

# UNDERSTANDING THE COPING STRATEGIES OF SELECTED FILIPINOS VICTIMIZED BY TYPHOON ONDOY ACROSS LIFESPAN

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*This empirical phenomenological study aimed to identify and understand the coping strategies of selected Filipinos victimized by Typhoon Ondoy across lifespan. Specifically, this study intended to (a) determine the lived experiences of the participants pertinent to typhoon Ondoy, (b) identify the coping strategies of the participants, (c) establish an eidetic symbol of the study, and (d) differentiate the coping strategies of selected Filipinos across age groups. The researchers interviewed 15 participants from Marikina City who were victims of typhoon Ondoy. Transcribed interviews were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. IPA yielded three themes common among participants' lived experiences - (a) Ondoy as a tragic incident, (b) Ondoy as an unusual encounter, and (c) Ondoy as a life changer. Results showed that Filipinos cope by (a) receiving social assistance which can be classified into two sub-themes namely - external aid and support from kin, (b) employing mitigative measures, and (c) turning to faith. Eidetic symbols of the study were also established. Conclusion and limitation are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Coping Strategies, Filipinos, IPA, Phenomenology, Typhoon*

## **INTRODUCTION**

An article released by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation last August 2010 revealed a list of common calamities that had struck the world and these include earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes, pandemics and famines. These events often come at the least expected time and the impact of such events do not only limit itself on the physical and tangible damages but go far beyond claiming lives, devastating hard owned infrastructures and properties and affecting communities endemically. Such casualty is not a stranger to the Philippines. According to the analysis of Germanwatch – an international organization for climate and development, the country is one of the states that suffer greatly from extreme weather disturbances. The geographical location of the country is one of the reasons why such catastrophes occur. The Philippine archipelago lies within the pacific ring of fire making volcanic eruptions and earthquakes frequent. Moreover, the setting of the Philippines sits on the path of the monsoons and typhoons formed from the West, causing the visits of not less than twenty typhoons a year (Alave, 2011). These typhoons bring about floods and tidal waves and because of the destruction of watersheds and rainforest, flash floods and mudslides became prevalent.

For the past years, Philippines' most destructive climate hazard is the flooding caused by grave typhoons and monsoons. Severe rains, cyclones and thunderstorms come naturally with

persistent rainfall, landslides and flash floods than it is likely expected jeopardizing the lives and livelihood of every Filipino.

Citing Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) and National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) records, Typhoon Ketsana, locally named Ondoy struck the Philippines on September 26, 2009 with a wind speed of 85 kilometers per hour with gust of 100 kilometers, a 455 mm, 24-hour accumulated rainfall, and left a trail of almost 354 dead people, 89,116 affected families or 448,454 persons and 10.85 billion cost of damage.

The corporeal effects of a calamity are usually evident. For many victims and survivors, emotional effects of calamities may be short-term and obvious but for some, it may be long-lasting and subtle and might result to trauma (Ehrenreich, 2001), but even though faced with such challenges, as a nation, Filipinos are claiming to be supple - always wearing a smile even under the most difficult circumstances (Jocano in Bankoff, 2007).

Given the fact that Filipinos are known to be collectivists, there were few studies conducted in collectivistic countries such as Asia and Latin America that have examined how culture and values influence coping practices (Cross & Vick, 2001 in Moore & Constantine, 2005). Considering that numerous researches on coping have been done in other countries, coping has been defined in many ways. Ibanez, et al., (2004) defined coping as the way of every individual to deal with the aftermath of a disaster, while Lazarus (1993) in Krohne (2002) defined coping as an effort made by an individual to handle psychological stress. Furthermore, Haan in Lazarus (1993) articulated that coping is an adaptation and it is the healthiest process of adapting to stressful situations. According to Davis (1996) in Pauland & Routray (2009), coping strategies refer to the various ways people utilize in dealing with a disaster, while Bankoff (2004) identified coping strategies as familiar patterns used by a community or an individual to reduce the impact of a disaster as a result of habituation.

## **Context of Current Research and Assumptions**

In the current study, the central domain is the coping strategies of Filipinos victimized by Typhoon Ondoy. Ibanez, et al. (2004) was able to identify four themes on coping strategies based on his qualitative analysis on the responses of their study's respondents. These were (a) seeking support, (b) seeking meaning, (c) problem solving, and (d) avoidance. Moreover, Folkman and Lazarus (1992) have identified five emotion-focused coping strategies: (a) disclaiming, (b) escape-avoidance, (c) accepting responsibility or blame, (d) exercising self-control, (e) positive reappraisal, and three problem-focused coping strategies: (a) problem solving, (b) seeking social support, (c) avoidance.

Several studies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, Cross, 1995, Essandoh, 1995, Mori, 2000, Bang, 1998, Nebedum-Ezeh, 1997, Ng, 2001 in Moore & Constantine, 2005) have reported that individuals coming from a collectivistic culture such as Africa, Asia, and Latin American countries may cope by talking and sharing their problems with, and seeking advice and support from people

close to them. They value interpersonal relationships and tend to see their significant others as part of their own self.

