

**CHILDREN’S FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES IN A SELECTED EVACUATION
CENTER IN THE PHILIPPINES**

The study was conducted to describe the experiences and feelings of six-to-eight-year-old children in an evacuation center of a flood-prone barangay in the Philippines. The participants were asked to draw their experiences inside the evacuation center and eventually interviewed on what they drew, what they felt during their stay inside the center, and what they expected to see to make their stay comfortable, happy, and meaningful. A frequency count was followed to tally and categorize the participants' responses according to their variables. Six (6) categories emerged for children's experiences: sensory experiences, bio-physical experiences, family-related experiences, social activities, and rules imposed by the parents; seven (7) arose for children's feelings, namely: afraid, happy, sad, pity, difficult, frustrated, and hungry; and two (2) expectations were observed: material things and social relationships. The study recommends developing programs, interventions, designing evacuation centers, and food planning for young children.

Keywords: early childhood, experiences, feelings, evacuation center, flood, children’s drawings

The World Disaster Report 2012 in Brussels, Belgium, ranked the Philippines as the third most disaster-prone country because of its high exposure to natural calamities (Flores, 2013). According to the Natural Disaster Risk Management in the Philippines (NDRMP), the nation is unusually susceptible to natural hazards, with earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tropical cyclones, and floods being the most catastrophic hazards due to a combination of factors, including the junction of several tectonic plate boundaries in the Philippines and being in an area of frequent tropical cyclones.

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), in 2013, a total of 25 tropical cyclones entered the country, surpassing the average of 19 to 20 cyclones annually (Flores, 2013). In recent years, floods have become more frequent and of increasing severity, resulting in the loss of lives, injury, homelessness, and damage to infrastructure and the environment. Their impact has been widespread, affecting critical sectors such as education and agriculture (Third World Water Forum: Poverty and Floods, 2003).

During disasters or natural calamities, evacuation is one of the pre-disaster responses that ensure people's safety and security (Philippines: Establishment of permanent evacuation centers sought, 2014). Families are sent to the nearest evacuation center during a flood, where they spend weeks or months, depending on its severity. Evacuation centers are existing buildings used as "temporary shelter for the displaced population in the event of natural disasters or conflict" (Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster [CCMC], 2010, P.1). These may include public school buildings, hospitals, factories, religious buildings, government institutions, and community centers. School buildings are commonly used among these transitional structures due to their number and accessibility. Furthermore, they are authorized by the Philippine government for that purpose (Department of Education [DepED], 2006).

For families living in flood-prone areas, a massive displacement of residents always happens at the onslaught of a flood. Other families immediately evacuate whenever there is a typhoon and warning. However, while children have been identified as a vulnerable sub-group, especially those who live in flood-prone areas, little research

has sought to understand children's experiences in evacuation centers.

From the many onslaughts of floods in the country, thousands of children have directly experienced its force and damage. This brought about the researcher's curiosity about children's experiences, feelings, and expectations in evacuation centers. Children are a diverse group, and their information and opinions related to their experiences in the evacuation centers vary. Considering their very young age, six-to-eight-year-old children readily engage with grown-ups in everyday activities and want to be taken seriously. Some may not verbally express their feelings and experiences; some are able to convey them through illustrations. Berk (2005) cited that children's writings are legible during middle childhood, and their drawings illustrate dramatic improvements in organization, detail, and representation.

Cognitively, six-to-eight-year-old children develop a clearer understanding of cause and effects and spatiotemporal events. The children now have a sense of necessity that things "ought" to happen in specific ways. As the child's cognitive skills increase, they mature to understand people and the events around them. According to Berk (2005), during middle childhood, children

can distinguish the thoughts and feelings of others; they can put themselves in another's place and demonstrate empathy and compassion. Ackermann (2004) supported this statement when she stated that it is during these ages that children understand and empathize with others. Children at these ages can develop ways to handle emotionally arousing situations (Berk, 2005).

Six-to-eight-year-old children are inclined to engage in interactions more. This is supported by Berk (2005) when he stated that school-age children desire group belongingness. Ripke et al. (2008) supported Berk's statement when they said that it is during these ages that peers become increasingly important. They are beginning to build and understand friendships and want to be accepted by peers. Friends that children may have at these ages may live in the same neighborhood and are most commonly of the same sex (DeBord, n.d)

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Cognitive Theory

Vygotsky emphasized that children actively construct their knowledge and understanding. In Vygotsky's Sociocultural Cognitive Theory, children are often described as social creatures. They develop

their ways of thinking and understanding primarily through social interaction. The tools given by the society govern their cognitive development, and their minds are molded by the cultural context in which they live (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007; Holzman, 2008, as cited in Santrock, 2009).

Vygotsky's theory of development pictures children engaging in activities and, from this engagement, constructing the context of their minds. Thus, thinking does not initially create action; instead, action creates thought (Thomas, 1992). Intellectual development is the process of children internalizing the outcome of their communication with the environment.

According to Gordon (2010), in Vygotsky's theory, adults teach socially valued skills at a very early stage; therefore, children's knowledge is relatively influenced by their social world values. He explained this by his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). If significant learning occurs in a social context, the learning is interpersonal and active and depends on who and how much a child's experiences interact with others. Initially, the family is part of the child's ZPD. The family shares and develops a cooperative dialogue with the child. The shared connections in the child's zone of

proximal development can also include the teacher. Finally, the older peers can be part of a child's learning in this sociocultural theory.

Experiences of Children

According to Greene and Hill (2005), experience is being consciously the subject of a state or being consciously affected by an event. Children's perspectives on issues and events can be seen as a subset of the broader enterprise aimed at understanding children's experience of the world.

