



Lived Experiences of Farmers in Catanduanes after Super Typhoon Pepito (Man-yi): A Phenomenological Study

VIVIENNE MAY RUBIO-VALENZUELA ^{ID}
Catanduanes State University

Corresponding author: vmrvalenzuela@catsu.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the lived experiences of farmers in Catanduanes, Philippines, following the devastation brought by Super Typhoon Pepito (Man-yi) in 2024. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gather narratives from purposively selected farmers-participants. The study involved 20 agricultural farmers, selected based on Subedi's (2021) recommendation of number of participants for narrative inquiry and guided by the principle of data saturation. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method which involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering them into emergent themes. The results revealed five major themes: fear and vulnerability, economic disruption and livelihood fragility, coping and recovery through self-reliance and community support, support system gaps, and spiritual and emotional resilience. The study concludes that while farmers



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exhibit strong internal and communal resilience, sustainable recovery remains constrained by systemic vulnerabilities and post-disaster livelihood support. It is recommended that policymakers and development institutions implement inclusive, community-centered disaster risk programs designed for long-term livelihood rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains the backbone of rural livelihoods across many developing countries, including the Philippines, particularly in the province of Catanduanes, where farming remains the primary source of livelihood. However, the increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters pose significant threats to the sustainability of livelihoods. In November 2024, Super Typhoon Pepito (Manny), a Category 5 typhoon, devastated the province of Catanduanes, leaving widespread damage to farmlands, infrastructure, and income sources.

As noted by Ayele (2019), the livelihood of farming households often depends on subsistence agricultural practice, which is increasingly threatened by climate change, financial instability, limited access to resources, and environmental degradation. These issues are magnified when catastrophic events such as typhoons strike, causing devastating impacts on the economic and social structures of vulnerable communities.

The geographical location of Catanduanes, situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire and directly exposed to oceanographic hazards, has earned the moniker “island of howling winds” (Tablate, 2023). The frequency and intensity of typhoons in the region have not only disrupted daily living but have also significantly undermined agricultural productivity and the resilience of local livelihoods.

In the context of the Philippines, this vulnerability is well-documented. According to Stephenson et al. (2018), the country experiences an average of 20 typhoons annually, resulting in extensive loss of assets, crops, and shelter, particularly in agrarian and rural areas. Walsh and Hallegatte (2019) estimated that nearly half a million Filipinos face temporary poverty each year due to natural disasters, with some never fully recovering. These findings underscore the need to address the structural vulnerabilities of farmers through resilience-focused and sustainable livelihood frameworks.

Several studies have highlighted the growing challenges that farmers face, ranging from the rising cost of farm inputs and declining farmgate prices (Domingo, 2023) to the need for greater access to education, infrastructure, and market linkages (Pingali et al., 2019). These challenges are exacerbated by

extreme weather conditions, which in turn exacerbate poverty and limit adaptive capacities, particularly in marginalized rural areas (Birkmann et al., 2022).

Moreover, Hidalgo et al. (2022) reveal that typhoons not only damage physical infrastructures and homes but also compromise economic opportunities and push rural communities into cycles of recovery and loss. The risk-based and vulnerability-based framework in these studies highlights how frequent typhoons result in long-term setbacks for livelihood sustainability.

Local and international studies further reinforce the importance of integrating sustainability into recovery and development strategies. Eadie et al. (2020) emphasized that sustainable livelihoods must be developed not just in response to disasters but as part of a long-term strategy for pre-disaster resilience. Andriess (2017) noted that strengthening primary sector value chains and forming farmer cooperatives are key to reducing poverty and improving rural development. Meanwhile, Chechina et al. (2018) emphasized that linking livelihoods to environmental conservation strategies could lead to more sustainable socioeconomic outcomes.

In Catanduanes, Super Typhoon Rolly in 2020 and Super Typhoon Pepito in 2024 were both significant climatic events that brought destructive winds and heavy rainfall, severely impacting the agricultural sector, which is the primary source of livelihood for most of its residents. While national disaster relief and recovery efforts are often deployed, there is limited qualitative data that captures the lived experiences of affected farmers and how such disasters shape their coping mechanisms, challenges, and resilience strategies.

Despite these insights, a gap remains in the literature regarding the understanding of the lived experience of farmers directly affected by super typhoons, particularly in isolated provinces like Catanduanes. As emphasized by Calipusan-Elnar and Abocejo (2021), capturing these narratives through qualitative research is essential in designing responsive policies and localized programs that reflect realities on the ground.

Given the lack of in-depth, localized studies focused specifically on the phenomenological impacts of Super Typhoon Pepito, it becomes imperative to conduct this research. This study aims to explore and understand the actual lived experiences of farmers in Pandan, Catanduanes, after the typhoon. The findings of this study aim to develop sustainable and community-based livelihood programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of agricultural farmers in Pandan, Catanduanes,

following the passage of Super Typhoon Pepito (Man-yi). The phenomenological approach was chosen to understand the personal narratives and subjective experiences of individuals who faced the impacts of the typhoon, with data analyzed using Colaizzi's method.