There have also been studies which showed positive relationship between good sense of humor and coping (Kuiper & Martin, 1993, Kuiper, Martin, & Dance, 1992, Lefcourt & Thomas, 1998, Newman & Stone, 1996, Overholser, 1992, Thorson & Powell, 1994, Thorson, Powell, Sarmany-Schuller, & Hampes, 1997 in E. Marziali et al., 2008). Additionally, in a study conducted by Martin & Lefcourt (1983), it was reported that humor can reduce the negative impacts of stress and be able to cope with it.

Numerous researches have discovered that coping strategies changes over time across lifespan for the reason that individual across every stage of life occupy different context and problems which require different coping strategies (James & Bonnie, 2007; Aldwin, 1994 in Berg et al, 1998).

Based on the reviewed literatures, the current study has the following assumptions:

- a. Filipinos victimized by Typhoon Ondoy are most likely to seek support, given that they are from a collectivistic culture;
- b. Filipinos use humor as their means of dealing with the impact of a disaster, and;
- c. Filipinos belonging from different developmental stages have different coping strategies.

Generally, this study aims to identify and understand the coping strategies of selected Filipinos victimized by Typhoon Ondoy across lifespan. Specifically, this study intends to:

- a. Determine the lived experiences of the participants pertinent to typhoon Ondoy;
- b. Identify the coping strategies of the participants;
- c. Establish an eidetic symbol of the study; and
- d. Differentiate the coping strategies of selected Filipinos across age groups.

According to Lazarus (1984), mental processes are important components of individual's strategy to deal with stressful situation. In 2009, when Typhoon Ondoy struck the Philippines, it caused several stress disturbances amongst the people. Following Lazarus theory on stress and coping, there are two types of coping people commonly used in dealing with the situation. Problem focused coping according to him is when the person made attempts in changing the situation by planning several ways to remove the situation and trying to remove the stressor. The second type according to him is the emotion focused coping. In this type of coping, individuals develop a skill on thought alteration. One tries to reframe the situation to make it less threatening and concentrate on positive outcomes only. As the name implies, emotions are the main focus of this type.

Lazarus firmly believed that people alter their emotions and tries to make it desirable. Both

problem focused and emotion focused type of coping can be used in order to achieve coping, they are hand-in-hand utilized by individuals to deal with such situations. From these two, strategies of coping have been identified by Lazarus. First is problem solving where individuals exert efforts towards the solution of the problem. Next is seeking social support wherein individuals used emotions in order to empathize or sympathize with victims and use humor in order to alleviate stress. The last one is avoidance wherein efforts made are directed towards the distraction of oneself on the problem and using several defense mechanisms such as fantasy, distancing, rationalization in order to refuse in facing the aftermath.

These three types again may be used by a single individual in order to deal with the situation. These areas of coping then lead to coping itself of individuals that are faced with typhoon Ondoy.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were selected through purposive sampling. In selecting the participants of the study, the researchers decided to look for essential criteria. First, they should have experienced Typhoon Ondoy. Next, they must have been a residence of Marikina City when the typhoon struck. Lastly, participants must be in their childhood (7-11 years old), adolescence (12-19 years old) and adulthood (20 years old onwards) when typhoon Ondoy struck.

### **Data Gathering and Analysis**

The main method of gathering data is through semi-structured interview. The researchers formulated questions that served as their guide for the interview. The guide questions were subjected to expert validation and then translated into Filipino which by then validated by another set of experts. The participants were interviewed individually three years after the typhoon. With their verbal consent, their interview statements were recorded. Permission to use and publish the gathered data were also asked and granted to the researchers. The recorded interviews were transcribed and responses were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis focuses on the lived experiences of the participants and it tries to figure out eidetic symbols and meanings of certain event and phenomenon experienced by the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The IPA involves systematic search for themes, forge connections between themes, and establishment of super ordinate themes. After analyzing the interview protocols, eidetic symbols and meanings generated from the obtained interview protocols were referred back to the original transcriptions in order to be validated. The researchers also went back to the participants to present and discuss the results and themes generated from the interview statements in order to ensure that the generated findings were solely derived from the subjective reality of every participant.

## RESULTS

The most common themes regarding the four emerging research questions are presented below. There are some themes which are branched into smaller categories or sub-themes. Excerpts that illustrate each theme and the number in terms of the age of informants that represent such themes are also included. A total of 15 transcripts (5 from each stage-childhood, adolescence, adulthood) were analyzed and thematized.

### Lived Experiences

**Ondoy as a tragic incident.** When typhoon Ondoy struck the Philippines last September 2009, everyone was astounded. No one ever imagined that it would cost hundreds of lives, damaged thousands of properties and destroy billions of livelihood and infrastructures. The aftermath of the disaster brought grave danger to its victims and put many localities in the country under a state of calamity. The scenery that it left to every single mind is a memory of hardship, fear and pain. It even caused people to start questioning why such things are happening to them. A mother participants described her feelings about what happen. She even posed “what if” statements about her life and self-blames that such things would not happen if the right preventive measures were taken.

