and to change their ways of waste management (SP3, Interview Script, para. 6). SP3 pointed out how the situation during Yolanda was aggravated due to lots of garbage. On the part of the government officials, the SPs called for responsible governance. Decrying corruption, they appealed that help should be given where and to whom it is intended. Further, the SPs enjoined both the people and the government to extend a caring hand. However, this responsibility of rebuilding was not only in the hands of those who were called to help. The SPs underscored also the role of those who were affected.

The people should work toward rebuilding their lives. Even though our progress is slow, our income is small, as long as we are constant and we persevere, like the ants, we will be successful through the help of God. (SP2, Interview Script, para. 9)

Overall, the SPs showed that they comprehended that the world they live in is an imperfect one and humanity is bound by imperfections. But their resolve to strive to become better and stronger persons and to make a better world through self-determination, solidarity, and trust in God was evident. Deep though their grief, they demonstrated affirmations of hope.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn.

In the face of catastrophic natural disasters, while the youth are confronted with both negative and positive experiences, they may choose to highlight the

positive and draw insights from them. Among the effective ways to deal with grief are having faith in God, Bible reading and prayer, support of family and community, and modeling of parents and teachers. The home, the school, and the community, through support, modeling, and mentoring can help the youth deal with their present conditions and rebuild their lives after negative life experiences. Last, faith is an important component in the youth's journey from grief to hope.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made for school administrators and teachers, government officials and other policy makers, and researchers. First, policy makers should implement the changes proposed by the youth such as restoration of damaged areas, provision of support services to the community (e.g., electricity), repair of traffic lights and street lights, renewal of good values among the people (e.g., proper garbage disposal and waste management). Next, assistance for the rebuilding of lives of those who were affected should continue. Additionally, the youth and other marginalized group should be given more opportunities to voice their points of view and to initiate positive change in themselves, in their community, and in the society. Last, photovoice should be used in other research studies especially those that deal with marginalized groups and those who are victims of disasters.

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White, E. G. (1952). *Education*. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press.

*Arceli H. Rosario, PhD
Associate Professor, Education Department
Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
Silang, Philippines
rosarioa@aiias.edu*

Carthy Joy T. Aguillon

Merylyn G. Lucion