Children of all ages, in all cultures, know essential things about life and the world. Their knowledge is based on experiences of love, trust, justice, and even dislike, disrespect, and unfairness (Sargeant and Harcourt, 2012). Even though relationships with significant adults, such as parents and teachers, are vital for emerging insights and abilities about children and childhood, the child encounters the world on their own (Sargeant and Harcourt, 2012). Children's experience is a part of the development of their outlook in life, but more than that, it is about the entirety of their emotional engagement with humanity.

Knowledge about what life is all about is shaped through experiences understood and made sense of by the child

himself. This means that the child bears knowledge not previously known by anyone else. According to Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000), the meanings they (the children) attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings their teachers or parents would ascribe. This statement is supported by Sargeant and Harcourt (2012) when they stated that we expect the child to have something to tell, which is only available through their voice.

Mayall (2002) discussed that the sociology of childhood conceptualizes children as active and competent beings and key witnesses to their own lives. Each child can provide insights into our current understanding of children, how they mature, their cognitive and emotional development processes, and their place in the world as influenced by their experience and physical environment (Sargeant and Harcourt 2012). The existence of children and their description of their own experiences is a vital element in understanding their world. It can be argued that without some access to the person's experience, we have an incomplete account, from a scientific perspective, of what it is that causes any person, adult or child, to act as they do (Greene and Hill, 2005). Understanding the lived experiences of children will motivate us to find out how

they interpret, negotiate, and feel about their daily lives. Hence, valuing children's experiences will assist us in exploring how children learn and how they perceive life as they see it through their eyes.

According to Cohen and Naimark (1991), the perception that children's subjective experiences should be better valued and understood is reflected in recent international policy changes, particularly in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There is considerable consensus that the convention, adopted in 1989, reflects the unprecedented value of the subjective worlds of children and for their right to be consulted and taken seriously. Children's right to hold and express personal beliefs is contained in Articles 12, 13, and 14. Article 14 bears the most significant relevance since it reflects the principle that the child's own views should be respected and listened to.

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming their views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child be given due weight, following the age and maturity of the child. (Cohen and Naimark, 1991: 183).

On the other hand, attitudes of suspicion towards children's capacities

remain widespread. For a long time, people have taken for granted that children have nothing of significance or value to tell about their lives and that adults understand much better than what is good for them and how events affect them. As Langsted asked concerning the paucity of research on children's perspectives on early childhood services: *'Is anyone interested in the kind of daily life the children want? Does anyone regard children as experts when it comes to their own lives?'* (Langsted, 1994: 29).

Furthermore, Greene and Hill (2005) have explained that children's views are often observed as merely learned or mimicked responses. It is perceived that when one listens to children's voices, one hears their parent's voices as well. Children in most societies are valued for their potential and for what they will grow up to be but are devalued in terms of their present perspectives and experiences. It is presumed that they cannot convincingly and consistently supply information about events or experiences. Younger children are seen as unreliable reporters even of their own experience that adults seldom ask them of their perspectives.

Donaldson (1978) argued that we often confuse children's language ability

with their general intellectual ability and that when we attempt to make ourselves understood to children, we find them more competent than we expected (Hogan, 2005). However, recent findings of children's abilities dispute the premise that children are not sufficiently capable of reporting on their own experience. In addition, Ceci and Bruck (2005) contended that researchers now find that young children can give accurate accounts of personally experienced events. This study is supported by the statement of Christensen and Prout (2005) that children came to be seen as much more active in the process of cultural learning as interpreters and creators of meaning rather than simply absorbing the meaning of adults. They are far from being seen as passive subjects in social structures and processes; instead, they are seen as active in the construction and the determination of their social lives, active in the lives of other people around them and the societies in which they live. Also, Hogan (2005) stated that children could remember more accurately when freely allowed to recall the details of events they have personally experienced. School-aged children are better able to recall, although they are still susceptible to contextual suggestions and particularly to their interpretation of the

investigators' expectations (Garbarino & Scott, 1992).

Evacuation Centers

Providing adequate temporary shelters is of invaluable importance during tumultuous times (NDRRMP 2011-2028). Evacuation centers are existing buildings used as "temporary shelter for the displaced population in the event of natural disasters or conflict" (CCCM Cluster, 2010, P.1). Apart from being evacuation centers, these places serve as the distribution center of donated consumer goods. The municipal government allocates packs of goods composed of rice, noodles, canned goods, coffee, sugar, bottled water, and biscuits.

In the Philippines, school buildings are commonly used because they are among the best-constructed buildings in the community. According to Duran (2013), school buildings are used as evacuation centers due to their quantity and accessibility. Thus, they can provide vital protection against natural disasters. Moreover, the Philippine government has made a directive for all the public schools to function as evacuation centers in times of calamity (DepEd, 2006). However, lawmakers have urged the government to stop using public

schools as evacuation centers during calamities and, instead, construct more permanent structures. According to *Philippines: Establishment of permanent evacuation centers in the country pushed* (2014), these permanent evacuation centers should be located in the safest areas, which can be used as safe havens for evacuees in every neighboring barangay in the country and constructed with internationally acceptable standards. In some cases, basketball courts, gymnasiums, and parks are also converted as evacuation centers to accommodate displaced families.

According to an article written by Lozada (2013), during the Typhoon Trami (Local name: Typhoon Maring) that hit Metro Manila in August 2013, evacuees transformed classrooms into makeshift bedrooms. Typically, 12 families or 55 people crowd in a 7 x 7-meter classroom. Evacuees are cramped at a density of one person in less than one square meter of space, way below the recommended standard of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is about 3.5 square meters absolute minimum floor space/person. This would be about 20 persons per regular classroom in the Philippines. In addition, overcrowding and strains to privacy, health and sanitation problems, lack of food, and missed income

opportunities are just some of the evacuees' concerns. In the aftermath of natural disasters and setting up evacuation centers, the risks for the spread of communicable diseases also increase. Congestion in most evacuation centers puts at risk the evacuees, especially the pregnant women, the disabled, senior citizens, and the children who are the most vulnerable in times of disasters (Philippines: Establishment of permanent evacuation centers in the country pushed, 2014). Dr. Shin Yong-Soo of the World Health Organization has reported that because of these people's experiences in evacuation centers, they are prone to stress and anxiety (The World Health Organization/Philippines: WHO warns of emotional burnout in the wake of Philippine flood, 2009).