*“Naawa ako sa sarili ko, naawa ako sa sa buhay namin. Bakit kami nagkaganun. Naawa ako sa mga anak ko...bakit namin naranasan ung ganoon. Ung hirap na hirap kami.” (I feel bad for myself and in our current state of living. Why did we become like this? I feel bad for my children... Why did we have to experience it? We are really having a hard time.)*

A female child describes how afraid she was every time she hears the word “Ondoy”. She fears that something would happen again and that she could never get that experience out of her mind. *“Naiiyak po ako nun, kasi nung pagpunta po namin, basang-basa po ako nun, tapos nawala po kaming tsinelas, wala po kaming kabit anong bagay na dala po nun pumunta kami sa lola ko para lumikas” (I am about to cry while we were on our way because I am soaking wet and I even lost my slippers. We do not have anything with us when we went to my grandmother's house to evacuate).*

Another participant, a male teenager described how typhoon Ondoy has become a part of their lives. He admitted that they never imagined that the flood would be that high and their second floor would not be enough as a safe ground. *“Kasi naging part siya ng buhay ko na very tragic. Tsaka, ung ano, experience ko naging miserable ung naging buhay namin. Nagbago ang buhay namin dahil ang pagkakataong un, once in a lifetime lang. Ngayon lang ako nakakita ng ganun, na kabit sa palabas hindi ko akalain mangyayari sa totoong buhay at mangyayari sa isang iglap lang.” (Because it has been a part of my life that was very tragic. Our life changed, it became miserable because of that once in a lifetime experience. It was my first time to experience such thing which I thought only exists in movies).*

**Ondoy as an unusual encounter.** Being able to live within the memories of the calamity is

to embrace the inequality of life. There are unexplained events such as disasters which took away hard earned money, priceless possessions and even lives which inevitably hurt survivors and haunt them with what transpired during the event. What the world has witnessed during the calamity is a once in a lifetime event that even though it gave us pain and suffering taught us lessons and memories that are impossible to forget. A male participant witnessed a lot of breath taking events during Ondoy. While he was stranded away from home and forced to stay on the roofs of his neighbours, he save a man's life and saw the determination of a father to save his family. While he was struggling up there because of the cold weather and non-availability of food he managed to survive that day because of his companions. And even after the flood he continue to gain irreplaceable experiences like when he was assigned to look for families, those deserving ones for relief goods.

*"Ung may-ari ng babay na nastroke dyan, di siya makalakad, ako pa ang nagbuhat niyan. Inakyat ko sa mas mataas na bubong kasi hirap na hirap na un e. E ang taba kaya inakyat namin lalo...Ung isang kasama ko, andito siya sa kabilang side, tinali niya ung sarili niya sa lubid tinali niya un para makatawid siya sa kabila dahil buong pamilya niya na-trap sa ilalim kumakatok lang para masira ung bubong. Un. ...Hahanapin ko ung mga hirap na hirap na pamilya, magbabahay-babay ako at bibigyan ko ng number para makakuha sa chorillo." (I was the one who carried the owner of the house who is suffering from stroke. I brought him to a higher place to avoid the flood. My other colleague tied himself with a rope to cross the flashing flood because his whole family was trapped. They were just pounding hard to destroy the roof to secure a way out. That... I went from one house to another to help other failies by giving them a number for the chorillo).*

A male child participant narrated his experience during the typhoon and how the greatly affected by it. Their house was near the Marikina river that is why the flood reached the roof of their two-storey house. Their whole subdivision resembled a swimming pool of mud and dirt. He saw how the water increase level, it came to the point when they do not have any other choice but to stay on the roof, and they have been rescued and he saw dead bodies he saw on the streets are just some of his experience that he could not forget.

*"...tumataas na po ung tubig sa ilog, nag-akyat na kami ng gamit kaso bigla pong nasa tubod ko na po...Nag-stay kami sa second floor pero bigla pong inabot padin po kami...Nasa bubong na po ung kapitbahay, kaya kami din po pumunta na dun, sa bintana po kami dumaan... Naghintay po kami, may dumating po na rescue, sinakay nila kami pero madami pa pong dinaanan bago makapunta sa school...Pag gising ko po nakela lola na po kami pero bumalik kami sa babay.. may nadaanan po kaming patay sa kalsada... Ung mga laruan ko puro putik, ung kama ko po nakabaligtad..." (The river is starting to overflow so we started to evacuate our things but in just a few minutes, the water is already knee-deep... We kept on moving from the first level of our house up to the roof of our neighbors to avoid being reached by the flood. We waited until the rescue team arrives and they brought us to an evacuation center... I feel asleep and when I woke up, we were already at my grandmother's house and when we went back to our house, I already saw dead bodies on the road and my toys are all covered in mud, including my bed which was turned upside down).*

**Ondoy as a life changer.** The typhoon caused a lot of changes into each of its victims' lives. Survivors may found themselves changed in a changed life situation. The impact of the calamity disrupted normal lives, making it more difficult to live everyday. For most participants, they experienced transition for more than a month because the calamity did not only immobilize their normal day to day activities but attacked their immune system making them incapable to strive harder. Because of the typhoon a lot of people experienced extreme suffering, pain, hunger and fear. But as most of the participants wondered how are will be able to start all over again, or how they will bring back everything they lost, some depended on their own self. They strive to look forward and not backward, determined that it was only a challenged posed by the Higher Power above and that instead of digging into the grievances they exerted effort to made their live worthwhile. A male participants was a good example for this. Even though his daughter became sick and that their sole business was destroyed still he believed that there is hope waiting around the corner."

