

Stories of Resilience: Mothers in the Aftermath of the Bagong Silang Fire

John Lloyd T. Abrea*, Shane Kiann L. Cebuano, Mark Lesther D. Gabayan, Mariel Joy B. Genialope, Noella Shayne P. Jongay, Cecile Joy M. Evina

College of Arts and Sciences, Western Philippines University–Puerto Princesa Campus

**Corresponding Author: johnlloydabrea010@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The study is a qualitative–exploratory in nature which investigated the experiences particularly on the roles, challenges, and coping strategies of mothers affected by a devastating fire in Barangay Bagong Silang, Puerto Princesa City. Utilizing narrative inquiry through semi–structured interview guide and face–to–face interviews with ten mothers from large families, the research explored maternal resilience in the aftermath of displacement. Findings revealed that mothers performed multifaceted roles as primary caregivers, resource managers, and community helpers while facing emotional trauma, financial hardships, and inadequate shelter conditions. Despite these challenges, they utilized problem–focused and emotion–focused coping mechanisms, including budgeting, community solidarity, and prayer. The study highlights the critical role of mothers in family recovery and recommends that government agencies like the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) and City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWD) of Puerto Princesa provide holistic, gender–sensitive support and improved infrastructure at relocation sites.

Keywords: maternal resilience, fire incident, gender–sensitive support

INTRODUCTION

Disasters are a complex global problem and an inevitable truth of life, disrupting the mental health and well–being of communities and often exceeding their ability to cope using their own resources. These events are classified as either natural or human–generated calamitous events that produce great loss of human life or destruction of the natural environment and public infrastructure (Kreimer 2001). Fire disasters, characterized by uncontrolled ignitions from both natural causes like lightning and human activities, significantly threaten life and property (Madondo et al. 2023).

In the Philippines, fire incidents are a severe threat; between 2011 and 2019, over 1,300 incidents occurred, resulting in thousands of deaths and billions of pesos in property damage (Villa and Ceballos 2021). Disasters disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, particularly women and children (Shaukat S. et. al. 2025). Maternal stress following such environmental disasters can influence children's long–term health and development, while the trauma of the fire can hinder a mother's ability to engage in nurturing roles, complicating the transition back to normalcy (Mockrin et al. 2022).

Barangay Bagong Silang, a close–knit coastal community in Puerto Princesa City, experienced a catastrophic fire on February 7, 2024, which gutted 450 households and affected over 900 families (Ticke 2024). Following the incident, mothers relocated to temporary shelters reported challenges such as poor ventilation and increased educational costs due to the distance from schools. Existing studies often focus on the economic impacts or causes of fires, leaving a significant gap in the exploration of the psychological and social aspects of recovery for mothers as primary caregivers.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a narrative analysis of the experiences of mothers affected by the fire in Barangay Bagong Silang. Specifically, the objectives are to explore the stories of resilience in terms of the roles performed by mothers, the challenges they encountered, and to identify the coping strategies they employed after the fire incident.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative–exploratory research design to investigate the complex social, emotional, and behavioral patterns of mothers affected by the fire. Narrative inquiry was utilized to capture personal stories and the specific meanings participants assigned to their experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of their resilience (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun 2012).

Participants and Locale Selection Criteria

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The researchers used purposive sampling to select ten mothers from Barangay Bagong Silang who had families with six or more members. These participants were directly affected by the fire and were listed in the official barangay records. The research was conducted between September 2024 and May 2025 in Barangay Bagong Silang and the temporary relocation sites in Barangay San Pedro.

Data Collection and Analysis Instrument and Procedure.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended inquiries. To ensure cultural sensitivity and build rapport, the researchers utilized the Filipino approaches of "pakapa-kapa" (feeling out) and "pakikipagkwentuhan" (storytelling), which facilitated harmonious communication. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process: familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report.