According to Whaley (2011), as the death toll from flash floods soared, the Philippine government turned its attention to survivors and the threat of diseases in crowded evacuation centers. This statement is supported by the Department of Health (DOH) when they said that those sick who are taking shelter in evacuation centers have complained of acute respiratory infection, fever, skin diseases, minor injuries, and diarrhea (Some 2,000 people sicken in Philippine flood evacuation centers, 2012). DOH provides public health services to

ensure adequate and safe water supply, toilet facilities, and proper waste disposal in all evacuation centers (Whaley, 2011).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) observed that children live in extremely different circumstances due to the disaster and its associated problems. Thus, it encourages all daycare workers to conduct supervised neighborhood play sessions with zero-to-six-year-old children in evacuation centers. This is to promote the welfare of children while they are in evacuation centers. The Supervised Neighborhood Play Program is a neighborhood community-based Early Childhood Care Development (ECCD) for children ages six years and below that utilizes play as an approach in providing early stimulation activities that are developmentally appropriate for each target area of the children in the community (Philippines: DSWD promotes supervised neighborhood play in evacuation areas, 2011).

Despite the local government's efforts, conditions in the evacuation centers are often complex, especially for children. According to an article released by DSWD, the department will continue to boost the establishment of functional child-friendly

spaces inside the evacuation centers to oversee the welfare of children. DSWD said these child-friendly spaces and temporary daycare centers in the evacuation centers were established to ensure that these most vulnerable sectors (children) are adequately protected (Philippines: DSWD to continue establishing functional child-friendly spaces in Zamboanga's evacuation centers, 2013).

While evacuation centers are an option of last resort, they are sometimes the only choice for the temporary protection and assistance to displaced populations forced to flee their homes due to natural disasters or conflict. In the NDRRMP 2011-2028, an evacuation center is considered a "temporary home for people," a place of safety for sources of livelihoods and important valuables to find refuge in times of trouble. One goal of NDRRMP is to "provide life preservation and meet the basic subsistence needs of affected populations based on the acceptable standards during or immediately after the disaster" (NDRRMP 2011-2028). One of the expected outcomes in this plan is that the evacuation centers or temporary shelters are adequately attended to.

In the DSWD (2013) article, teacher volunteers from different schools hold special classes in the evacuation centers.

According to Hadjirul, a kindergarten teacher, "*It is a big help to the children when they undergo activities that will lessen or make them forget the trauma they have experienced*" (DSWD, 2013; 5).

In another article DSWD (2013), couple-volunteers Joey and Lorna Eguia conducted storytelling and reading sessions for children in the evacuation centers managed by DSWD. They believed that through Story and Play Therapy Sessions, they would hasten the healing of children, inspire them more to read, and transform their lives.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has equipped child-friendly spaces with didactic materials, books, and toys in Belgrade. Psycho-social volunteers were sent to provide counseling, creative workshops, and a warm and accepting environment to relieve the evacuees of stress and tension. The volunteers made it possible for the children to enjoy their playtime and games, relate to each other, and get to know each other. The volunteers also asked the children to draw and do creative work. UNICEF continues to assist in helping children overcome crises with as few consequences as possible (Kovacevic, UNICEF, 2014).

Thus, looking into their experiences, people will know more about how they interpret and understand their world, especially during disasters (Greene and Hill, 2005). While a vast number of literature details the impact of a flood on children, very few have been published locally about children's experiences, feelings, and ideas in evacuation centers, specifically among six-to-eight-year-old children. There is undoubtedly a dearth of research asking children to depict their feelings and behaviors or evaluate their services.

The study aims to identify children's experiences, feelings, and expectations in evacuation centers. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What do six-to-eight-year-old children experience and feel in evacuation centers in the event of a flood?
2. What expectations do six-to-eight-year-old children have in response to these experiences in the evacuation centers?

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive study that uses a qualitative approach to describe

children's experiences, feelings, and recommendations in evacuation centers.

Barangay Tumana, Marikina City, served as the venue for this study. This place was chosen because of the frequency of disastrous floods during the event of a storm. Since this barangay is near the Marikina River, it is one of the flood-prone communities in Marikina City. When Marikina River's water level reaches 17 meters, alarm level 3 is declared, and evacuation is enforced (Flood level alert guide, 2013). Families affected by the flood seek shelter in H. Bautista Elementary School, a public school that serves as one of the evacuation centers located in Marikina City.

The study involved thirty (30) six-to-eight-year-old male and female children who are currently studying. They all live in Barangay Tumana, Marikina City, and their socio-economic status is along with the marginal sector. For individual interviews, a total of 30 respondents were interviewed. The children who were interviewed in this study were able to stay in the evacuation center within three months from the interview date.

The researcher prepared an interview guide for this research. The interview guide consists of three parts: The first part consists

of warm-up questions, which are meant to build rapport with the respondents. In the second part of the instrument, the respondents will be asked to draw what they have experienced in the evacuation center. The respondents will be encouraged to talk about what they have drawn. The third part consists of six open-ended questions that will produce the most crucial and significant part of the data. The questions were translated to Filipino so the children would easily understand and answer.

The researcher provided pencils, colored pens, and crayons, as well as blank, white, short bond paper for every child for the drawing procedure. A voice recorder was used to gather more accurate information. Before this was used, the researcher asked the parents' and the participants' permission.

