

Tested by the storm: Preparedness, faith, moral transformation, and collective resilience among older adults in Tacloban

Reggy Capacio Figer

Language and Communication Research Center, University of Shizuoka, Japan

*Correspondence:

Email: reggyfiger@gmail.com

Received:
30 August 2026

Revised:
20 September 2026

Accepted:
25 September 2026

Published:
30 September 2026

How to cite (APA 7th style): Figer, R. (2026). Tested by the storm: Preparedness, faith, moral transformation, and collective resilience among older adults' in Tacloban. *Community Empowerment Journal*, 4(3), 721-734
<https://doi.org/10.61251/cej.v4i3.484>

Abstract

For the past decade, the frequency and destructive nature of disasters have increased. Those most affected by these calamities are the vulnerable sectors of the society, such as the elderly population. While previous studies frequently concentrated on the fragility of older adults, there is a scant attention to their knowledge, faith, and community ties as resources for collective resilience and recovery. This study addresses this gap by examining the ways in which older adults in Tacloban drew on these resources following the disaster. In this qualitative study, I examined how 16 older adults in Tacloban Philippines, experienced and responded to Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Through in-depth interviews, I identified four interrelated dimensions of resilience: preparedness, faith, moral transformation, and community-based collective resilience. The findings, moreover, revealed that informants used these dimensions of resilience not only to deal with harsh conditions after the disaster but also to support others and contribute to the collective recovery of their community. I also argue that since the consequences of disasters on older adults are more substantial, their perspectives, experiences, and contributions should be more fully recognized and valued. Furthermore, I yearn to contribute to studies in disaster gerontology as well as highlight older adults as active agents in disaster response and recovery situations.

Keywords: disaster resilience; faith; older adults; Philippines, ST Haiyan

INTRODUCTION

Geographically situated along the typhoon belt in the Pacific, the Philippines is more than ever susceptible to storm surges, flashflood, landslides, and other natural hazards (Santos, 2021). According to Murga (2022), an average of 20 typhoons with five being destructive visit the country every year. In fact, the World Risk Index (Bündnis Entwicklung hilft & IFHV, 2022) ranked the Philippines 1st as most afflicted nation from severe weather situations among 193 countries in the world. One of the very destructive typhoons that struck the country was Haiyan.

Locally named Yolanda, Super Typhoon (ST) Haiyan hit the Visayas region in the early morning of November 8, 2013 (McPherson et al., 2015). Loss of lives in different cities particularly in the coastal areas were recorded. Based on the data from the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 6,300 people were killed, an additional 1,062 individuals were missing, and 28,688 persons were injured by ST Haiyan (NDRRMC, 2014). Most of these deaths came from Tacloban, a town located on Cancabato Bay and San Juanico



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

© 2026 Authors

Strait (Mikami et al., 2016). From these casualties, two-fifths were over 60 years old (Kulcsar, 2013). This was a significant proportion of loss of life among the elderly population.

After a disaster, studies show that older adults experienced adverse health consequences. In a meta-analysis of literature (Parker et al., 2016), the elderly population were “2.11 times more likely to experience PTSD symptoms and 1.73 more likely to develop adjustment disorder when exposed to natural disasters when compared with younger adults” (p.11). Post-traumatic stress diseases (PTSD) symptoms may develop which may lead to older adults’ difficulty in managing their lives (Walsh et al., 2016). Also, there is a greater prevalence of older adults developing chronic conditions from the aftereffects of disasters (Bell et al., 2020).

This vulnerability of elders in disasters can be attributed to their physical and mental decline brought about by their old age (i.e., poor health, reduced agility, weakening of their sight and hearing) and scarcity of services and support especially in emergency situations (Guddo, 2020; Heide-Ottosen, 2014; Bodstein, et al., 2014). Despite heightened risks and dangers of disasters, older adults’ needs are barely provided by emergency service providers (Guddo, 2020). They remain less visible or nonexistent when it comes to disaster planning and response (UN OHCHR, 2019). It is important to note that, although, elderly population are seen as vulnerable and invisible in the society, there are studies that thought otherwise and regarded older adults as instruments of positive change. Hand et al. (2018) explored on the various methods older adults use to meet and satisfy personal and community needs.

In this study, I discuss the different dimensions of resilience that older adults employed to survive ST Haiyan. I believe that their voices should be recognized and regarded because they are usually the ones who are at-risk during disasters. This study, therefore, shows that older adults are active agents to disaster response and recovery, drawing on their experiential knowledge, faith, and community relationships to support collective resilience. Although previous studies indicated the vulnerability of the elderly population in disasters, less attention was provided to their strengths as well as their active contribution to recovery.

Notably, there is limited knowledge on how older adults leverage their experiences, faith, and social relationships to cope with disasters and support their communities. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the experiences of older adults in Tacloban from the ST Haiyan disaster and how these experiences impact their recovery as well as their participation in community life after the disaster. It is hoped that this study deepens the understanding in disaster-afflicted communities by realizing that older adults are not solely vulnerable survivors but also agents of resilience in disaster recovery and reconstruction.