RESULTS

Roles Performed by Mothers after the Fire Incident

Following the fire incident, mothers immediately assumed the role of **primary caregivers**, placing the safety and emotional welfare of their children above material concerns. Nanay Dora exemplified this by stating, *"Bilang isang ina unang una syempre ay inasikaso ko ang mga anak ko, kasi pagtapos ng sunog anak ko talaga ang inu-una ko, diko na inisip ang mga gamit ko kasi nga makikita ko parin yun pero ang mga anak ko hindi na"*. Mothers also maintained household stability through domestic labor; Nanay Emma shared, *"Tapos pala yun naglalaba ng mga damit namin, naglilinis dito sa bahay at nagluluto basta lahat ng gawaing bahay"*.

Beyond domesticity, they acted as **resource managers**. Nanay Ace worked to provide for educational needs despite displacement: *"ang ginawa kong tungkulin ay ang mag trabaho para kumita ng pera para mabigay ko ang mga need ng anak ko sa school, lalo na nagkaroon ng adjustment o pagbabago dahil medyo malayo na sila sa school"*. Nanay Emma added, *"hahanap ka parin ng paraan paano ma provide yung pambili ng mga gamit na kailangan maka pasok sila sa school sikap ka parin"*. For some, this meant taking on dual-parenting roles, as Nanay Vida recounted, *"Ako ang naging nanay at tatay lahat ng kailangan ng anak ko ako lang ang nag-aasikaso lalo na yung time na ng sunog"*.

Additionally, mothers served as **active participants in community relief**, with Nanay Vida, a Barangay Health Worker, noting, *"habang nag-e-evacuate kami doon nag-aassist din kami sa mga kapwa namin kabarangay na may mga sakit. Nagmomonitor din kami, nagche-check ng BP, nag-dispensed ng mga gamot"*.

Challenges Encountered by Mothers Affected by Fire Incident

Mothers faced intense **health and well-being challenges**, including lasting psychological distress. Nanay Kath shared, *"Nag-iwan po ito sa akin ng pobyang trauma dahil nga grabi yung pangyayari until now pag naiisip ko yun natatakot pa rin ako"*. Concerns for children's physical health were also prominent; Nanay Dora feared, *"na baka magkasakit mga anak ko atsaka apo ko ng leptospirosis at dengue kasi maraming lamok"*, while Nanay Emma noted persistent respiratory issues: *"ang ubo at sipon parin talaga kasi hindi maiwasan kasi nga ma-alikabok tapos mainit"*.

Financial hardships were exacerbated by displacement. Nanay Dora explained, *"pabaon ko sa mga anak at apo ko ay hindi sapat...ayaw ko na laging nag-aabsent"*. Nanay Marisol added, *"minsan nga di sila nakapasok kasi walang budget, walang pamasaha"*. Distance from work was a major hurdle, with Nanay Dora noting, *"Mahirap parin kasi nga nasanay kami doon malapit lang kami sa mga pinagkikitaan namin... hirap pang makahanap ng sideline"*.

Structural challenges in the shelters also caused significant stress. Nanay Bea described the impact of rain: *"isa pa yung baha... iniisip ko na baka biglang mag baha at mabasa ang mga gamit, tsaka sakripisyo rin talaga sa paglilinis"*. Nanay Ace highlighted the lack of privacy and comfort: *"hihiga kami sa semento yung higaan naman namin is banig... dagdag pa yung sa palikuran syempre sa dami ng gumagamit di naman gaya ng sarili mong Cr"*.

Coping Strategies Employed by Mothers after the Fire Incident

To manage **financial stress**, mothers utilized **budgeting and alternative livelihoods**. Nanay Lyn emphasized, *"Pinag-iipunan namin ang mga pamasaha at baon nila papuntang school para makapasok sila"*. Nanay Ace adapted by finding new ways to trade: *"Nag-aangkat ng isda kapag halimbawa na hindi maka-laot, nangungumpra para lang may malako, ganon ikot-ikot lang"*. When resources were depleted, Nanay Vida turned to family: *"Minsan naghihiram ako sa mga kapatid ng asawa ko, para lang matustusan ang mga pangangailangan ng mga anak ko"*.