Data gathering was composed of two (2) parts. The first part involved giving preliminary letters to the Barangay Chairman to ask permission to conduct the study. After the approval of the Barangay Chairman, parents and neighboring families were given letters defining the objectives of the study. A letter of permission was also included to allow the researcher to conduct interviews with their children. The respondents who took part were given complete information

about the research and were willing to be a part of the study. The thirty (30) respondents who usually sought shelter in H. Bautista Elementary School were randomly sourced in the barangay.

This study described direct measures of children's experiences and feelings in the evacuation center; hence interviews were used prominently. An interview was scheduled after the consent forms were given. The researcher asked each child questions that would create rapport. Afterward, each child was asked to draw their experiences during their stay in the evacuation center. The researcher gave children paper, crayons, and pencils and left them to draw by themselves.

After the task, the researcher sat at a level comfortable to the child and started speaking with the child using informal language. The child was invited to say something about their drawing following the cue of the Malchiodi that free drawings will yield visual data, but it is the verbal material that will provide the data for interpretation (Veale, 2005).

The researcher proceeded to interview each child individually by using the questions in the interview guide. The researcher was aware that children are susceptible to contextual suggestions,

particularly their interpretation of the researcher's expectations (Garbarino & Stott, 1992). Children are capable of providing reliable responses; thus, appropriate ways to phrase questions have been considered. From both practical and ethical considerations, the researcher's task is to ensure that the right questions are asked and that the research will be conducted in a manner that optimizes the opportunity for children's perspectives to be listened to and heard (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000). Open-ended questions were used to allow the children to answer in their own words.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences and Feelings of Six-to-Eight-Year-Old Children in the Evacuation Center

Reasons why six-to-eight-year-old children go to evacuation centers

As shown in Table 1, the responses of children were categorized into two: **Safety Reasons** and **Prevention of Bad Experiences**. More than half of the respondents go to evacuation centers when the typhoon approaches for safety reasons.

Table 1 *Children's Report on Reasons Why They Need to go to Evacuation Center during Typhoon*

Response Category	Age						Total No. of Responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Safety Reasons							
● So we will not be flooded	5	38	5	50	6	50	15
● So we will not die	-	-	2	20	4	33	6
● So we will not drown	2	15	3	30	-	-	5
● So we will not get wet in the rain	3	23	-	-	-	-	3
	2	15	-	-	-	-	2
● So we can evacuate	-	-	-	-	1	8	1
● So we will not be in danger	-	-	-	-	1	8	1
● When there is a typhoon							
Prevent Repeat of Bad Experiences							

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So what happened during Ondoy will not happen to us again 	1	8	-	-	-	-	1
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Ackerman (2004) stated that at this stage, children are able to determine what would happen when a situation arises or its cause and effect. It was seen that the children's responses on the reasons why they go to the evacuation centers validated NDRRMP 2011-2028's (2011) statement evacuation centers as the only choice for the temporary provision of protection and assistance to displaced populations in times of natural disaster. Mainly, this reason prompted the family to seek shelter in the evacuation center. The respondents were fully aware that their lives would be in danger when the water rises. They were responsive to the information that going to the evacuation center during the event of a flood would keep them safe from harm and prevent a repeat of bad experiences.

The result means that children understand that going to and staying in the evacuation center is for their safety, and they are capable of discerning that their place is not safe during a typhoon.

Environmental signs and emotional prompts that signal six-to-eight-year-old children when to go to the evacuation center

The children's responses were categorized as follows: environmental signs and social prompts. The **environmental signs** are the strong typhoon and continuous rain that signal the children to go to the evacuation center. **Social prompts** are signals from the people who motion the children to the evacuation center.

Table 2 Children's Report on Environmental Signs and Social Prompts that Tell When Children Go to the Evacuation Center

Response Category	Age						Total no. of responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Environmental Signs							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the rain is strong 	10	90.91	12	92.30	8	50	30

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the rain won't stop 	-	-	1	9.69	4	25	5
Social Prompts							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When mother says so 	1	9.09	-	-	1	6.25	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When it is announced in the television 	-	-	-	-	1	6.25	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the alarm rings 	-	-	-	-	1	6.25	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the Barangay Captain gives us the signal 	-	-	-	-	1	6.25	1

They are aware of their surroundings and their explanations as to why things happen and what they need to do in order for them to be out of danger. The answers of the six-to-eight-year-old respondents illustrate that they are aware of the necessary response or action in case they are informed of an impending storm or flood by the parents, media, or authorities. However, some of the children's responses corroborate the statement of Greene and Hill (2005) that children's views are simply learned and mimicked responses as they just followed their parents' actions. Although both parents and children's exposure to a disaster may be similar, children take cues from their parents about danger and safety. On the common

responses cited by the respondents, they go to the evacuation center when heavy rain or typhoon is observed and when the people around them prompt them to do so. This states that children are able to grasp the signs of when they should go to the evacuation center and how often they need to. Henceforth, children learned to observe and follow precautions for their protection.

Duration of children's stay in the evacuation center

The children's answers were primarily based on their recent experience brought forth by Typhoon Ruby. The children's responses were categorized into

two, namely quantitative and qualitative responses. In the **quantitative responses**, the children were able to give a certain number of days that tell the duration of their stay in the evacuation center. It is apparent that among six-to-eight-year-old respondents, the response *"three days"* garnered the highest percentage—50% among six-year-old respondents, 50% among seven-year-old children, and 40% among eight-year-old

children. Under the **qualitative responses** category, the children did not give the exact number of days. The responses *"if it is still raining"* and *"sometimes we stay for a long time, sometimes for a few days only"* received 10% each among the six-year-old respondents. The responses *"every time there is a storm"* and *"for many days"* received 10% each among the seven-year-old respondents.