*Pag nakalipas na, bayaan na. may kinabukasan na dapat pansinin. Ang nakalipas ay aral nalang e...hindi ako papaapekto sa ano ng buhay. Nasa ospital na e. wala namang pagsubok na bibigay na hindi natin kakayanin e. Ipagpatuloy ang hanapbuhay. Hanggat meron mapagkikitaan sige lang. Pag may pagkakataon, kailangan anuhin, pag may cliente na nagppatrabaho, wag nang tanggihan."* (When it is over, let it be. The future is what we should pay attention to, the past will just serve as a lesson. There will be no trails in life that we cannot overcome. As long as you have a livelihood, just continue working. Grab every opportunity that comes your way, do not refuse clients who need your service).

Two of the participants of this study loss their source of income for good. Even three years have already passed since the destruction, they did not manage to come back to their old works. *"Nangangapa, hindi mo alam kung paano ka mag-stastart e. Siyempre ung business nga namin, masyadong malaking kapital ang kailangan ulit, siymepre makina un, hindi nama gagana kung walang makina."* *"Nabaha ung goods e. Hindi ko na maibabalik sa kompanya gawa nang maputik at ayaw nilang tanggapin. So labat ng account ko, nag-close na yon kasi nag-iisue ako ng tseke na hindi na ako nakakasingil."* (You do not know how to start over. We need a big capital for our business. Of course those are machines, our business will not work without machines. The goods were ruined by the flood so I will not be able to return it to the company and because they will not accept it anymore. I issued checks but I was not able to get back the charges so my accounts were all closed).

An adult participants sadly, described her feelings of loss and what ifs. She thought that if they were not that unfortunate they would not experienced the calamity. She even blamed herself for the hardships her family experience but in the end, she never forget to mentioned how lucky they were because they are still together. *"...Bakit namin nararanasan ang ganoon. Hirap na hirap kami. Siguro kung marami akong iniisp kung sana mayaman lang ako, hindi namin naransan ung ganoon. Kung maganda sana ung buhay namin edi siyempre hindi kami nakatira dito sa Tumana hindi namin mararansan ung ganitong hirap. Pero sa awa ng Diyos, nakasurvive kami ngayon."* (Why did we have to experience it? We were really having a hard time. I have thought that if I am just rich, if my life is much better than it was then we will not be experiencing it because we will be leaving in a different place. But with God's mercy, we survived it.)

## Coping Strategies

The table summarized the coping strategies obtained from the study and the number of respondents who utilized such. The respondents were divided according to their age groups. Some of the respondents utilized more than 1 coping strategy and other coping strategies such as Avoidance.

Age Group	Receiving Social Assistance		Employing Mitigative Measures	Turning to Faith
Childhood	External Aid	Support from kin	5	2
	1	5		
Adolescence	5	4	5	3
Adulthood	5	3	5	3

**Receiving Social Assistance.** Receiving Social Assistance refers to the help whether moral or tangible that participants continuously received immediately after the destruction and until they perceived that they are ready to stand on their own. It has two sub-themes: External Aid and Support from kin.

External Aid (n= 5 adults, 5 adolescents, 1 child) are services or help from the government, non-government organizations, acquaintances, co-workers, classmates, neighbors and friends. These help are in form of relief operations, donations, calls or text messages, and informal visits. A female adolescent described her immediate experience after the flood when she saw their neighbors and asked the conditions of one another. She also stated how her friends helped her during the time that they were cleaning. *“Lumabas po ako, tiningnan ung mga kapitbahay ko. Tapos, tinanong ko po kung okay lang sila, tapos tinanong din nila kung okay lang kami.” “Ung mga kaibigan ko, kinakausap din nila ako, tapos ayun, nag-sasaya kami. Siyempre wala nang baha kaya masaya na! ... sa labas lang po, habang nag-lilinis kami” (I went out of the house to check our neighbors and asked if they are fine. Then, they asked us if we are fine too.) “Ung mga kaibigan ko, kinakausap din nila ako, tapos ayun, nag-sasaya kami. Siyempre wala nang baha kaya masaya na! ... sa labas lang po, habang nag-lilinis kami” (I talked to my friends and then we rejoiced. Of course, the flood already subside so it is already a happy day!... it is just outside while we were cleaning).*