Emotional coping included distraction and social support. Nanay Lyn shared, *"Inaaliw ko nalang ang sarili ko para hindi ko maisip yung mga problema... hindi ko nalang pinapakita sa mga anak ko na namomroblema ako"*. Nanay Bea found relief through community: *"Yong ginawa ko para maibsan ang stress is*

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nakikipagkwentuhan ako sa mga kapitbahay namin". Faith was also central; Nanay Marisol prayed, "Sinasamahan namin ng dasal kay Lord na tulungan kaming palakasin ang loob na labanan ang hirap at sakit".

For **physical coping**, Nanay Dora used simple tools: *"Nagpapausok kami gamit ang egg tray... nagsisindi rin kami ng katol sa gabi naman gumagamit kami ng kulambo"*. Nanay Kla managed the heat by building a small extension: *"nakagawa kami ng sala na maliit dito sa labas kahit papaano meron kaming nata tambayan kapag masyado ng mainit sa loob"*.

DISCUSSION

Roles Performed by Mothers after the Fire Incident

The prioritization of children's safety over material possessions aligns with established views of mothers as "emotional anchors" who provide stability during traumatic events (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000; Walsh 2007). This protective behavior is consistent with research characterizing maternal disaster response as caring and diligent (Ayeb-Karlsson 2020). The efforts to maintain routines like cooking and cleaning are essential for fostering child resilience and recovery in post-disaster settings (Peek 2008 with Hobfoll et al. 2007). Furthermore, the multifaceted roles identified, ranging from financial provision to community healthcare, reflect the gendered burden of caregiving and financial management prevalent in low-income households (Chant 2014; Arriagada 2002). Nanay Vida's community assistance specifically embodies the Filipino value of *bayanihan*, highlighting how maternal skills are leveraged for collective communal healing and psychological support (Martinez et. al. 2020).

Challenges Encountered by Mothers Affected by Fire Incident

The emotional distress and phobias reported confirm that fire incidents lead to long-term anxiety and emotional regulation difficulties (Levine et al. 2008). Physical health issues, such as respiratory infections and fear of vector-borne diseases, are directly linked to poor housing and waste management facilities in temporary shelters, which can significantly worsen health outcomes (Ifyalem and Jakada 2023). The financial strain on the other hand, highlights the disproportionate impact of disasters on caregivers, who often sacrifice personal needs to ensure their children's education continues (Enarson 2012; Peek and Fothergill 2008). Structural inadequacies such as low metal roofs causing extreme heat and shared latrines, not only cause physical discomfort but also erode personal dignity and increase the psychological burden on mothers. These findings emphasize the need for disaster response strategies that prioritize adequate shelter and sanitation specifically for families.

Coping Strategies Employed by Mothers after the Fire Incident

Mothers utilize a blend of emotional resilience, social networks, and problem-focused coping to maintain family stability. Adaptive budgeting and the pursuit of alternative livelihoods are crucial for household survival when primary income sources are disrupted. Socializing and faith-based practices serve as vital emotional buffers, helping mothers manage trauma and find the "inner strength" needed to support their children (Enarson 2012; Peek and Fothergill 2008). Finally, the physical adaptations, such as using mosquito nets and creating outdoor shaded areas, are practical grassroots interventions. Research suggests that improving ventilation and creating shaded spaces are effective ways to mitigate heat exposure in disaster settings, especially when formal support is limited (Galang et al. 2024, Kenny et al. 2019). These collective strategies demonstrate the great maternal strength and resourcefulness required for post-disaster recovery.

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GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The authors of this study did not use any AI-tools in the generation of the manuscript.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study prioritized ethical considerations, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants received detailed information about the study and their rights, including the freedom to withdraw without repercussions. To protect sensitive data, confidentiality was strictly maintained, and pseudonyms were used to guarantee anonymity. The researchers also acknowledged the potential for emotional distress and designed the study to provide a supportive environment, mitigating harm while fostering trust and security. Through safeguarding participants' welfare, the study aimed to collect authentic insights while respecting their rights and dignity.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no competing interests to any authors.

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