Table 3 Children’s Report on Duration of Stay in the Evacuation Center

Response Category	Age						Total No. of Responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
<u>Quantitative Responses</u>							
● three days	5	50	5	50	4	40	14
● one day	2	20	1	10	2	20	5
● one or two days	1	10	1	10	3	30	5
● two days	-	-	1	10	1	10	2
<u>Qualitative Responses</u>							
● if it is still raining	1	10	-	-	-	-	1
● sometimes we stay for a long time, sometimes for a few days only	1	10	-	-	-	-	1
● when there is a typhoon	-	-	1	10	-	-	1
● many days	-	-	1	10	-	-	1

Typhoon Hagupit (locally known as Typhoon Ruby) hit the country last December 9, 2014. Before making landfall,

Typhoon Hagupit was foreseen as a super typhoon and may be perilous to the Philippines. As of 2 PM in Marikina City, at

least 547 families or 2,418 individuals from the flood-prone Barangays Tumana were in evacuation centers in preparation for the damage it might bring to their barangay. H. Bautista Elementary School, a public school in Barangay Tumana, was one of the shelters they sought refuge. Though the typhoon has weakened and did not bring heavy rains, the families in Barangay Tumana were prompted to go to the evacuation center. The families stayed there mostly for three days before they were assured that the typhoon had left the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR). Families stayed in the evacuation center for at least a day to a maximum of three days.

Among all the respondents, it is commendable to note that the eight-year-old respondents were able to give a definite duration of their stay in the evacuation center compared to the six- and seven-year-old respondents. Most of the six-year-old respondents gave responses that did not indicate a definite duration of their stay in the evacuation center.

Children's Experiences in the Evacuation Center

Table 4 shows the results of children's experiences in the evacuation center. Out of the children's responses, five

categories were generated. Most of the six-to-eight-year-old respondents shared their experiences with what they had seen, heard, felt, and smelled inside the evacuation center. The children also described the evacuation center in terms of space.

In the **bio-physical** category, the children described how they felt or what they were doing during their stay in the evacuation center. For the **family-related experiences category**, the responses were divided into the three sub-categories: Role of parents, mother-father relationship, and interrelationship. Under the role of parents, the children describe what their parents do while they are inside the evacuation center. The mother-father relationship describes how children observed their parents react to the circumstances inside the evacuation center. Under the sub-category interrelationship, the children described the relationship of neighbors.

The **social experiences** describe the activities or play experiences the children engaged in during their stay inside the evacuation center. The **rules imposed by the parents** category describe the rules that the children have to follow during their stay in the evacuation center.

Table 4 Children’s Report on their Experiences in the Evacuation Center

Response Category	Age						Total No. of Responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
<u>Environment</u>							
Sound							
• Noisy	5	10.87	6	13.64	5	13.15	16
• The people with food started to arrive	2	4.35	2	4.55	2	5.26	6
• many children are crying	1	2.17	1	2.27	-	-	2
<u>Sight</u>							
› crowded	4	8.70	4	9.09	3	7.89	11
› naughty children	1	2.17	1	2.27	-	-	2
› wet classrooms	2	4.35	-	-	-	-	2
› the children are fighting	-	-	1	2.27	-	-	1
› dirty classrooms	1	2.17	-	-	-	-	1
› many rats	-	-	1	2.27	-	-	1
<u>Feel</u>							
› cold	4	8.70	1	2.27	1	2.63	6
<u>Smell</u>							
› foul-smelling washrooms	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
<u>Space</u>							
› the space is too small	1	2.17	2	4.55	-	-	3
<u>Biophysical</u>							
› eating	2	4.35	4	9.09	1	2.63	7
› sleeping on the floor	4	8.70	-	-	2	5.26	6
› hungry	-	-	1	2.27	1	2.63	2
› watching television	1	2.17	1	2.27	-	-	2
› tired	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
<u>Family-related Experiences</u>							
Role of Parents	1	2.17	2	4.55	2	5.26	5

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› mothers are taking care of their children							
› lining-up for relief goods	1	2.17	1	2.27	2	5.26	4
› the mothers are cleaning	2	4.35	-	-	-	-	2
› the mothers and fathers are cooking	-	-	1	2.27	1	2.63	2
› fixing our things	1	2.17	-	-	-	-	1
<hr/>							
Mother-Father Relationship							
› mommy and daddy were not around	-	-	1	2.27	1	2.63	2
› parents are burdened by problems	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
› parents are fighting	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
Interrelationships							
› the mothers or neighbors are fighting with each other	-	-	1	2.27	2	5.26	3
› the mothers were sharing stories with one another	1	2.17	-	-	-	-	1
<hr/>							
<u>Social Activities</u>							
Presence of Playmates							
● playing	9	19.57	7	15.91	7	18.42	23
● writing on the blackboard	-	-	2	4.55	-	-	2
<hr/>							
● I am with my friends	1	2.17	-	-	-	-	1
Lack of Playmates							
● they do not let me play with them	-	-	-	-	2	5.26	2
› no playmates	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
<hr/>							
<u>Rules Imposed by Parents</u>							
› we are spanked when we are naughty	2	2.17	3	6.82	-	-	5
› we were told to go to sleep	-	-	-	-	1	2.63	1
› we are not allowed to go out	-	-	1	2.27	-	-	1
<hr/>							

From the interview, the children gave various and diverse responses. The children's detailed account of the things that happened

to them and the other people around them is made stronger by Lloyd-Smith and Tarr's (2012) statement that the children have

something to tell, which is only available through their voice. As Vygotsky described, children are social creatures. It is through social interaction that they learn and cultivate their ways of thinking and understanding based on the avenues that the society has given to them, and their mindset is fashioned by the culture where they live (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007; Holzman, 2008, as cited in Santrock, 2009).

The categories which appeared throughout the entire interview regarding children's experiences were described in the succeeding parts of this discussion. Their drawings supplemented every category that appeared among six-to-eight-year-old respondents.