Literature review

Studies show that the elderly population is markedly helpless to the impact of disasters because of physiological, social, and economic factors. As a result of their age, they have restricted movement as well as enduring health conditions, which somehow hamper their ability to evacuate or seek refuge the soonest during emergency circumstances (Breen, 2024). In addition to this, sensory deterioration such as hearing and/or visual impairment may result in delayed recognition of critical warning signals (Tuohy et al., 2015).

Apart from physiological challenges, older adults are also prone to being socially isolated and financially constrained. It is said that a significant proportion of older individuals live alone or have limited social networks. This can lead to reduced access to immediate assistance (Klinenberg, 2018). Those who are economically disadvantaged, especially for those on fixed incomes or worked in the informal sector, these older adults will have a restriction in their ability to invest in disaster preparedness (Bukvic et al., 2018).

Conversely, it should be recognized that, older adults are also agents for positive change. For example, older adults act against climate crisis as this affects the world – with extreme impacts to them, and other marginalized sectors of the society like women and children (UNECE,

2022). Case in point, Elders Climate Action (<https://www.eldersclimateaction.org>) is an organization initiated by older adults in their determination to end the climate crisis and hopefully lead to a better future for their children and all children in the world. Such initiatives are ways for older adults to create a positive impact in the society (Alisjahbana, 2022).

When a catastrophe strikes, it is vital that individuals and communities possess resilience to adjust and rise above their present situations – stronger to endure future disasters and problems (Shih et al., 2018). According to Hyogo Framework for Action (UNISDR, 2005), resilience is “the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure” (p.4). It is therefore imperative for older adults to improve their disaster resilience capacities to withstand the repercussions brought about by natural hazards and calamities. Having resilience could be seen as a beacon of strength and hope for family members and community fellows as they witness their elders adapt and cope well with an adversity.

Because of the importance of resilience in disasters, different government and non-government organizations set-up resilience building activities for older adults. In the case of HelpAge International with its local partners, it has fostered community programs and projects for older adults to improve their disaster-resilience skills (Heide-Ottosen, 2014).

During critical and dangerous times, faith often plays a primary cognitive and emotional strength – helping individuals navigate and understand the adversity. Park (2013) put forward that spiritual or faith offers a “global meaning” system, which allows survivors to apprehend and shift the pain and trauma to purpose or mission. Through a spiritual lens, survivors are able to deal with life’s challenges and reduce the risk of depression and other problems (Wortmann & Park, 2008).

The impact of looking at disasters through faith or religion can be put into two groups. The positive religious coping, which is when survivors feel more connected to God or see a difficult situation as a chance to grow spiritually, is linked to being more resilient and happier with life (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). On the other hand, negative coping involves feelings of being forsaken by God or having deep-seated spiritual doubts. This can make people feel more stressed and upset (Pargament et al., 2026). It also offers personal peace of mind and opportunities for faith-based organizations or support groups that can help people deal with their problems (Koenig et al., 2024).

Acknowledging older adults’ strengths and weaknesses in disaster situations is crucial for building more inclusive and resilient communities. Their valuable life experiences, local knowledge, faith, and social networks are important factors in disaster response and recovery. Providing them the prospects to share, offer, and participate in community planning and decision-making can cultivate their agency and engender their collective resilience. This perspective provides a basis for examining how older adults in Tacloban draw on their experiential knowledge, faith, and community relationships as they cope with disaster and contribute to the recovery of their communities.

Based on related literature, studies revealed that older adults are vulnerable sectors of the society especially when face with disasters. Issues on health, mobility, access to resources, as well as support from personal and institutional networks could be compromised. Some studies, on the other hand, showed practical experience, social capital, leadership, and civic engagement. These attributes suggest, far from being beneficiaries of aid, older adults serve as community assets. In this study, it emphasizes that the personal experiences, faith, social connections serve as essential tools that drive community recovery and shared resilience during disasters.

METHOD

To understand older adults’ experiences of ST Haiyan as well as provide for an enhanced knowledge about older adults’ post disaster recovery, I employed a qualitative approach in this study. This approach was instrumental in guiding this research since it accentuated and explored on older adults’ real-life experiences and understanding of ST Haiyan. Subsequently, this resulted in a more detailed and perceptive research data.

This research was carried out with the help and support of the Office of Senior Citizens Agency (OSCA) in Tacloban. Informants were purposively selected based on their age, ranging from 60 to 85 years old. Face-to-face interviews, with 16 older adults who experienced first-hand ST Haiyan, were conducted. Their direct experience of ST Haiyan made them information-rich informants who expressed articulately their personal ordeal of the disaster. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews that solicited informants to narrate their experiences, challenges, sources of support, and contributions to recovery. Before the interviews, consent forms were distributed and signed by informants. Protection of their privacy and confidentiality, likewise, was assured to them. Informants also allowed audio recording of the interview. The interview lasted for about 40-90 minutes.

