
Panic Attack: Fire Incident Narratives Among Urban Dwellers

Haneylyn L. Cagod, M.S.

J.H. Cerilles State College, Dumingag Campus, Zamboanga del Sur

ABSTRACT

It is important that we remain informed and educated in order to maintain our safety at all times. This study will explore the experiences of urban dwellers during a fire incident in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. The study participated by six participants who experienced fire incidents in their own household. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Interview and guide questions were used in gathering the data. The study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data and came up with seven meaningful themes, namely: (1) Panic and Irrational Behavior; (2) Body Manifestation during a Fire Incident; (3) Keeping Family Members Safe and Secured; (4) Outpouring Support; (5) Manifesting Symptoms of Posttraumatic Syndrome; (6) Guilt and Remorse and; (7) Coping with the Disaster. The majority of the participants are unaware of how to react in the event of a certain situation, such as a fire. Victims, on the other hand, are prone to panic when a fire occurs, which is why they are unsure of what to do. This study recommend strengthening the implementation of OPLAN LIGTAS PAMAYANAN, in terms of fire safety, fire suppression, and evacuation through symposiums and special seminars with the cooperation of barangay officials, it will be more successful in maintaining people's and community's safety.

KEYWORDS: *experiences, fire victim, Oplan Ligtas Pamayanan, panic, urban dwellers*

INTRODUCTION

Fire safety is all about risk. Although the chances of a significant fire in any structure are low, the implications of such a disaster are huge (National Fire Protection Association) [1]. The objectives of fire safety design are to create an environment with an acceptable low risk of loss of life or property due to fire. Because any assessment of safety needs judgment as to how fire and smoke would behave in the case of an unplanned ignition, as well as how the fire protection system and the occupants in the structure respond (Buchanan & Abu) [2].

When assessing the possible threats to structures, fire is one of the most important considerations. In order to avoid unfavorable scenarios, fire safety systems are commonly installed to prevent fires or to protect structures from such catastrophes (Sobral) [3]. Time and space are limited in an emergency. It must concentrate on the necessities and be prepared for the possibility that you will never be able to return to your home (Schneiderman) [4]. This is something that many countries lack. Simultaneously, sensitization and education measures should be used to raise public knowledge of fire danger and acceptable behavior in order to prevent fires caused by negligence (Hirschberger) [5].

Furthermore, based on the data from Bureau of Fire Protection, there have been a number of 50 fire incidents in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental from the year 2016-2020. Most of the causes of these fire incidents are electrical ignition caused by overloading, loosed connections open flame from unattended lighted candle, open flame from rubbish fire, unattended bonfire, electrical ignition caused by short circuit, overheated wire of unattended television, open flame from cooking (Charcoal), kitchen fire / open flame from cooking (Firewood), overheated frayed wires, open flame from cooking (Copra), open flame from unattended lighted cigarette, open flame due to unattended lighted mosquito killer, and many. It is considered as rampant due to excessive cases of fire incidents every year. This may be considered a serious problem in Tangub City.

The Bureau of Fire Protection of Tangub City has implemented the OPLAN LIGTAS PAMAYANAN through campaigned in order to prevent fire incidents. It has 2 (two) pronged programs, the principles guiding the Kaagapay and Lingap programs involve the immersion of fire service personnel in the field, the communities, informal settlements and even homes in order to evaluate vulnerabilities to fire, and implement immediate remedial measures to prevent fire, or the interventions needed. This immersive and interventional approach to fire safety in communities will directly address the problems at the very same place where the problem effectively starts. This interaction between the BFP and the community itself through its residents is the key to a holistic and comprehensive fire safety and prevention program.

The researcher initiated this study to learn more about experiences of urban people during a fire incident in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. This study was carried out in order to inform the general public about how we cope with fires in our own homes. During a fire emergency, panic attacks can occur, and individuals must know how to deal with it. It will also serve as a reminder of the significance of the Bureau of Fire Protection's special seminars and meetings.