I. Environment

In the theme Environment, the children recounted their experiences using their senses. The respondents experienced chaos or disorder when they were in the evacuation center due to the presence of many families in one classroom. Most children reported that the evacuation center was "noisy" because the classroom was crowded, and the children were playing inside. The children described the space where they stayed in the evacuation center as "*too*

small." This confirms the statement of Lozada (2013) in his article that, typically, 12 families or about 55 persons crowd in a 7 x 7-meter classroom. The presence of many families contributes to the noisy and crowded atmosphere. The respondents recounted that the evacuation center has foul-smelling comfort rooms, for the school has only one comfort room for every floor shared by many families during their stay in the evacuation center. Lack of sufficient water supply in comfort rooms was a significant factor for dirty and foul-smelling comfort rooms. The respondents also described that it felt cold inside the evacuation center. They reported that they had to wear jackets to feel warm.

a. Bio-physical Experience

In the category bio-physical experiences, the children reported what they were doing and what their bodies felt during their stay in the evacuation centers. Most of the respondents recounted that "*eating*" was what they and other families did to not feel hungry while in the

evacuation center; they were either eating the food they brought with them or the relief goods they received from donors. "*Sleeping on the floor*" was also one of the respondents' experiences. They recounted that all of them slept on the floors with boxes and blankets as their beds. Some respondents shared that they also "*watched television*" inside the evacuation center. The families were allowed to use the television owned by the school. The families in each room had to pay Php 350.00 a day to use the television. Watching television is a way for them to amuse themselves and distract them from the negative situations that are presently occurring.

Some of the respondents also narrated how their bodies felt during their stay in the evacuation center. Few of the respondents felt hungry. They detailed that they were not able to bring

food sufficient for their stay. Also, they had to line up for relief goods to fill their hungry stomachs.

It is also worthy to note that one eight-year-old respondent recalled that she was always "*tired*" every time they had to go to the evacuation center. The respondent's parents always asked her to take care of the younger siblings or go to the nearest store to buy food such as noodles and canned goods while their parents prepared their things for their stay in the evacuation center. The respondent felt that they were given more tasks to accomplish as the eldest among their younger siblings.

II. *Family-related Experiences*

A number of responses of the children were categorized as family-related experiences. These experiences were grouped as follows:

a. *Role of Parents*

Under this category, the respondents described

what the parents were doing inside the evacuation center. Mostly, parents were busy taking care of their children. Parents, most especially the mothers, stayed close to their children to ensure their safety and protection while in the evacuation center. Abnormal conditions during disasters have prompted some people to exploit the vulnerable sectors of society. The Gabriela Party List group, a non-government organization that upholds violence against women and children, cited rape and sexual cases in evacuation centers where many women and girls were victimized. In the crowded condition of evacuation centers, women and children become vulnerable to rape, trafficking, prostitution, and other forms of exploitation.

b. *Mother-Father Relationship*

Under this category, the children described how their parents felt and reacted to their circumstances. An

eight-year-old respondent mentioned that their parents were “burdened by problems” about their plight in the evacuation center as “*Their parents fought.*” The children’s statements regarding their parents’ reactions indicated that they were aware of the dilemmas their parents were undergoing.

Some respondents stated that their parents, primarily fathers, were not in the evacuation center because they had to go back to their house and look for their belongings. If both parents had to check on their house, they left their children behind under the care of the older siblings for safety.

c. *Interrelationship*

This category involves the relationship of neighbors with one another. “*The neighbors were arguing*” was the experience of some of the respondents. The children

narrated that neighbors argued because of the lack of space in the classroom. Arguments also break out when they line up for relief goods. Stress and anxiety are the normal reactions of people after a disastrous event. Congestion in the classrooms exacerbates anxiety and distress, leading to neighbors fighting with one another.

III. Social Activities

In this category, the respondents gave an account of their activities while they were in the evacuation center. "Playing" was the response that prevailed as the highest among all the six-to-eight-year-old respondents. Children played inside the evacuation center to fill in their time and entertain themselves. "Writing on the blackboard" for some respondents was one of their pastimes in the evacuation center. Being with friends is the experience as one six-year-old respondent mentioned, "I am with my friends." However, an eight-year-old male respondent shared, "I don't have any playmates." Although

many children were with him, he would rather play with his group of playmates than with other children. Two eight-year-old respondents recounted "they don't let me join them" in their play.

IV. Rules Imposed by Parents

Parents impose rules for their children to follow while inside the evacuation centers. Children understand that they need to abide by their parents' rules to not be chastised. "I get spanked when I disobey" was the common response of the respondents. They were disciplined if they were disobedient. Others mentioned that they were not allowed to play with other children; they were asked to stay with their siblings, sit down with their parents, or stay in their own space in the evacuation center.

Children's Feelings in the Evacuation Center

Table 5 shows the results on children's feelings in the evacuation center. The respondents gave numerous answers that tell of their feelings when they stayed in the evacuation center by looking at the table.