It is important to emphasize that during the interview, some older adults decided to write their answers on paper because of their inability to hear properly. To answer questions, they either replied in pure Waray (a language essentially spoken in Tacloban), Filipino (the official language in the Philippines), English (the other official language in the Philippines), or a mixture of these two or three languages. Responses in Waray and/or Filipino were translated in English by me. I have a native level proficiency in Waray, Filipino, and English. To warrant the validity and accuracy of my translation, a professional translator was hired.

Responses were put in matrices based on the questions asked. Correspondingly, I examined thematically the data set and coded them for any major themes and patterns. A wide-ranging analysis was again performed to consolidate as well as exhaust possible themes and topics of the interview data. It should be noted that after the data analysis has been completed, there were important steps that were carried out in order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. I repetitively examined and read the transcripts from the matrices and compared emerging themes to the original accounts of the informants in order to strengthen the quality of the data. I also considered the similarities and differences across the informants’ responses as I developed the final themes. At the same time, older adults’ experiences and perspectives were retained as closely as possible to reduce my bias as a researcher and ensure that the findings were grounded in the data. Taken together, it is hoped that the research protocol ensured validity and reliability on the analysis and interpretation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Profile of Informants

Table 1. Summary of Older Adults’ Profiles Who Participated in the Interview

Male	4	Average Age	71
Female	12	Average Age	69
<i>Educational Attainment</i>			
Graduate Studies	6	High School	6
College	2	Elementary	2

Getting ready and prepared

Experiencing first-hand the devastation brought by ST Haiyan, informants firmly regarded the importance of “physical and mental preparedness”. According to one informant being physically prepared means they were able to store non-perishable food, such as canned meat, tuna, and sardines as well as drinking water. She also added flashlights and portable lamps, battery-powered radio, first aid kit, and sanitation supplies (like soap and toilet paper) (P2, female, 70y).

Mental preparedness, for informants, meant that you must plan. Monitoring the news as well as trusting experts for guidance was central in preparing for a disaster. They felt that this helped reduce the impact of ST Haiyan into their homes and lives. One informant asserted: *“to think clearly and to plan for the steps that me and my family would take after the disaster has struck; never to underestimate the outcome of the disasters; to think positive always; and to believe that I can overcome the impacts of the disaster no matter how devastating the effects are”* (P2, female 70y).

Unfortunately, this was not the case for some informants in the interview. They did not heed the call for evacuation. With the intensity and strength of ST Haiyan, they were caught off guard. Accompanied by wind gusts of 235 miles per hour and water surges of up to 4 meters (13 feet) high (Mercy Corps, 2013), the ST Haiyan had caused a massive destruction and loss of lives in Tacloban. As some informants lamented:

“This was a great mistake on my part: well-informed, but without the due alertness and preparation for evacuation. Many lives were taken due to the lack of alertness, lack of preparation, and most of all, the disbelief towards information. Hopefully, this becomes a lesson to each and every one” (P6, female, 63y).

“Our house was washed out, and not an item was spared from the onslaught of the water. In the meantime, I was searching for a possible temporary shelter. I was constantly on the lookout for any relief goods. We roamed and roamed around the entire City of Tacloban in search for my missing eldest granddaughter; to this date, I still could not find her. As for my two grandchildren, they were brought to Samar; we chartered a motorboat going there just to give them a proper burial. All these were borne from Typhoon Yolanda; all else are nothing compared to this unbearable pain I feel deep down in my chest” (P7, male, 65y).

All informants professed that the aftermath of ST Haiyan was far more difficult than during the typhoon. It was hard to see the immense destruction not just from their homes, but also from their communities, and the city-at-large. The sight of dead bodies of loved ones, friends, and just anyone was a harrowing vision for them. As The BBC News reported: *“The head of the Red Cross in the Philippines has described the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan as “absolute bedlam”...Tacloban, Leyte province, was largely flattened by a massive storm surge and scores of corpses are piled by the roadside, leaving a stench in the air as they rot, say correspondents. Hundreds of people have gathered at the airport desperate for food and water, others trying to get a flight out”* (BBC News, 2013). It was, indeed, the most difficult time of the informants’ lives.

The experience, apparently, marked a scar in the hearts and minds of the informants. Despite this difficulty, informants had to be strong for their family especially that their children and their grandchildren looked up to them for strength and hope. They had to stand their ground and be resilient as they faced the uncertainty of the future.

Restoring faith

Being Asia’s bulwark of Catholicism, the Philippines is considered as one of the religious countries in the world (Merez, 2018). This belief in God or in the doctrines and teachings of religion has a significant influence on how informants perceived, responded, and coped with ST

Haiyan. Some of them believed that the typhoon was God's way to punish them. Because of this, they had to pray hard to ask forgiveness and be saved from God's retribution for their sins. Aside from this, others deemed God's omnipresence and omniscience to protect them from the typhoon. As informants conveyed:

"Prayers and petitions for Divine Intervention from The Almighty filled my head, asking Him not to forsake us" (P6, female, 63y).