Another adolescent female participants revealed how her mother's co-workers helped them to recover. *“Kasi ung ibang tao tinutulungan din kami, gaya nung sa trabaho ni Mama, maraming nagbigay sa kanya ng damit. Medyo nakakabawi din kami kahit papano.”* (Because there were people who helped us, like the clothes my mother's workmates gave us. With this, we were able to get our life back). A male adult relates his experiences in exerting efforts in helping other people which were also victimized by the typhoon. *“Kasi miyembro kami ng yung ano, ung Charismatic. Eh mayroon kaming mayamang miyembro sa may Batangas. Yun! Isa kami sa napagkatiwalaan na mamahagi ng*



relief... ‘pag nakita na ako, pipila na ang mga tao. Dun kasi sa Chorillo un pinapack, may sampung truck un dumating. Kumuha din ako ng mga sampung tauhan dito, para ibaba ung mga relief na un.” (Because we are members of a Charismatic group, another member from Batangas were fortunate to have more in life decided to help us and I was part of the people entrusted to share the reliefs... So every time the people see me that time, they started to line up. There were a total of 10 trucks that came so I also assigned people to help me to organize the reliefs).

A male adolescent affirmed how his friends provided him encouraging messages and help them in the process of coping. There were also other people whom he never expected to help them during those times that they have nothing at all. “Maraming nakatulong. Ung sa work ng Papa ko, tapos ung sa simbahan din nakatulong din un... nakatulong ung ano, mga kaibigan ko. Ung nag-give comfort kahit papano ay kumusta ka na, ung mga simpleng ganun. Nakatulong din samin un tsaka ung sa kaibigan ng Mama’t Papa ko. Nakatulong din un especially nung wala kami, wala talaga kaming kagamit gamit. Un, dumating lang un tulong sa Papa ko, doon na bumuhos un mga gamit, kaldero ganyan, doon kami nagkaroon ng pag-asa na ambait pala nila” (A lot of people were able to help us, my father's workmates, our church mates and my friends. They gave us comfort even just by asking how are we doing. We lost everything that time and we have nothing but our friends gave us a lot of things like cooking pots. That's when I realized that they are kind).

Another male child participants mentioned that an actor whose name he failed to remember gave assistance. “Pati po mga artista po, may de lata po” (Even actors have canned goods).

*The other sub-theme of Social Assistance is Support from Kin (n=3 adults, 4 adolescents, 5 children) refers to the assistance the victims have received from their immediate family and close relatives. In whatever form that their kins are giving them, co- researchers viewed those help as an important factor in coping. In either ways, the help they obtained, or the services they offered to each other alleviate the sufferings they are both experiencing after the disaster. A female adolescent received a call from her grandmother during the Typhoon and since there was no electricity that time, she knew then that the flood is not like any other flood disaster. “Tumawag po ung lola ko nun sa abroad, tinanong kung kumusta na kami, kung may kinakain. Napanood niya po kasi sa t.v.” (My grandmother based overseas called us and asked us how are we doing, if we have food to eat. She told me that she was able to saw what happened in the television).*

A female adult respondent relayed how she and her whole family cleaned their house. Her brother was living beneath her own home that is why she helped him deal with the damages the typhoon left. “Pinoy eh. Alam mo naman ang Pinoy. Kabit nasa kalagitnaan ng trabedy... tsaka magkakasama kasi kami kaya madali samin, tulong-tulong kami.” (It's because we are Filipinos. You know Filipinos, even in the midst of calamities. It because we are together, we helped each other that is why it is very easy).

A male child described how his close kin relatives helped him and his family when the typhoon devastated their house. Aside from fetching them from the evacuation areas, they opened their houses for them to have temporary shelter. “Ung mga kamag-anak po. Sila lola, kela tita po kami

*nakatira nun e. Ung mga damit nila pinapahiram po nila.” (We stayed at our relatives' place. They let us borrow their clothes).*

Another female child affirmed that her relatives spared time talking to her and told her that everything will be fine. She was worried about the other members of her family who was not with her during the typhoon and when they finally met, they helped each other in cleaning the remains of the devastation. *“Palagi po nila kaming sinasabihan, kinakausap po nila kami, sinasabi na okay lang daw po un, magiging okay kami, ganoon po.” (They always tell us that it is just fine and soon it will be okay).*

A female adolescent proved that even though their family is faced in such difficult situation, her father did not fail to help their relatives in low-lying areas to prevent further damage to their properties, by packing their assets and putting them to higher places and aided them to evacuate. *“Pumunta kami doon sa tita ko sa may bukid, kasi doon mas unang binaha kaysa dito. Tinulungan namin ung tita ko na ilagay ung gamit nila sa bundok, sa may mas mataas na place...Pag-uwi ko, kasama ko si Papa nun, pero pumunta na ako sa bahay ng pinsan ko, si Papa tinulungan niya rin ung iba naming kapit-bahay.” (We went first at my aunt's house near the fields because it was the first one to be flooded. We helped them put their things to higher places. I was with my father that time but instead of going home, I went to my other aunt's house and my father also helped our other neighbors).*