Table 5 Children’s Report on their Feelings in the Evacuation Center

Response Category	Age						Total No. of Responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Afraid							
Seen Events							
● flooded	2	8.69	1	4.35	-	-	3
● there is a storm	2	8.69	-	-	-	-	2
Unseen Events							
● the flood might rise	1	4.35	4	17.39	3	10.34	8
● we might die	3	13.04	2	8.68	1	3.45	6
● we might drown	2	8.69	3	13.04	1	3.45	6
● we won’t be able to return	-	-	-	-	2	6.89	2
Repeat of Bad Experience							
● our things are wet again	1	4.35	-	-	2	6.89	3
● we will leave our house	1	4.35	1	4.35	-	-	2
● our house will be stink	1	4.35	-	-	1	3.45	1
● “Ondoy” will happen again	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	1
● I feel hungry	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
● we will line up for relief goods	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
● my parents always tell me stories about what happened during Typhoon Ondoy	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	1
Separation Anxiety							
● my father is left at home	-	-	2	8.69	3	10.34	5
● our parents leave us with our older sister	2	8.69	-	-	1	3.45	3
● I am afraid that I won’t see my parents again	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	1
Happy							
Safety							
● we won’t be in danger anymore	-	-	1	4.35	1	3.45	1
Presence of Playmates							
● many playmates	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	1
Togetherness of Family							
● I am with my family	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
Sad							
Seen Events							
● It is flooded outside	1	4.35	1	4.35	2	6.89	4
● there is a typhoon	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
	-	-	1	4.35	-	-	1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no classes 							
Absence of Friends and Playmates	-	-	2	8.69	-	-	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no playmates I miss my friends I don't have friends 	1	4.35	-	-	1	3.45	2
	-	-	1	4.35	-	-	1
Family-related Issues							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> my mother is sad 	-	-	1	4.35	1	3.45	2
Repeat of Bad Experience							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> our things are wet again we always go to the school when there is a flood 	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	1
	-	-	1	4.35	-	-	1
Rules Imposed by Parents							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we were spanked when we are naughty we are not allowed to play 	1	4.35	-	-	1	3.45	2
	-	-	1	4.35	-	-	1
Pity							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel pity for my parents. I feel pity for the other children. 	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
Having a difficult time							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am always asked to do something. 	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
Frustrated							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discipline issues I always get scolded. 	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1
Bad Experience							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My hand is always stepped on when I sleep. 	-	-	1	4.35	-	-	1
Hungry							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The food that we brought was not enough. 	-	-	-	-	1	3.45	1

The table shows that seven (7) categories were generated from six-to-eight-year-old respondents' answers. From the varied responses of children, we can see that six-to-eight-year-old children start to display an increasing awareness of their own and others' emotions. This is also validated by

Ackermann (2004) when she stated that it is during these ages when children understand and empathize with others.

The categories derived from the respondents' answers are as follows:

I. Afraid

This category was grouped into four. The respondents felt that they were afraid because of seen events. **Seen events** are the tangible occurrences that children witnessed, either from their surroundings or on television. The events such as heavy rains and rising floods evoked the feeling of fear among the respondents. Aside from the seen events, the six-to-eight-year-old respondents were also afraid of unseen events. **Unseen events** are circumstances that the children imagined. A high percentage of the respondents' statements show that dying made them feel scared. They felt afraid because they thought they would not be able to go back to their houses, they might die, and the water would rise and eventually drown them. These thoughts, although unseen, bring fear into the minds of these respondents. Several respondents also felt afraid because they presumed that there would be a **repeat of bad experiences** that occurred during the typhoons. Bad experiences such as "*our house will stink*" and "*our things are wet*

again" also gave them fear. A six-year-old respondent narrated that she was afraid because her parents told her numerous times of their experiences during Typhoon Ketsana (Locally known as Typhoon Ondoy) in 2009, where the flood caused by the typhoon displaced thousands of families, causing billions of damages and many fatalities. Another six-year-old respondent shared that her parents kept telling her stories about the flood. The thoughts evoked by such stories produced fear in these respondents. They feared that the same events would happen once again. **Separation anxiety** was also one of the reasons the respondents felt afraid. The children's parents had to leave them behind and go back to check on their houses. They were left under the care of their older siblings. Mostly, the fathers had to stay at home and protect the house from theft. They were afraid that their fathers would not return to the evacuation center because of the flood.

II. Happy

Safety was the primary reason that made the children feel happy despite their evacuation center circumstances. The thought that they were out of harm's way of the storm and rising flood and inside the safety of the evacuation center brought them happiness. The **presence of playmates and friends** and the **togetherness of the family** were also the children's responses that gave them a sense of happiness. Their presence in the evacuation center alleviated their fears.

III. Sad

This category, caused by many factors, tells why the respondents were sad during their stay in the evacuation center.

"It is flooded outside" was the response that generated the highest score among the respondents. **Seen events** such as floods and storms induce the feeling of sadness among the six-to-eight-year-old respondents.

The **absence of playmates and friends** also evoked sadness among the respondents. *"I miss my friends,"* *"I don't have any*

playmates," and *"I don't have any friends"* were the answers that show how friends and playmates were important to them at this point. Though the children were in a roomful of other children, these were not their playmates. They would rather play with their group of friends and playmates. **Family-related experiences** also made most of the respondents feel sad. They were sad because they were aware of the emotions of their parents. The response *"mother is sad"* tells how sensitive their parents were feeling. They have an increased awareness of their feelings as well as others'.

A **repeat of bad experiences** was also the reason that made some of the respondents feel sad. The thought of their things becoming wet again and the hassle of going to the evacuation center evokes sadness among the six-to-eight-year-old respondents.

Several respondents narrated that they were sad because of the **rules that their parents imposed** while they were inside the evacuation

center. When rules were broken, they were either scolded or spanked.

IV. Pity

“I feel pity for mommy and daddy” and “I feel pity for the other children” were also the responses of the eight-year-old respondents. Children at this age are responsive to other people’s difficulties.

V. Having a difficult time

It was worthy to note that one eight-year-old respondent answered: “having a difficult time” when asked this question. She felt that she was having difficulty since she was the eldest among the siblings. Her mother asked her to go to the store to buy food and take care of younger siblings while her parents prepared what they needed for their stay in the evacuation center.

VI. Frustrated

“I feel frustrated because I was always scolded” was the

experience of one eight-year-old boy. One eight-year-old girl mentioned that she felt frustrated because her hand was always stepped on while sleeping. The pain she felt and her sleep disturbance made her feel frustrated.

VII. Hungry

An eight-year-old respondent shared his hunger experience while inside the evacuation center. This was because the food they brought was insufficient to sustain them for many days.

Children’s recommendations during their stay in the evacuation center

Table 6 shows the results of children’s recommendations in the evacuation center. In response to their experiences in the evacuation center, the children gave their recommendations to make their stay happy and comfortable the next time they need to go there and seek refuge during the event of a disastrous flood.