"Yolanda has taught me that we should always pray to God for guidance and salvation for He is our One and only Saviour and the Light that guides and helps us in the darkest hours of our life" (P2, female, 70y).

A few of them resigned with the idea that whatever was meant to happen would happen. Anchored on destiny or the existence of an omniscient God, who has foresight of imminent events, this fatalistic attitude towards life made some of the informants accept their fate wholeheartedly as they could not anymore change what was destined for them even if it were horrible.

"That life is nothing without God. We must be ready for whatever happens, and nothing is permanent in this world" (P16, female, 60y).

"I was faced with all sorts of trials and tribulations. My spouse and my three grandchildren had all passed away, but all of these, I forfeit to the Lord" (P10, female, 68y).

"That what we have, including our very own life, is not ours" (P1, male, 82).

"Having experienced such devastating disaster brought me to realize that LIFE IS TOO SHORT! We cannot predict when our earthly existence would cease [to exist]" (P4, female, 72y).

Their faith and religion afforded informants hope and strength to go through this traumatic event of their lives. They became more religious and sought comfort in God. With the wreckage of life and properties, informants regarded their belief in God as a big help for them to cope with the physical and emotional aftermath of ST Haiyan. Their faith was an integral part in their recovery and healing process.

"The devastation of the Super Typhoon Yolanda has brought me closer to God than before" (P2, female, 70y).

The number of deaths and injuries as well as the huge devastation brought by ST Haiyan in Tacloban has brought the informants to thinking that life, indeed, is short. With family members, relatives, friends, and acquaintances, young and old drowned and/or swept away by the storm surge, informants felt that they had to make sure to take advantage of what life has to offer and just be grateful to the Supreme Being. As one informant held:

"...every opportunity to enjoy this gift of life every day must be a moment of expressing our gratitude to Him, our Creator; that all earthly possessions we have would just perish, and that nothing remains once we are visited with natural calamities or when we finally die" (P4, female, 72y).

Finding a new moral compass

A great number of informants experienced some-sort of 'awakening and enlightenment' after the disaster. They realized the value and purpose of their lives. They said they became better

individuals. They helped their neighbours, made amends with their foes, assisted in the distribution of relief goods, and supported each other so that they could all manage to survive the ordeal.

“I stood up and focused to preoccupy myself with different ways to serve the people as a senior citizen. I had been elected as a president of a senior citizen congregation with 118 members, and I am also the leader in the 4466 Habitat Cluster 13 Blk 30L-01. That was where I learned the many different experiences of people” (P10, female, 68y).

“Yolanda had changed my view of life through the development of a positive outlook [in life]” (P13, female 66y).

“It changed my view of life in a way of which it was difficult. I thought to myself that life only goes once and it can never be bought, and the fact that life matters more than the valuable things in life” (P15, female 67y).

These acts of love, compassion, and mutual support strengthened their bonds and renewed their spirits. Through their experiences, they came to recognize that material possessions could be lost, but strong relationships and a caring community could provide strength in times of hardship.

“Our foodstuffs, our basic drinks, even a change of our clothes — all destroyed due to the onslaught of Typhoon Yolanda. Regardless, I still fought tooth and nail for my well-being; neither had I given up, nor had I ever lost hope” (P9, male, 68y).

“I had learned to be forgiving and understanding to people who don't meet my expectations, and it is easier this time to give up accumulated goods, so that these items could be more useful for others” (P4, female, 72y).

They learned that staying connected, helping one another, and sharing hope were important ways of moving forward after the disaster. In this sense, the experience of the storm helped them find a new moral compass – one centered on compassion, solidarity, and the belief that when relationships and communities remain strong, optimism and courage can grow even in the face of adversity.

Collective resilience, shared recovery

The community has an important role in the aftermath of a disaster (Berardi et al., 2020). Community members are often than not the first responders when a crisis strikes (Patel et al., 2023). Just like in the ST Haiyan disaster, their neighbours played an important role in their survival. As one informant aptly put:

“Yolanda has taught me that fostering a better relationship with my neighbours and other members of the community is a crucial factor in the survival of an individual whenever there is an upcoming disaster; having a good relationship with each member of the community means that there is always somebody that can help me whenever I am in need during a disaster” (P2, female, 70y).

Similarly, they believed the friendlier and nicer they were, the more help they can get. One informant mentioned that even with their enemies, they made up and became friends after ST Haiyan (P1, male, 82y). This was to ensure that droves of individuals would lend a hand should another disaster happens. Aside from having smooth interpersonal relationship with their neighbours and community members, older adults believed that there is a need for them to

participate in activities conducted by the local government and OSCA. In this way, they would become well-informed, able to voice out their sentiments, and participate in decision-making.

