

"Kalooyi an Kalag ni Pulano": