ImportanteBuhi (What Matters, I’m Alive!): Visayan Catch Phrase and Its Implications after Typhoon Odette

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Abstract
This study was formulated to explore the usage of the catch phrase “ImportanteBuhi”, among Filipinos hit by typhoon Odette. The goal was to discover the different interpretations of the catch phrase and its implications to the individuals affected by typhoon Odette. The findings of this study were centered around the concept of resilience with which there were three subthemes namely lived experiences, coping strategies, and divine providence. This research utilized a qualitative method and the answers from the respondents were made into themes. The target population of this research were individuals who were seriously affected by the typhoon.

Keywords: Typhoon Odette, “ImportanteBuhi” (What Matters, I’m Alive), Resilience

Introduction
In a research by Conde (2004), “The Philippines is considered to be one of the world’s most disaster-prone countries with an average of 10–20 strong typhoons and five (5) cyclones a year, putting its citizens at major risk for repeated natural disaster related trauma”. According to the 2020 World Risk Index (WRI), the Philippines ranked 9th in the world as the most affected country from extreme weather events. Many people faced mental and emotional consequences from the traumatic experience of typhoon Yolanda before but it was assessed that cognitive behavioral intervention was best in alleviating the stress but had little to no effect with raising hope levels (Del Fierro and Huxter, 2015). Despite such vulnerability, most Filipinos tend to maintain a positive outlook in life (Ang and Diaz, n.d.). Filipinos learned to develop coping mechanisms to survive. One evident case was the onslaught of Super Typhoon Odette, the 15th storm in 2021 and the strongest storm of the year which hit the country on the 16th of December 2021 (Super Typhoon Odette (Rai), 2022). It was one of the most destructive typhoons to hit the Philippines with an estimate of PhP 23.4 billion worth of damage to infrastructure and agriculture. Reports also showed that nine (9) million people were displaced mostly in Bohol, Cebu and Southern Leyte as houses and livelihoods were destroyed.

In spite of the typhoon’s tremendous impact, Filipinos demonstrated the willpower to overcome the hardships they faced and found ways to cope with the situation. After the typhoon passed, one common expression of people in the Visayan region is usually “ImportanteBuhi!” (What Matters, I’m Alive!). This has been frequently heard in conversations with family, friends, and the people living in areas which were greatly affected by the typhoon. This study explores the different interpretations of the said Visayan catch phrase and its implications to the individuals affected by Super Typhoon Odette. This research examines how the catch phrase helps with coping distress, how it’s being utilized as a positive reframe, and how it relates to resilience.

Methodology
The researchers used a qualitative method, specifically the descriptive research design. This design was chosen by the researchers since the study aimed to describe the implication of the catchphrase. To gather data, the online survey method was utilized. This set of questions were formulated by the researchers that would help draw
out answers that will be useful to the study. Prior to using the questionnaires, these were validated first by experts. As it is still in the midst of the pandemic, the researchers sent out the survey questionnaire online. The respondents were from parts of Cebu and Bohol; these areas were severely affected by the super typhoon accounting for 61% of destroyed homes. The researchers selected the participants using purposive sampling. This sampling method helped the researchers find participants that would draw out what the researchers were looking for. In this sampling method, the researchers selected the respondents with these criteria; these are, 1.) must be residing in Bohol and Cebu 2.) was in Cebu and Bohol during supertyphoon Odette.

The survey questions were given to the participants whom the researchers selected based on the criteria. The respondents were then asked to answer the forms online and were encouraged to recall their experiences during the super typhoon Odette. The answers were then collected by the researcher from the participants and were reviewed for thematic analysis.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. The names of the respondents were not included in the study to uphold confidentiality.

**Results and Discussion**

A total of eight (8) respondents were gathered in the course of this research, four (4) of which were female and four (4) were male, two (2) of these respondents were Korean and American respectively. From the interview that was conducted, the researchers were able to come up with sub-themes which were lived experiences, coping strategies, and divine providence all under the main theme of resilience.

The purpose of this study was to know the implications of the phrase, “ImportanteBuhis”, to victims affected by typhoon Odette and whether it has helped with their resilience or coping during the said catastrophe. The first sub-theme was about the victims' lived experiences during the typhoon with which basic amenities were scarce such as electricity, water and fuel. In a news article published by Inquirer, residents of Cebu would line up in long queues to have a chance of purchasing clean water and food supply. There were even some residents who would buy clean water supplies in bulk and would sell it to others double the amount (Mayol, 2021). This circumstance ran quite rampant during the catastrophe, however, it is not surprising to see this type of behavior. According to National Geographic Society (2019), Charles Darwin’s Theory of Evolution mainly talks about the survival of the fittest, wherein, those who are able to fight and cope with the environment will be able to survive. In relation to that, the very behavior of the victims selling water supply which is double the price of when they bought it, is a clear depiction of Charles Darwin’s survival of the fittest. As all people in the said area were affected, a matter of how they can survive is of utmost importance. Is this a depiction of resilience? According to the American Psychological Association (n.d), resilience is the ability to adapt to internal or external demands, which means to say that the occurrence that was previously stated is a sign of resilience.

However, is this enough to get back on one’s feet? If one’s mental capability is affected, it would be hard to even think about any immediate solution to such a predicament. According to a study conducted by Wu et al. (2020), “improved mental health is associated with increased resilience”, thereby connoting that something must be done first to one’s mental state, which leads to the second sub-theme of this research, coping strategies.

The most common coping strategy that the respondents in this study used was social support, in which those respondents living with their family members were most fortunate to have, on the other hand, those living without the family tend to resort to praying or entertainment like watching videos, listening to music and the like. In a study about social support and resilience to stress, social support can help in mitigating the effects of stress and in promoting positive coping mechanisms given that the social network is a healthy one (Ozbay F. et al., 2007). If one were to look at Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs, the first and most basic need that must be met would be the physiological needs, which are namely the need for food, shelter, clothing, rest or sleep, and reproduction. This was clearly evident when the typhoon struck and the victims affected by it had to look for the most basic amenities which were food, water and shelter. However, what does it have to do with the catchphrase? In the hierarchy of needs, if
one were to look at the next need it would be safety needs which would entail one to seek for personal security or in this case, safety. Upon knowing that their lives were spared from the typhoon, the respondents were most grateful for staying alive. Which means to say that this phrase has made them aware of how being alive is important in spite of having worldly possessions in which the different respondents said:

“Dili importanteang material things, mas importantejudngabahi na after sanahitabo”
“I keep on reminding myself that life is most precious above all”
“It made me realize that we have to be alive and never give up. Continue to make plans—series of plans and back up plans, until we reach our goal. All those plans will not sustain us if we are dead, right?”
“Mas importanteang babuhinga, didtonakasukodngamabuhirajudgihaponmaskiwalay gadgets”
It was further stated that the phrase helped the respondents to have hope, to persevere, and to be patient:
“As a Korean person, I just patiently wait for the better days to come. I say the phrase means “Patience”.”
“It helped me keep going and not lose hope.”
“At least I don’t quit. Whatever problems you have, deal with it cause tomorrow’s gonna be another day.”

“Ma recover rana soon maskidugayangmganagubsutangtungodsabagyo.
Pero ang life if mawala kay walan jud”

It was apparent from the answers of the respondents that those with families during adversity such as pandemic and typhoon aftermath were able to go through slightly better than those that were not. The desire for humans to stay connected in small groups or tribes such as family circles and relatives validate the very nature of the same to stay protected and safe. Uncertainty triggers anxiety and fear could only be mitigated by the presence of another human being as part of his or her existence or anything such as religion or a belief in god which leads to the last sub-theme of this research which is divine providence.

When the respondents were asked what catch phrase or saying they live by everyday, god or the divine was most common. One participant stated that:
“With God, nothing is impossible.” It reminds me daily that I can always do and give my best, but it is God that will make all my effort grow and flourish—making impossible things possible.

In an article about religion, spirituality and Filipina American breast cancer survivors, some survivors often succumbed to leaving it all to God, which is reflective to that of the Filipino concept of Bahala Na, that connotes or implies to entrusting one’s life to God (Lagman et al., 2012). All in all, it is the divine that remains the source of hope and motivation for the respondents. The catchphrase ImportanteBuhi only comes second after thanking God for having given one, another chance at life.

Based on the different themes discussed in this research, was the catch phrase related to that of being resilient? Others expressed that sometimes this catch phrase is overused of just doing the bare minimum without having any plans for the future:
“Sometimes negative. Kay makastopsiyanako from trying my best. Like “bahalanahagbongni oy bastimportantebuhi” Muragnahimonsyag excuse”

The catch phrase does not necessarily correlate to that of being resilient, however, to others it was a source of comfort, gratitude and hope.

Conclusion
This research was focused on exploring the implications of the catchphrase, “ImportanteBuhi” after the onslaught of typhoon Odette and whether it had any significance to that of resilience. There were three themes that were derived from the answers of the respondents which were lived experiences, coping strategies, and divine providence. The study demonstrated that the catchphrase was not necessarily indicative of resilience, but rather, it
was a source of hope which would lean towards positive reframe or optimism rather than resilience. The catchphrase serves as a foundation to that of resilience.

References