It is worth noting that some of the informants were retired professionals (ex. teachers, engineers, government office workers); hence they were used to providing services, skills, and talents to their patrons and former employers. Nevertheless, fully utilizing their vast experience and wisdom would significantly enhance post-disaster response and recovery. They might not be able to have the physical prowess as before; their insights and knowledge, however, maybe of value in different disaster situations. Likewise, older adults believed that volunteering and helping their community provided them a sense of purpose and fulfilment in their lives. They felt they are able and part of the society again.

“Yes, I rendered service. I was one of those who were given admin perks at the TRS where we resided at that time. I became one of the leaders of the WASH program led by OXFAM — that is, for overseeing the clean-up drive to reduce any chances of infection spreading within the community. I was the one who received their supplies for the maintenance of the cleanliness of the community.” (P7, Male, 65y).

“Yes, I had volunteered. At first, I roamed the city to jot down those who were spared from any harm and suffered some casualties — those who were still alive. Once the relief goods had arrived, I also assisted in handing them over to the people up until it was finished. While there were still some [primary] relief being handed over, whatever possible relief that were made available, I still helped in its distribution” (P14, Female, 65y).

As there was an overflowing of assistance coming from different organizations as well as from their families not affected by the disaster, some informants shared their own provisions and supplies to their neighbours.

“Indeed, I did my part in the relief distribution then. I also shelled out from my own including rations, clothing, and drinkable medicine since there were a lot of assistance that was given to us — assistance that had been from our relatives that were unaffected. Whatever had been given to us, we shared with others. I could only support and assist since I had nothing to offer in terms of finances” (P10, Female, 68y).

Older adults’ insights revealed solidarity and support, where they shared their resources despite their own limitations. While they did not have the financial means, older adults still recognized their capacity to offer whatever small help they can. This suggested that resilience was not only determined by monetary resources; it could also be through non-monetary forms like reciprocity, cooperation, and compassion.

Also, it is significant to mention that some elders were considered as “healers” by their fellow older adults. The immense know-how and familiarity with the environment of older generations may complement in resolving disaster issues and concerns like that of being ill or sick. It is said that older adults are important knowledge keepers (Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors, n.d.). They usually serve as teachers, healers, advisors (Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors, n.d.).

During the interviews, I heard from informants’ stories that since hospitals were devastated during ST Haiyan and staff doctors and nurses alike were also affected by the ST, older adults used their knowledge of herbal medicines. They looked for plants and concocted some medicine out from them to treat wounds and other injuries. Another informant mentioned about boiling ginger and asking those with stomach ache to drink it. She remarked further that ginger has a warming and calming effect on the stomach, notwithstanding its anti-nausea and anti-microbial properties (P2, Female, 70y).

These informants' responses were validation of their commitment to be of service to their communities. This somehow made older adults' relationships with their families, friends, and neighbours more potent. Despite their age and the trauma that they experienced from ST Haiyan, informants were still pro-active in finding ways to be valuable and worthwhile in their own respective communities. As members of the community, older adults recognized that they had an important role to play in helping one another survive and recover from the disaster. Their shared efforts and mutual support contributed not only their own recovery but also the recovery of the community as a whole.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that older adults in Tacloban were not merely passive recipients of aid but they were also active contributors to disaster response and recovery. Based on the findings of the study, disaster recovery was seen as a relational construct. Social connections and neighborhood understanding facilitated strength and vigor among the older adults. Meanwhile, their faith and religious convictions enabled mental support and fortitude that fostered hope among the informants. Likewise, older adults carried out their agency through leadership, volunteerism, and knowledge-sharing, which engendered informal governance roles during the recovery process.

One significant finding of this study highlighted how older adults utilized their experiential knowledge to navigate ST Haiyan disaster. Many older adults have lived through difficult situations including erstwhile typhoons. Because of these experiences, they have learned to stay mentally and physically ready. They know how to prepare for danger and respond to challenging situations despite limited resources. This knowledge did not come from formal disaster training. Instead, it developed through many years of everyday life experience. This insight is essential because older adults are often described mainly in terms of their weaknesses including their physical limitations, health problems, or dependence on others. While these concerns are valid, focusing only on their vulnerabilities can fail to notice what older people can contribute. Their age and life experience can also give them useful knowledge about how to deal with disasters.

In fact, older adults came into sight as beacons of hope and strength to their families and community members during the ST Haiyan disaster. While acknowledging their diminished physical strength, older adults believed that others viewed them as symbols of optimism, fortitude, and courage, rather than as liabilities. Based on the interviews, the older adults' ability to overcome the horrors of ST Haiyan and maintain composure amidst the chaos offered guidance, hope, and courage to others. Their unwavering spirit, perseverance, and wisdom demonstrated their determination and stability to rise above as they dealt with the aftermath of ST Haiyan.

It should be pointed, however, that not all older adults were inherently resilient. Rather, their resilience might be connected to their lifelong learning and previous experiences, which informed them on how to respond to subsequent typhoons. Their knowledge could also be pass on to younger people who have less experience with major disasters. In this way, older adults could serve as important sources of local community knowledge within their respective communities.