Purposive sampling was used to select 20 farmer-participants who were directly affected by the typhoon. The number was guided by Subedi's (2021) recommendation for narrative inquiry and determined by the principle of data saturation. The primary data collection technique involved semi-structured interviews, supported by field observations to provide context. The interview guide was validated by a panel of experts and translated into the local dialect to enhance participant understanding and ensure accurate responses.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to: informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participation was voluntary. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed using thematic coding based on Colaizzi's seven-step process, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and organizing emergent themes.

Data were further processed through triangulation with field notes and observations to strengthen validity. In accordance with Colaizzi's method, the fundamental structure of the findings was returned to the participants for verification to ensure that it accurately captured their lived experiences. This rigorous approach ensured that voices of marginalized farmers were authentically represented, providing a reliable basis for drawing conclusions and policy recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Colaizzi's Method: Analysis of Lived Experiences of Farmers

Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Theme
<i>"We feared for our family's safety during the onslaught of the typhoon".</i>	Farmers experienced fear for their lives and families during the typhoon	Fear and Vulnerability
<i>"There was no electricity, water or communication. Everything was gone".</i>	Loss of basic services deepened the trauma and hindered response.	Fear and Vulnerability
<i>"Our crops were wiped out, and our farming equipment was damaged".</i>	The typhoon caused total or partial loss of livelihood resources.	Economic Disruption and Livelihood Fragility

<i>"We had to borrow money or look for another source of income temporarily".</i>	Coping involves borrowing and finding alternative income sources.	Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support
<i>"We depended on aid and assistance from the community and the government, but it was limited".</i>	Community and government support were essential but limited.	Support System Gaps
<i>"We repaired our house and started planting again, even though it was difficult".</i>	Recovery efforts included self-reliant rebuilding and returning to farming.	Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support
<i>"We are more prepared, we built a stronger house and stored food, but the typhoon was too strong that it was still not enough".</i>	Farmers learned from experience and adapted their disaster preparedness but the severity of typhoon impact caused too much damage.	Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support
<i>"We are able to start to recover because of our faith in God and our courage".</i>	Spiritual faith and internal strength played an important role in emotional recovery.	Spiritual and Emotional Resilience
<i>"The assistance that arrived was still not enough, especially for rebuilding the farm".</i>	Gaps in technical and financial support prolonged livelihood recovery.	Support System Gaps
<i>"There is still fear, in case it happens again, especially since we don't have any money, our savings are gone, and the assistance are limited".</i>	Anxiety remains due to lack of resources and uncertainty about future disasters.	Fear and Vulnerability
<i>"We joined training sessions about disaster preparedness".</i>	Proactive participation in disaster-preparedness education was adopted.	Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support
<i>"It would have been more effective if the aid had arrived earlier and been sufficient, and if there had been a livelihood program".</i>	Timely and sustained support, especially livelihood-focused was requested.	Support System Gaps
<i>"It's just us helping each other. Right after the typhoon, not even an hour passed before we went to check the damage to our house and our neighbors".</i>	Community solidarity became a substitute for formal aid.	Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support
<i>"We are thankful that we are alive, even though we have almost nothing left".</i>	Life was prioritized over material loss, and gratitude was expressed amid suffering.	Spiritual and Emotional Resilience

The key informants of the study are farmers, whose primary source of livelihood is agriculture, with abaca cultivation identified as the most common. Most of them own the land they cultivate, although the size is generally less than one hectare. This shows reliance on subsistence or limited commercial farming, making them more vulnerable to economic disruptions caused by natural disasters.

This chapter presents the interpretation of data based on the emergent themes drawn from the lived experience of farmers in Pandan, Catanduanes, following the super typhoon Pepito. Guided by the phenomenological approach and Colazzi's method of data analysis, five major themes emerged from the significant statements and formulated meanings.

Theme 1: Fear and Vulnerability

Farmers consistently expressed fear and anxiety during the typhoon, particularly regarding their personal safety and that of their families. An example of participant's response is "*We feared for our family's safety during the onslaught of the typhoon*". This was exacerbated by the sudden loss of basic services, including electricity, water, and communication. The inability to connect with others and assess external conditions heightened their sense of helplessness.

The findings are consistent with Calipusan-Elnar and Aboejo, (2021), who emphasized that emotional distress is the dominant feature of disaster experiences, especially in isolated rural communities. The fear expressed by participants reflects a deep-seated vulnerability that stems not only from the physical force of the disaster but also from their limited resources and access to protective infrastructure.

This theme also reflects what Delina and Cagoco-Guiam (2018) describe as the intersection between environmental insecurity and psychological stress in typhoon-prone areas. Without local systems of early warning and psychological support, fear becomes a defining element of the disaster experience.