Table 6 Children’s Report on their Recommendations in the Evacuation Center

Response Category	Age						Total No. of Responses
	6 years old		7 years old		8 years old		
	F	%	f	%	F	%	

Material

● toys	6	23.07	7	36.84	5	23.81	18
● much food	2	7.69	2	10.52	6	28.57	10
● bed	3	11.54	2	10.52	-	-	5
● books	1	3.85	2	10.52	-	-	3
● TV	1	3.85	-	-	1	4.77	2
● curtain	-	-	1	5.26	-	-	1
● Mama Mary	-	-	-	-	1	4.77	1
<u>Social Relationships</u>							
● my family	7	26.92	2	10.52	4	19.05	13
● my friends and playmates	5	19.23	3	15.78	4	19.04	12
None	1	3.85	-	-	-	-	1

The following are the categories under children's recommendations in the evacuation center:

I. Material

Most respondents answered "toys" as their best recommendation to make their stay in the evacuation center happy. Most respondents mentioned that toys such as cars, trucks, and robots for boys; and dolls, parlor, and cooking sets for girls would alleviate their fear and bring them happiness. Children's request for toys to play with inside the evacuation is their means of coping

with the negative feelings brought about by the disaster. Books and television were some of the material things that the respondents mentioned that would make them happy.

Another response that garnered a high percentage was "much food." Families tend to go to evacuation centers unprepared or with little food. They are likely to line up in the distribution centers for some relief goods composed of rice, noodles, canned foods, and cooked food to be fed. The idea of having plenty of food to eat without them

lining up for relief goods would make them happy during their stay. "Bed" was also one of the respondents' answers that received a high score. According to an article written by Lozada (2013), evacuees transform the classroom into makeshift bedrooms with flattened boxes covered with blankets as their mats. A comfortable bed to sleep on is their recommendation for a happy stay in the evacuation center. The researcher also deemed it worthy of mentioning that one seven-year-old female respondent answered "*curtain*" as her recommendation since she was concerned with their family's privacy. Reports on rape cases are not uncommon in the evacuation areas where many women and girls were victimized (Umil, 2013). A curtain that would cover them and give them privacy while they were sleeping is her recommendation to make her happy and comfortable during her stay in the evacuation center.

II. *Social Relationships*

The response that generated the highest score is "*family*." As long as their family is with them, they

would feel happy no matter what circumstances or place they are in. Being with their circle of playmates and friends was their recommendation for a happy stay even during difficult times.

Some respondents prefer not to play with other children in the evacuation center. They would rather play with their group of friends or not at all. They would rather play alone or sit back and watch other children play without their friends.

Children's stay in the evacuation center enables them to produce ideas that lead them to make recommendations on making their stay comfortable and happier even during difficult times. Moreover, these recommendations would lessen the negative feelings that they will undergo and make them stay comfortable and happy next time they need to seek refuge in the evacuation center in the event of a disastrous flood.

CONCLUSION

Children's Experiences in the Evacuation Center

The six-to-eight-year respondents go and seek refuge in an evacuation center in times of a disastrous flood. They are fully aware that being in the evacuation center would save them from being flooded, from drowning, or worse, from dying.

The respondents are mindful that heavy rains or typhoons prompt them to go to the evacuation center. Though the general answers of the respondents were environmental signs such as “*when the rain is heavy*” and “*when there is a strong storm,*” some respondents were just responsive to the social prompts given by their parents, media, or the authorities

Families stayed in the evacuation center until they were assured that it was safe to go back to their homes. The six-to-eight-year-old respondents had given responses specifying the number of days to no exact number of days. The six-to-seven-year-old respondents were able to gauge the duration of their stay as dependent on when the rain stops or when the flood subsides. The eight-year-old respondents, who were more specific in the duration of their stay, responded “*three days.*”

Experiences of the six-to-eight-year-old respondents in the evacuation center were many and varied. The diverse responses were

categorized into five themes. Their responses were drawn from their experiences in the environment, bio-physical experiences, social activities, family-related experiences, and rules imposed by parents.

Children’s Feelings in the Evacuation Center

The feelings of the six-to-eight-year-old respondents were categorized into seven themes. While the respondents were in the evacuation center, the children felt afraid, happy, sad, pity, having a difficult time, frustrated and hungry. The many experiences evoked these feelings that they had gone through during their stay in the evacuation center.

Children’s Recommendations in the Evacuation Center

From the experiences of six-to-eight-year-old respondents, their recommendations for a happy stay in the evacuation center were based on material things, namely, toys, books, and television to fill their time, lots of food, a curtain for privacy, and a comfortable bed to sleep on. Social relationships such as their family, their group of playmates, and friends were other respondents' recommendations for a happy stay in the evacuation center. They believe that the

presence of these people would alleviate their fears while they stay in the evacuation center.

Parents should acknowledge and understand that their children's feelings are real and have to be addressed by the parents themselves. By understanding the results of this study, the parents can provide support to their children who experience difficulties during their stay in evacuation centers.

The insights obtained from this study can also be helpful to teachers and administrators who can include this study by embedding flood awareness and disaster preparedness in their curriculum, most especially in those places frequently ravaged by flood. Classroom activities can help children overcome their hardships during the disaster.

From the data acquired in this study, the health and social services sectors can propose programs for appropriate support, advice, and intervention to address children's negative feelings such as fear, sadness, difficulty, frustration, pity, and hunger during their stay in evacuation centers.

The garnered data are also helpful in making policies regarding Disaster Preparedness. The policy will hopefully include the youngest sector of society and consider children's feelings while in the evacuation center. The results garnered in this study can be used as a basis for program development for children zero-to-eight-years of age. Teachers and other volunteers who are aware of the results of this study can be more effective evacuation center volunteers during flood disasters.

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