Another important finding concerns the role of faith. The informants' strong sense of faith and religiosity played an important role in their survival of ST Haiyan. For many informants, faith provided comfort, hope, and strength during and after the disaster. A major disaster can create fear, sadness, uncertainty, and a feeling that life is no longer stable. Faith can help people find meaning during such difficult experiences and give them hope for the future. Based on the interviews, older adults attributed their post-ST Haiyan resilience, courage, and renewed optimism to a deep conviction in a Supreme Being or God. This concurs with the ideas of Park

(2013) that faith offers survivors a shift from pain or trauma to having a purpose or mission in life. This foundational belief strengthened their familial and communal relationships, thereby fostering enhanced camaraderie and solidarity. Given that most informants identified as religious or spiritual, there was a noticeable correlation with improved physical and mental health, alongside stronger social support networks. These findings align with a growing body of literature highlighting the positive relationship between religious or spiritual practices and the overall well-being of older adults (e.g., Britt & Hamilton, 2023; Berardi et al., 2020).

The experiences of older adults from ST Haiyan also indicated a process of moral transformation following the disaster. Because they were confronted with the loss from family and friends, the uncertainty of a future, and the tough times ahead, informants came to provide greater premium on compassion, helping others and sharing what they had, as well as maintaining strong and solid relationships. In the wake of ST Haiyan, informants shifted their focus from individual concerns to the broader needs of their communities. There were several anecdotes from the interviews that accounted acts of kindness and mutual support which strengthened social cohesion and mutual accountability between older adults and the broader community. In this manner, recovery was not only about rebuilding their homes and surviving each day, but it was also about restoring relationships and finding meaning in caring for others.

More than their love for themselves, their resilience came from their love for their family and God. This was one reason why informants actively and meaningfully engaged in disaster response and recovery initiatives. Their concerns for the present and future generations fuelled them to be active agents in their own communities. Although their lingering health issues and physical limitations may hinder their ability to prepare for and respond to a disaster, some older adults contributed their abilities and talents in disaster response, as evidenced by the interviews. Their understanding, practices, and know-how gained from longevity, their relationship-building skills, faith, and spirituality were compelling assets in disaster resilience and response.

As Haiyan destroyed lives and properties, survivors came together to help and support each other in order to survive and thrive. Because older adults felt a sense of camaraderie within the community and believed that each member's life was valuable to others and to the community, grounded in shared faith and belonging, the community's sense of unity was strongly cultivated and fostered. The existence of a shared faith among older adults and other members of the population strengthen their fellowship and collective action for community development and endurance.

Despite the trauma brought by ST Haiyan, older adults demonstrated a strong spirit and collective resilience. They understood their roles within their families and communities. During the interviews, informants demonstrated high energy and enthusiasm when discussing their involvement in community and post-disaster activities. As established throughout this study, older adults are not simply recipients of care. they play a far more active role. They have a voice and agency, too. Because of their accumulated life experiences and deep understanding to some issues and events, older adults may be able to supply wisdom in their own respective communities. Understanding older adults as social actors also cultivate togetherness and solidarity post-disaster situations. It is central to dispel the idea that older adults are weak and burdensome. Recognizing older adults with voice and agency is essential in fostering well-being and better quality of life. It is hoped that this will nurture a more inclusive and age-friendly society.

The findings of the study suggest that the resilience among older adults in Tacloban was built on relationships rather than individual capacities to endure the ST Haiyan disaster. Recovery was shaped and influenced by the interaction between personal, social, and the community. It also reveals that preparedness provided the informants the time to plan, organize, and be ready. This offered them the knowledge and practical strategies for responding to the ST Haiyan. Faith, meanwhile, afforded meaning, hope, and emotional strength during and after the disaster.

Informants also mentioned about moral transformation, which led them to put greater value on kindness, communal responsibility, and providing assistance to others. Consequently, this fostered collective resilience and fortitude within their communities. Instead of being defined solely by their vulnerability, the older adults in this study were distinguished as active individuals whose experience, faith, and sense of duty helped preserve social ties and rebuild the community after the storm.

CONCLUSION

The ST Haiyan disaster exposed the weaknesses as well as the strengths of older people. The study emphasized resilience, agency and community contributions of older adults. They exhibited anticipatory preparedness, faith-based coping, moral transformation, and civic engagement. All of this helped older adults endure and overcome and make choices in disaster recovery. The findings of this study suggest that lived experiences of older adults in Tacloban provide a more holistic understanding of disaster resilience. Older adults may be at greater risk during disasters, but they also have life experiences, knowledge, faith and social relationships that can be critical to their recovery and the recovery of others.