Theme 2: Economic Disruption and Livelihood Fragility

A dominant concern among participants was the destruction of their farms, crops, tools, and sources of income. An example of participant's response is "*Our crops were wiped out, and our farming equipment was damaged*". Many were unable to return to work immediately, and the loss of harvests resulted in no income for an extended period. For subsistence farmers, the loss was not only economic, but it also represented the temporary collapse of their entire way of life.

These coping strategies reveal a high level of social cohesion, consistent with the findings of Su and Tanyag (2019) and Maquiling et al. (2021), who observed

that disaster-affected Filipinos often rely on one another due to inadequate formal aid. While admirable, this reliance on oneself and the community highlights the need to enhance institutional safety nets in rural disaster situations.

The findings support Ayele's (2019) assertion that livelihood fragility is exacerbated by climate change, limited access to inputs, and inadequate market connectivity. Without significant post-disaster rehabilitation, the agricultural productivity and economic well-being of small-holder farmers remain persistently threatened.

Theme 3: Coping and Recovery through Self-Reliance and Community Support

The initial phase of recovery for most farmers was rooted in self-initiated efforts which included repairing their homes and equipment, borrowing funds and seeking temporary employment. An example of participant's responses is "*We had to borrow money or look for another source of income temporarily*". Some had no choice but to wear wet clothing, as their homes were totally damaged and the only garments, they could recover were already soaked wet.

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In the lack of comprehensive intervention, the community becomes both the first responder and long-term support system. However, this is not sustainable in the face of repeated calamities and prolonged recovery periods.

Theme 4: Support System Gaps

Although most farmers received immediate help in the form of food and water, many reported gaps in financial and technical support. An example of participant's responses is "*We depended on aid and assistance from the community and the government, but it was limited*". The aid provided was insufficient and lasted only a few days. Several shared that they needed long-term livelihood recovery programs, faster aid distribution, and access to tools or training. The mismatch between the needs and assistance created frustration and prolonged hardship.

This theme aligns with Taganas (2019) and Domingo (2023), who emphasize the need for disaster recovery programs that extend beyond emergency relief and actively rebuild farming systems. Moreover, as Hidalgo et al. (2022) argue, addressing vulnerabilities requires not only providing resources but ensuring that

systems of aid distribution are inclusive, efficient, and context-specific.

Theme 5: Spiritual and Emotional Resilience

Despite significant losses, farmers consistently expressed gratitude for life and a sense of spiritual strength. An example of participant's responses is "*We are able to start to recover because of our faith in God and our courage*". Faith, personal determination, and emotional endurance were consistently highlighted in their narratives. These intangible resources helped them face uncertainty, find meaning in their suffering, and commit to rebuilding their lives.

This form of resilience, founded in belief and hope, aligns with the observations of Maquiling et al. (2021), who emphasized that disaster recovery is not just material; it is deeply emotional and existential. Spiritual resilience may not replace structural support, but it offers a strong foundation for psychological survival and motivation.

CONCLUSIONS

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of farmers following the devastation caused by Super Typhoon Pepito. Through Colaizzi's method of data analysis, five major themes emerged: fear and vulnerability, economic disruption and livelihood fragility, coping and recovery through self-reliance and community support, gaps in support systems, and spiritual and emotional resilience. These themes encapsulate the depth of emotional, social, and economic challenges faced by farmers, while also highlighting their capacity to adapt, persist, and find meaning in the midst of crisis.

The findings revealed that the farmers' experiences were shaped not only by the physical destruction caused by the super typhoon but also by the long-standing vulnerabilities embedded in their rural environment, which included limited access to resources, unstable livelihoods, inadequate disaster preparedness, and gaps in institutional support. Although immediate relief was provided, it was insufficient for a full recovery, prompting farmers to rely on their personal resilience, faith, and support from their communities.

The disruption of farming activities had a significant impact on their income and food security. Farmers had to resort to alternative income sources, borrowing, and rebuilding with minimal resources. Despite this, they showed strong internal resilience and faith, which became vital in their recovery. However, their narratives also highlight persistent fears about the future, with concerns about recurring disasters.

Moreover, the study emphasized that disaster recovery in rural communities

must go beyond short-term relief and incorporate sustainable intervention. There is a clear need for inclusive extension programs, technical support, and policies that will address livelihood challenges.

This study concludes that while the farmers of Catanduanes exhibit remarkable strength and determination, their resilience should not substitute for systemic support. A more proactive, community-based, and sustainable approach to post-disaster recovery that acknowledges lived experiences, strengthens local capacities, and addresses long-term needs of vulnerable farming communities.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of this study can be translated into a practical and community-based sustainable livelihood extension program. The research results will be communicated through user-friendly formats such as brochures, infographics, and short videos in the local dialect to help farmers understand recovery strategies and improve their livelihood practices. These materials will be used by local government units, agricultural officers, and cooperatives to implement community-based programs that build long-term livelihood sustainability and disaster preparedness among affected farmers.

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