### **Employing Mitigative Measures.**

(n=15) These are problem-solving focused strategies present in the victims of the typhoon where they took measures and actions to lessen the ramifications of the disaster. While the activities taken before the onset of the event can be termed as preventive, those actions done during and subsequent to the flood are mitigate. Besides trying to save their own lives, the victims also attempted to save their assets or any household items that they can carry with them. Seeing the aftermath of the flood is not a pleasant view for those who already stayed on their roofs just to be safe. And such actions they executed immediately after the flood lessens their anxiety and brings them back to their normal life. Cleaning, scrubbing and fixing are such activities they engaged together in order to bring back the life they have prior to the typhoon. A female adult described what was she doing the time when the water slowly rises level. She said she was still lucky for their house was located on the second floor and their household items were saved, but her sister was unfortunate to lose a lot of things. *“Ung time na un, ano.. Tumutulong kami mag-akyat ng gamit ng mga nasa babang kamag-anak namin.” (During that time, we helped our relatives downstairs to put their things here, where it is much higher).*

Another female adult narrated how she and her family hand in hand tried to save anything they can because they never expected that the flood would increase such level. *“Siyempre ano, nag-akyat na ng mga gamit sa mataas na bahagi ng aming bahay. Siyempre ung mga kailangan isave na mga importateng bagay, inaano namin.. Inaakyat sa taas.” (Of course, we put our things in higher places. We make sure that we save the important ones first and put it upstairs).*

A male adolescent described how they immediately put their household assets on the second floor of their house, but unfortunately, the flood did not stop from rising, that is why they still needed to transfer to a higher place - and that is their neighbor's house, bringing with them things that are of real importance. *"Naglipit at nagtaas na kami ng gamit... Wala nang gamit nun sa baba, kung meron man, ung di na talagang kayang isave... Umabot padin ung tubig sa may bagdan na kaya pumunta na kami na sa kapitbahay na may thirdfloor at rooftop... Nagsalba din kami ng gamit, nagtulungan kami kabit papano. Isa-isa kaming naglipat ng gamit patungo sakanila tapos un parang tinulungan din namin sila."* (We tried to save everything. There were little things left downstairs. But there was already water up to the stairs. That's when we decided to go to our neighbor whose house has a third floor).

A male adult related what he immediately did when he went back home after staying on a roof for almost a day. *"Makikita mo dyan puro putik. Kaya ang ginawa ko kinuha ko agad ung hose. Habang may tubig pa, winalisan ko na dun.... Maputik, sobrangdaming putik. Mga kalat, ung mga linoleum patong patong. Tinanggal ko na."*

A male child enumerated the things he did the moment he stepped back at his house after staying for a day in their grandmother's place. He did rescue their properties at home and put them upstairs but they never imagined that the only place where there will be no flood is on their roof so everything that they saved has been washed-out. He was worried about his school things since he have unfinished requirements. *"Hinanap ko po ung school bag ko, naiwan ko po un kasi sa sala. Andun po ung notebook ko. Pero hindi ko na po makilala [laughs]... Umakayat po kami sa kwarto. Ung mg alaruan ko po puro putik, parang tae po. Ung kama ko po nakabigtad... kaya sobrang nakakapagod po talagang maglinis."* ( I look for my school bag. When I found it in the living room, I cannot recognize it. I went upstairs to find my toys covered in mud and bed is turned upside down).

**Turning to faith.** (3 adults, 3 adolescents and 2 children ) Depending on religion is an emotion -focused strategy in coping. The dark times brought by the typhoon Ondoy utilized the victims' own ways in turning to their faith and depending on God. Their beliefs and values of praying lessen worries and allowed them to keep going in life. When the flood continued to rise and the rain would not stop, they knew that God will not leave them in ruins and His power will keep them safe. They also depended on Him and asked for His providence. Depending on their faith relieved their worries, activated emotional growth and promoted positive interpretation for what happened to them. A female child narrated how praying the rosary help them throughout the disaster. *"Kasi po nag pre-pray na lang po ako. .. By praying the rosary po, nagrorossary po kami. Mga sampung beses po. Nagtha-thank you po kami kay God na okay na pala. Na buhay po kami."* (I prayed hard everyday, even 10 times. I pray the rosary and thank God that we are just fine).

Another child, male, described how he was thankful of those people who helped them. According to his mother, he needed to pray and thank God for He was the reason why those people who helped them existed. *"Kasi nag-prapray po kami. Si Papa Jesus po ung nagbibigay ng mga taong tumutulong samin."* (Because God gave us the people who helped us. I prayed to Jesus and thank Him) An adult female

participants, a mother by nature and by heart described how she asked for the Lord's guidance since she was not with her children, so she prayed for their safety. "...*nag-alala ako sakanila, iyak ako ng iyak. Tapos naranasan kong lumuhod sa maraming tao. Nagdasal ako kay Lord na sana iligtas niya lang ang mga anak ko, ang pamilya ko, wala akong pakialam kahit maubos labat ng gamit namin.*" (I was worried with them. I prayed to God to help them and keep them safe even though we may have nothing. I even kneel in front of many people just to pray).