The results also suggest that resilience is not an individual quality. It is built through connections with family, friends, neighbors, religious communities, and others in society. Older adults' experiences can be a source of useful knowledge, while their social connections can be a conduit to accessing and sharing support. Their faith, meanwhile, can be a source of strength to an individual, or a way of feeling close and bond to other people. It gives hope, meaning, and emotional strength with family, neighbors, friends, and fellow believers which steered to practical and social support. Furthermore, the findings show a process of moral transformation, in which experiences of loss and hardship reinforced informants' sense of compassion, mutual responsibility, and commitment to helping others. The findings contribute to disaster research by showing that older adults can be active agents of collective resilience and should be included in community preparedness and recovery efforts. Hence, the study identifies older adults as actors of resilience. This has major implications for disaster policy and practice. Disaster frameworks should involve older adults in planning, leadership, and community mobilization efforts.

The study is limited by its qualitative focus on older adults in Tacloban and the findings may not be fully representative of the experiences of older adults in other disaster-affected communities. I recommend that future research investigates on the experiences of other disaster-prone areas and communities to explore the relationships between faith, life experiences, and social relationships in enhancing collective resilience. Another recommendation is for future researchers to explore on the intersection between culture, faith, community networks, and disaster government policies of different countries that may influence disaster management and recovery. The experience of being "tested by the storm" demonstrates that recovery entails more than merely rebuilding homes and physical spaces. It is also about repairing relationships, maintaining hope, sharing knowledge, and providing mutual support. The experiences of older adults in Tacloban highlighted the crucial role that personal and community resources play in facilitating recovery for individuals and communities in the aftermath of disasters.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I. (2015). Religious coping among diverse religions: Commonalities and divergences. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 7(1), 24-33. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037652>
- Alisjahbana, A. (2022, June 29). Asia-Pacific: Older persons as agents of development. Retrieved August 20, 2023, <https://archive-2017->

- 2022.indepthnews.info/index.php/sustainability/health-well-being/5417-asia-pacific-older-persons-as-agents-of-development
- Bell, S. A., Horowitz, J., Iwashyna, T. J., & Heyn, P. C. (2020). Health outcomes after disaster for older adults with chronic disease: A systematic review. *The Gerontologist*, 60(7), e535–e547. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz123>
- Berardi, M. K., White, A. M., Winters, D., Thorn, K., Brennan, M., & Dolan, P. (2020). Rebuilding communities with empathy. *Local Development & Society*, 1(1), 57–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26883597.2020.1794761>
- BBC News. (2013, November 11). Typhoon Haiyan: Philippines destruction “absolute bedlam.” Retrieved June 17, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24894529>
- Bodstein, A., de Lima, V.V., & de Barros, A.M. (2014). *The vulnerability of the elderly in disasters: the need for an effective resilience policy*. Retrieved June 5, 2023, from <https://www.scielo.br/j/asoc/a/mVBdgpwNz5YymN4tTQZHGXR/?lang=en&format=pdf>
- Breen, K., Ru, S., Vandeweghe, L., Chiu, J., Heyland, L., & Wu, H. (2024). “If somebody needed help, I went over”: Social capital and therapeutic communities of older adult farmers in British Columbia floods. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 15(2), 290–301. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-024-00558-6>
- Britt, K. C., & Hamilton, J. (2023). How can we support religious and spiritual practices of older adults with mild cognitive impairment and dementia? *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 49(4), 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.3928/00989134-20230309-01>
- Bukvic, A., Gohlke, J., Borate, A., & Suggs, J. (2018). Aging in flood-prone coastal areas: Discerning the health and well-being risk for older residents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(12), 2900. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15122900>
- Bündnis Entwicklung hilft, & Ruhr University Bochum, Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV). (2022). *WorldRiskReport 2022: Focus: Digitalization*.
- Elders Climate Action. (n.d.). Retrieved November 7, 2023, from <https://www.eldersclimateaction.org/>
- Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors. (n.d.). Queen’s University Office of Indigenous Initiatives. Retrieved November 7, 2023, <https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/ways-knowing/elders-knowledge-keepers-and-cultural-advisors>
- Guddo, R. B. (2020). The vulnerability of older adults and natural disaster. *Disaster Advances*, 13(11), 79–83. Retrieved November 8, 2023 from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/DrGuddo/publication/347975474_The_vulnerability_of_older_adults_and_natural_disaster/links/5feb0ed345851553a001fc09/The-vulnerability-of-older-adults-and-natural-disaster.pdf
- Hand, C. L., Rudman, D. L., Huot, S., Gilliland, J. A., & Pack, R. L. (2018). Toward Understanding Person-Place Transactions in Neighborhoods: A Qualitative-Participatory Geospatial Approach. *The Gerontologist*, 58(1), 89–100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx064>
- Heide-Ottosen, S. (2014). The ageing of rural populations: Evidence on older farmers in low and middle-income countries. HelpAge International. <https://www.helpage.org/silo/files/the-ageing-of-rural-populations-evidence-on-older-farmers-in-low-and-middle-income-countries.pdf>
- Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*. Crown Publishing Group.
- Koenig, H. G., VanderWeele, T. J., & Peteet, J. R. (2024). *Handbook of religion and health* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190088859.001.0001>