METHODS

This study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data to come up with meaningful themes. The stated research design was used as an appropriate approach to explore the experiences of urban dwellers during a fire incident in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental.

This study was conducted in Tangub City. This study was participated 6 (six) urban dwellers in Tangub City who experienced fire incidents on their own household. They were selected based on the data from the Bureau of Fire Protection, Tangub City, Misamis Occidental using purposive sampling. Participants was identified using the following inclusion criteria: 1.) must be of legal age 18 years old and above, 2.) fire victims and 3.) they are willing to express and participate in the study.

The study utilized researcher-made interview guide questions to explore the experiences of urban dwellers during a fire incident in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental.

In the entire process of the study, the welfare of the participants was the priority of the researcher. Privacy and confidentiality were always observed, particularly the name of the participants and other information unnecessary to the study. The researcher adheres to the

guidelines set by the Republic Act No. 10173, known as the “Data Privacy Act of 2012”. Through these, the researcher can assure the privacy and confidentiality of the qualitative research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the themes extracted from the transcripts of the interviews. The transcript was subjected to reduction, coding, and extraction of emerging themes before developing the final themes. The themes represented the meanings of their experiences of urban dwellers during a fire incident in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental.

The participant of this study was both male and female who are fire victims in Tangub City. Among of the six (6) participants, there are three (3) married participants and three (3) single participants. There are five (5) female and one (1) male participant, they were generally around 26-43 years of age. Most of the participants’ types of house are made of light materials.

There are seven emerging themes based on the participants' responses, namely: 1) panic and irrational behaviour, 2) body manifestation during a fire incident, 3) Keeping Family members safe and secure, 4) outpouring support, 5) manifesting symptoms of posttraumatic syndrome, 6) Guilt and remorse, and; 7) Coping with the disaster.

Theme 1: Panic and Irrational Behavior

Anyone who has experienced a fire incident is likely to react with panic and irrational behavior. The victim's cognitive response in an emergency scenario is panicking. When confronted with any threat, particularly fire, one experiences a mix of emotions and various thoughts. During the episodes, the majority of the participants expressed despair, fear, or terror. Apart from the fire, the house's children are also a matter of concern. It's acceptable to lose all those houses and furnishings, but not the children; we can always get or buy new things, but losing a loved one is catastrophic.

Participants shared their experiences and feelings:

“I was super panic because the children are shouting and when I take a look fire was then spreading fast P1”.

“When I saw the fire, I have mixed emotions. “I was so panic; I don’t know what to do and I was afraid of what I saw that the fire dispersed so fast in a big portion of our house P2”.

“I don’t understand my emotion, I cannot move, and I felt like I’m losing my strength P4”.

“I really don’t know what to feel that time of incident, I have mixed emotions I was so nervous and panic P5”.

Many persons who suffer from anxiety have major problems with nervous and irrational thinking - they realize their thoughts are wrong, but they can't manage to convince themselves of the more logical and reasoned solution. Worry has the potential to develop irrational thoughts on its own. When a person is nervous or experiencing an anxiety attack, they are more likely to have irrational thoughts (Abraham)[6].

Theme 2: Body Manifestation during a Fire Incident

A person who has been through a fire may not be aware of his or her reactions at the time of the tragedy. When confronted with an emergency situation, it is natural for a person to react with panic, trembling, fear, heart attack, or collapse. It is usually the person's reaction; nevertheless, some people have already developed a fear of fire as a result of their experiences.

These are the following statement supported by the following answers of the participants:

“My body was shaking as I saw with my own house burning with fire I can't breathe well and my heart beats so fast, I was so scared, and I thought we will die that time P1”.

“My heart pounding so fast and I felt I'm losing energy, I was sweating and I felt my body was freezing. I lost my strength of what I saw and it's too painful and despairs I almost can't breathe P2”.

“We are all shock and nervous and I was shaking P3”.

“My body is shaking and my heart pumps so fast. I almost collapsed; I cannot even speak and cannot move that time P5”.