A female adolescent affirmed how her faith would guide and help her to overcome such challenge. "*Ung faith din kay God. Yun. Na tiwala lang at malalagpasan din namin un.*" (My faith in God that soon this would be over). Another female adult participants said that they are still blessed after what happened. She had developed a positive attitude towards what happened and was glad that no one was badly hurt. "*Siyempre, Blessed pa din kami. Kasi siyempre walang nawala sa pamilya namin, Kumpleto padin kami. Hindi kami nabura sa mundo. Ung Papa ko, kahit nastranded, safe naman siya.*" (Of course we are still blessed. We are safe and complete. Though my father was stranded, he is still fine).

### **Other coping strategies mentioned.**

Few participants have displayed avoidance as another way on how they were able to cope with the disaster. They do not want their lives to be affected by problems so they focus in doing steps in order to bring back the things they have and those they lost before. They are aware of their own capabilities, thus depended on their own beliefs and abilities. "*Kapag nakalipas na, wag nang pagtuunan ng pansin... hayaan na yan. Ang pagtuunan ng pansin ang darating dun tayo. .. aral na lang un e. doon tayo. Wala namang pagsubok na hindi natin kaya ang ibibigay e.*" "*Tiwala lang sa sarili, kung kinakabahan ka, hindi mo naman magagawa. Hind ka naman makakasurvive. .. Kailangan may tiwala ka sa sarili mo at alam mo ung ginagawa mo.*" (We should not pay attention to the past anymore... Let it be. There are no trials that we cannot overcome. Just believe in yourself. You will not make it if you are nervous, you will not survive. You really need to believe in yourself at you need to know what you are doing).

As can be seen on the identified themes of the participants, it has been found out that children would utilize *Social Assistance*, specifically "*Support from Kin*", while adolescents and adults would utilize "*External Aid*" as their coping strategy when it comes to dealing with the aftermath of Typhoon Ondoy.

## **DISCUSSION**

To our knowledge, this study builds to the limited array of researches investigating on the coping strategies utilized by Filipinos in times of disaster. By interviewing the people directly affected by the typhoon, the study have obtained a vast account of experiences and feelings that would enable unbiased coping strategies that are used in the Philippines.

Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the coded interviews revealed that

receiving social assistance, employing mitigative measures, and turning to faith are the core coping strategies that are utilized by Filipinos in order to cope with the aftermath of the disaster. The first two coping strategies that emerged coincides with the theory of coping formulated by Lazarus in 1984 as proven by several researches through the years (Roxberg, et al 2010, Glass, et al 2009; Lemieux, et al 2009; Schnider, et al, 2007; Ibanez, et al, 2004; Benight, 2004; Ibanez, et al, 2003; Carver, et al 1989;). The previous researches investigated different coping strategies utilized by different culture of people facing a variety of troubles in life like disaster, sickness, or war used problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as base theory and yielded the same results. The last occurring theme - turning to faith is a rare find in studies which also focused in determining the coping strategies of catastrophic victims. Several studies (Nakonz, et al, 2009; Lawson et al, 2007; Ai et al, 2003, Zontini, 2004; Carver, et al, 1989;) have proven that turning to faith, religion or to the Higher Power is a useful coping strategy for refugees of war and in the midst of sickness. Turning to faith as a coping strategy for victims of a calamity or disaster emerged from the data obtained from this study. There are few strategies that have been mentioned by the participants of the study. One of this is avoidance which is considered as an identified theme in a study (Ibanez, 2004). Avoidance as used in other studies is referred to as efforts in refusing to dwell on problems, distracting oneself or exhibiting defense mechanisms. But in this particular study, the researchers would like to define avoidance as mentioned by the victims as accepting what happen and treat it as a lesson. participants would say that past is already past, what has done should be left the way it is, what is then important is that as people, efforts should be made in order to make the future as pleasant as it could be avoiding more disasters like this.

As Filipinos themselves believed to belong to a collectivist society and having obtain close family ties, social assistance contribute to help a victim overcome the aftermath of every disaster. Whenever somebody is family member is in danger, a close kin would never let that member suffer alone. He would try all means in order to provide assistance to those who needs it. Even during the time of the typhoon, close family members look out for their kins and ask for their safety. A participant recalled how her grandmother from abroad called them while the water continues to rise level. There were two participants who looked for their son and daughter even though there is the presence of heavy rains and flood. After the flood had subsided, help from their family showered every victim. There were those who stayed for months in their kin's house and depended on them in terms of clothing and food. There were those who immediately visited their relatives to check if they are fine and if there are things that they needed. This proved previous researches on disasters that assistance comes first from the closest family members and victims rely for their support (Ibanez et al, 2004; Ibanez et al 2003; Roxberg et al, 2010; Lawson, et al 2007) Government aids, Non-Government Organization (NGOs), personalities and friends also conduced to the coping process of each survivor. These external aid or those help coming from non-family members contribute a lot in helping victims cope with the aftermath. Their donations, in cash or in kind and their encouraging words assist them in moving forward and continue life. And even in the most difficult circumstances, as long as there is a concept of help in the picture, Filipinos does not have a hard time in dealing with troubles (Bankoff, 2007; Moore and Constantine, 2005) As a participants