- Kulcsar, A. (2013). *Older people disproportionately affected by Typhoon Haiyan*. HelpAge. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/older-people-disproportionately-affected-by-typhoon-haiyan>
- McPherson, M., Counahan, M., & Hall, J. L. (2015). Responding to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. *Western Pacific surveillance and response journal: WPSAR*, 6 Suppl 1(Suppl 1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.5365/WPSAR.2015.6.4.HYN_026
- Mercy Corps. (2013, November 14). The facts: What you need to know about Super Typhoon Haiyan. *The facts: What you need to know about Super Typhoon Haiyan*. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from <https://europe.prosperglobal.org/en-gb/blog/facts-typhoon-haiyan>
- Merez, A. (2018, May 9). PH among world's most religious countries: Study. Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/05/09/18/ph-among-worlds-most-religious-countries-study>
- Mikami, T., Shibayama, T., Takagi, H., Matsumaru, R., Esteban, M., Thao, N. D., & Li, S. (2016). Storm surge heights and damage caused by the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan along the Leyte Gulf coast. *Coastal Engineering Journal*, 58(1). <https://doi.org/10.1142/S0578563416400052>
- Murga, A. (2022, January 5). Filipinos count cost of climate crisis as typhoons get ever more destructive. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/05/filipinos-count-cost-of-climate-crisis-as-typhoons-get-ever-more-destructive>
- National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). (2014). NDRRMC update: Final report re effects of Typhoon “Yolanda” (Haiyan). http://www.ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/1329/FINAL_REPORT_re_Effects_of_Typhoon_YOLANDA_HAIYAN_06-09NOV2013.pdf
- Pargament, K. I., Exline, J. J., Cowden, R. G., & Wilt, J. A. (2026). Are spiritual struggles the cause or effect of psychological problems (or both)? Empirical findings and their implications for research and practice. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 13(2), 179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000408>
- Park, C. L. (2013). The meaning making model: A framework for understanding meaning, spirituality, and stress-related growth in health psychology. *The European Health Psychologist*, 15(2), 40–47. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from <https://www.ehps.net/ehp/index.php/contents/article/view/ehp.v15.i2.p40/1041>
- Parker, G., Lie, D., Siskind, D. J., Martin-Khan, M., Raphael, B., Crompton, D., & Kisely, S. (2016). Mental health implications for older adults after natural disasters—A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 28(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610215001210>
- Patel, G., Phung, V. H., Trueman, I., Pattinson, J., Botan, V., Parvin Hosseini, S. M., Ørner, R., Asghar, Z., Smith, M. D., Rowan, E., Spaight, R., Evans, J., Brewster, A., Mountain, P., & Siriwardena, A. N. (2023). "It's like a swan, all nice and serene on top, and paddling like hell underneath": community first responders' practices in attending patients and contributions to rapid emergency response in rural England, United Kingdom—a qualitative interview study. *Scandinavian journal of trauma, resuscitation and emergency medicine*, 31(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13049-023-01071-3>
- Santos, G. (2021). 2020 tropical cyclones in the Philippines: A review. *Tropical Cyclone Research and Review*, 10(3), 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tcrr.2021.09.003>
- Shih, R. A., Acosta, J. D., Chen, E. K., Carbone, E. G., Xenakis, L., Adamson, D. M., & Chandra, A. (2018). Improving disaster resilience among older adults: Insights from public health departments and aging-in-place efforts. *RAND Health Quarterly*, 8(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RHQ-08-01-03>

- Tuohy, R., Stephens, C., & Johnston, D. (2015). Disaster preparedness: Older adults' perspectives. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, 11(1), 46–61. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEM.2015.069516>
- UNISDR. (2005). *Hyogo framework for action 2005–2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*. Geneva.
- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2019, October 1). *Older persons invisible and vulnerable in emergencies*.
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). (2022). *Older persons as active agents in a changing climate* [Concept note / Event documentation]. United Nations International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP). https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Older%20Persons%20as%20Active%20Agents%20in%20a%20Changing%20Climate%20FINAL_0.pdf
- Walsh, J., Gibson, A., & Brown, L. M. (2016). Peace of mind's price tag: The psychological costs of financial stressors on older adults postdisaster. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 2(4), 408–417. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000089>
- Wortmann, J. H., & Park, C. L. (2008). Religion and Spirituality in Adjustment Following Bereavement: An Integrative Review. *Death Studies*, 32(8), 703–736. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180802289507>

AI Disclosure

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies were used solely to improve the readability and organization of the manuscript. All outputs generated through these tools were carefully reviewed, edited, and validated by the author to ensure accuracy, completeness, and alignment with the study's original content. The author assumes full responsibility and accountability for the integrity of the work, including its analysis, interpretation, and conclusions. AI tools were not used for data generation, data analysis, or as a substitute for scholarly judgment, and are not listed as authors or co-authors of this study.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.