In addition, during an episode of anxiety, heart palpitations and fast breathing patterns are prevalent. High blood pressure and coronary issues such as heart disease or heart attack can be caused by the constant release of stress response hormones at persistently high levels of worry. A panic attack, the most common symptom of panic disorder, is a highly painful experience of anxiety-related bodily feelings. Distressing physical symptoms such as chest pain, rapid heart rate, shivering, trembling, and shortness of breath define these attacks (Star [7]).

Theme 3: Keeping Family Members Safe and Secured

In an emergency, the first thing to do is to make sure that all family members are safe and secure. As compared to anything else, family is the most important thing. They are the priceless resource that must be protected when dealing with any emergency situation. Partners, children, or any family member is one of the factors that cause panic because they are the love of our life, apart from any damage.

Participants shared there experience, these are supported by the following answers:

“I really don't know what to do, I shouted and without thinking I immediately carry my two children and I told my brother to hold my shirt going outside P1”.

“When I saw a big fire, I was shouting loudly calling my sister and told her fire! Fire! I immediately go back to the room and get my 5 month old niece P2”.

“Because the fire is spreading to other portion of our house, I immediately get my children and wife to go outside. Next to that I get the important document P3”.

You have fewer than two minutes to escape out of a burning house before it is enveloped in flames and smoke, according to (Bradford) [8]. Because there is so little time to think or respond in the moment, it is critical to educate yourself on house fire safety before you are faced with a real-life situation. Teach children and all family members the fundamentals of fire safety and how to avoid fires.

Theme 4: Outpouring Support

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the community, neighbors, strangers, and even government and business entities provide unwavering support to any fire victims. It is to be grateful that some people have a good heart and are willing to give whatever they can to those who are in need. Participants express their gratitude to their neighbors and others for their unwavering support in the aftermath of a disaster. They were lucky to have friends and neighbors willing to help them without expecting anything in return. As a result, their daily food necessities are temporarily met.

The following were the statements given by the participants:

“Our neighbors give us food, drinking water, some kitchen utensils despite the pandemic P4”.

“I really don’t know what to do, our neighbor trying to help us, but we don’t have anything to do with it, that is why our neighbor volunteered to call the BFP. One of my neighbors using his motorcycle hurriedly goes to BFP to report. Especially today its pandemic, we are on crisis, we thankful to the people who give and donated for us, it so difficult coz we don’t have house to sleep P1”.

“I don’t know what to do, I am thankful because my brothers arrived and help us recover some things/appliances/furniture. The clothes that we are wearing everyday were the donation from our family and to the Local Government Unit provides us food and other essentials P3”.

“Somebody calls the BFP, Our neighbour helping each other to stop the fire P5”.

Many Filipinos have lost their houses and businesses as a result of fires. Despite the fire, Filipinos demonstrated that they were willing to help one another in the research. Following the accident, the participants were grateful for the donations they received. Apart from that, the federal and provincial governments have provided assistance to fire victims with home construction and company start-up expenditures (Allanic et. al.) [9].

Theme 5: Manifesting Symptoms of Posttraumatic Syndrome

When dealing with a fire emergency situation, the impact is severe; not only does the trauma persist for a minute, but it can also trigger phobias. Seeing items that cause one to recall occurrences makes a person emotional. Matches, lighters, candles, and other similar items can put a person in a traumatic state, particularly if they are the cause of a fire. Participants stated that seeing those instruments still makes them feel fearful and panicked. When facing with fire occurrences, feelings of worry, panic, and phobia persist for months or years. Panic might strike at any time, and they may come across anything or find themselves in a circumstance similar to his or her own.

The following were the statements given by the participants:

“Until today I am still thinking of what happened and heartaches are still here, all the time that I think of it, I still cried during the night time. I feel like I’m still in shock because every night I just woke up and I feel like I’m hallucinating. If I saw matches, lighter or etc. I will hide it and put it in higher place where children can’t reach it P1”.

“I can really tell that this situation makes us feel trauma because until now my children still scared and shaking even somebody is burning garbage outside P3”.

“I felt like I carry the world because of pain even my mother until now cried all the time we talk about the fire incidents P4”.