said, *“Pinoy e, alam mo naman ang Pinoy.. basta nagtutulungan yan.”*

As activities executed before the onset of the event are referred to as preventive measures, Filipinos are equipped in employing mitigative measures or those actions done not only to save lives but to rescue household assets or livelihood during and after the onset of typhoons (Shitangsu, 2010). Almost all the respondents employ this kind of coping strategy. Besides looking for their loved ones and keeping alive, they tried saving everything they can save and those which are significant to them. A participant recalled how she and her dog struggle in swimming in order to save their lives. After the flood has subsided and the rain had stopped, it was then a question of how are they going to get back to the life they have before. But the bigger question then is how to fix the damages, what to do with all the mud and those things that have been washed out. Indeed, Filipinos do not waste time and immediately started cleaning the mess that the typhoon left. Things just like person's life is an important asset for them for it was hardships that bought those things. In fact, some participants would answer that once they possess the things, appliances or household items they had prior to the flood, that is the time that they could say that they have cope with the situation.

The last coping strategy that has emerged from the analization of data is the Filipino's way to turn to Higher Power in this kind of situation. There are only a few empirical evidences available about the use of religious coping and its impact towards the attitude of a person (Ai, et al; 2003). As studies cite Pargament (1997), religious coping have been referred to as coping mechanism which provides positive growth and invites feelings of significance in stressful situations. Results showed that a number of Filipinos rely to their faith in such situations. They use prayer in order to communicate with God and ask for their safety. Some even used the rosary to ask for guidance. Filipinos strong faith in their religion kept them hanging on to whatever situation they are faced with. They believed that when they ask for God's providence, He will provide them with it. But praying never stopped as the calamity stopped. A child participant told how thankful he is to Jesus for sending them people to help. A lesson he learned from his mother that whatever blessing they are receiving, it is because of Jesus. Many believed that whatever tragedy is happening it is part of God's plan and that there is always a reason behind it (Nakonz and Shik, 2009). Many participants depended on their faith and that it will save them and keep them away from harm. A participant affirms that it is not yet the end of the world and that there is a better reason why this is happening. Another implies that it is not right to be angry because no one desires something tragic to happen. And a lot of them were thankful enough that they were safe and that their significant others though separated from them are in good hands. They perceived that being alive amidst what happen is still a blessing they should be gratitude of.

The analysis also revealed that children tend to use Social Assistance, specifically “Support from Kin”, while older individuals tend to utilize “External Aid” as their coping strategy. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Li et., al. (2011) when they found out that Chinese children who has cancer tend to use emotion-focused coping strategy such as distracting one's self and ignoring the problem (McLeod, 2009) than problem-focused strategy such as

information-seeking and taking control of the situation or the stressor (McLeod, 2010).

As one of the objectives of the current study, eidetic symbols were established. Even though the participants had unique symbols to represent their experiences during typhoon Ondoy, it is apparent that they all talk about relevant values such as hope - *"nawalan kami ng pag-asa tapos nung naka-move on kami, parang ilaw... Malinang na lahat."*, stability - *"kabit nabagupit na siya ng bagyo parang ano nakastand up pa rin"*, fortitude - *"ung pagiging malakas namin kabit may mga ganung pangyayari na nangyari samin"* and religiosity - *"un po ung naghibigay sakin ng lakas ng loob na parang kabit anong mangyari, kabit ano pang trahedya, kabit ano pang sakuna, un lang po talaga, rosary."*

## CONCLUSION

Filipinos have almost the same coping strategies with those of other countries known to have collectivistic culture.

All of the participants' significant experiences were obtained directly from the participants themselves through semi-structured interview. These significant experiences were able to help the researchers see how participants interpreted such phenomenon - (a) Ondoy as a tragic incident, (b) Ondoy as an unusual encounter, and (c) Ondoy as a life changer. Furthermore, 3 common themes on how Filipinos cope were yielded by the analysis - (a) receiving social assistance which can be classified into two sub-themes namely - external aid and support from kin, (b) employing mitigate measures, and (c) turning to faith. It can be concluded that the participants of this study employed mitigate measures after being victimized by Typhoon Ondoy. Also, the study was able to establish eidetic symbols based on the unique responses of the participants when asked for an object which can summarize or symbolize their experiences during the typhoon and it is apparent that the symbols mentioned pertains to hope, stability, fortitude, and religiosity.

## LIMITATION

The results of the current study were generated from a small number of participants, thus, yielded coping strategies are not to be generalized to a number of people. It is therefore recommended that in order to yield a more collectivistic result, researcher should widen the scope of interview from the questions to be asked to the respondents who will be interviewed. One has to keep in mind that meaning obtained from a certain phenomenon is personally constructed - based solely of the subjective reality of the participants despite of having some themes being relevant or important to the other. This study was conducted 3 years after the typhoon Ondoy and employed a semi-structured interview for data gathering. For future researchers, it is recommended that Filipinos victimized by typhoon Ondoy from other areas of Luzon should be included in the study, and essential criteria such as experiencing loss of an immediate family member should be observed. Although the methodology would be more challenging and toilsome, the researchers believe that it would make the findings closer to the general population.

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