“Its too difficult in our situation, until now the trauma that I felt that time is still here P5”.

In addition, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health illness that can develop after stressful events such as severe personal assaults or natural or human-caused disasters, according to (Cunha) [10]. Intrusive recollections, nightmares, or flashbacks of the trauma are some of the re-experiencing symptoms; avoidance, which is the attempt to avoid ideas, feelings, and situations. Reminders of the trauma; negative sentiments about oneself; difficulty to appreciate a joyful activity; excessive self-blame for the event or its repercussions; emotional detachment and social isolation

Theme 6: Guilt and Remorse

Accidents can happen as a consequence of man-made or natural causes. In the event of a fire, we may believe it is our fault or that we have been negligent. We can't help but blame ourselves for what happened. One of the reasons why fire accidents occur is that people have a selfish and irresponsible attitude.

The following were the statements given by the participants.

“I never think this would happen, I thought they are just playing not even thinking that they play match. I was so careless because I focus on laundry P1”.

“We experienced it because we are just very confident, and we thought it will not cause any harm and the attitude of always saying later even if it's important. We never give solution because we are very busy working. I don't know any wires in connection to electric current, it's our fault we did not consult the experts, we have many appliances also that functions every day P3”.

“For me, it happened because we felt comfortable and satisfied with it during copra drying, the fire is big, maybe we are so comfortable because for how many years my father always do this as source of income, we don't expect it would create a massive fire P4”.

“Because of negligence and carelessness that would cause fire incidents. But if we care and avoid that situation, maybe nothing will happen. It is a lesson that needs us to learn and to my neighbour especially to my uncle, needs to be careful if he smokes, it must be disposed properly P5”.

In the study of (Peterson) [11] revealed that, persons who suffer from anxiety are more likely to blame themselves and assume responsibility for other people's happiness. It's not enough to wish others to be happy; anxiety and its side effect, guilt, convince us that we're to blame for other people's troubles and terrible experiences. Anxiety causes guilt, which is a highly unpleasant side effect. The mutual cause-and-effect link between anxiety and guilt makes it difficult to escape the cycle. One of anxiety's side effects, guilt, can be reduced.

Theme 7: Coping with the Disaster

When a fire breaks out, all you can think about is saving your children and other family members. Regardless of your anxiety or terror, you must survive and continue to live. It is preferable to carry on with the children rather than reminisce about the past. Continue to grow as a good person and be blessed by another life.

The following were the statements given by the participants:

“I focus to my children and brother, to distract my attention in recalling the fire incident P1”.

“Maybe I can say that all of these things happened for a reason, I entrust to God, maybe this is a lesson for us to go back and believe in God P4”.

“I will attend any fire and safety awareness seminars; this would help us what to do in a fire situation P3”.

“I will join the seminar about fire safety facilitated by the barangay so that, we should know what to do if there are fire incidents P5”.

Anxiety often manifests as a fear of being out of control. Making a disaster plan can help alleviate some of its symptoms. Prepare a disaster preparation kit and make an evacuation plan (Hackley) [12]. If you've ever been engaged in an industrial accident, you know that how you and others respond can have a significant impact on how things turn out. Industrial disasters are clearly terrifying and deadly events, and many people's natural reactions tend to panic or lose control. It's natural to be scared and react in this way, but panicking will only make the issue worse. Instead, keeping calm and in control can assist you and everyone else involved in effectively managing and controlling the situation (Dugas) [13].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During this pandemic, fire victims faced physical, financial, and emotional challenges. Emotional breakdown occurred among fire victims, which could lead to panic attacks, despair, anxiety, and heart attacks. To avoid fires, any materials that could cause a fire should be secured, and children should not be allowed to play with it. Aside from that, every member of the family should be aware of the threat, and we should all educate each other on how to stay safe and secure. Panic and irrational behavior are common reactions of people who have been in an emergency situation, but we must remain calm so that we can think about what to do and what needs to be done in the event of an accident. Keeping family members safe and secure is the number one priority in an emergency situation, and body manifestation during a fire incident is the response of someone who saw the real life situation of a fire accident. The outpouring of support is usually from concerned people or family members who are willing to help despite the outbreak. The person's reaction to the trauma may endure for days, weeks, months, or even years, depending on the severity of the symptoms. The regret and remorse associated with being negligent on the side of the individual who negligently reacted became the primary causes of the accident. Regardless of what has occurred, those who have been affected by a fire are doing their best to cope with the calamity. As a result, let us all strive to be knowledgeable and watchful at all times, to be aware of the danger and to understand how to react appropriately in an emergency scenario.

Based on the findings and conclusions, to maintain safety and avoid fires, the researcher suggests that the Bureau of Fire Protection, Local Government Unit, and Barangay officials conduct daily inspections of every dwelling. The BFP must expand the campaign of Ligas Oplan Pamayanan in terms of fire safety, fire suppression, and evacuation through symposiums and special seminars with the cooperation of barangay officials, it will be more successful in maintaining people's and community's safety. BFP, on the other hand, will distribute more fliers, posting of tarpaulins and advertising in television, even in social media indicating the fire safety procedure, so that the community is constantly reminded to be safe.

The Bureau of Fire Protection, in collaboration with the school administration for each of the city's schools, must organize seminars or webinars, either in limited face-to-face sessions following the IATF protocol or online. Everyone, including students, professors, and instructors, must be aware of the dangers of fire.

The Local Government Unit of Tangub City must provide physician who assigned in the city as to monitor the medical condition of all fire victims. Aside from that, the researcher suggests that the barangay health worker (BHW) visit the fire victims, check their blood pressure, and submit a report on their condition as a kind of health monitoring.

Due to a lack of fire officer personnel, the barangay level must choose one of its representative officers to complete trainings and seminars with the BFP, allowing them to administer programs such as seminars, specifically in fire prevention, on their own barangay. The researcher, on the other hand, suggests that as part of fire prevention, civilian volunteer organizations (CVO) monitor or inspect every dwelling and submit a monthly report.

REFERENCES

- i. National Fire Protection Association (2018). Fire Safety. Retrieved on October 28, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3vTmyHp>
- ii. Buchanan A. & Abu A. (2017). Structural Design for Fire Safety. Retrieved on October 5, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3uHzqQ0>
- iii. Sobral (2017). Fire Safety Systems in Buildings-Problems and Concerns beyond the Project. Retrieved on January 12, 2022 from <https://bit.ly/3GmpjVR>
- iv. Schneiderman A. (2017). The Things You Should Take In An Emergency Evacuation. Retrieved on January 12, 2022 from <https://bit.ly/3re5dah>
- v. Hirschberger, P. (2017). Forest Ablaze, causes and effect of global forest fires. Retrieved on October 5, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3DrcVCr>
- vi. Abraham, M. (2021). How Anxiety Causes Irrational Thoughts - and Vice Versa. Retrieved on November 23, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3xfBVKE>
- vii. Star K. (2021). Managing the Physical Symptoms of Panic and Anxiety. Retrieved on November 24, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3HKkU0l>
- viii. Bradford A. (2021). Home Fire Safety Guide. Retrieved on November 26, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3xmlz3f>

-
- ix. Allanic E., Cuevas J., & Prenala R., (2021). The Fire Victims Dilemma: Unveiling Stories During Covid-19 Pandemic. Retrieved on November 23, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/30LPvKk>
 - x. Cunha J. (2021). Symptoms and Signs of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Retrieved on November 26, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3r97qFm>
 - xi. Peterson, T. (2016). Guilt: A Distressing Effect of Anxiety. Retrieved on November 26, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3FTK6jf>
 - xii. Hackley (2017). Managing Anxiety During Natural Disasters. Retrieved on December 7, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3DumPCQ>
 - xiii. Dugas (2017). Safety Measures to Be Taken During Industrial Disasters. Retrieved on December 7, 2021 from <https://bit.ly/3IqPhZM>

www.ijmas.com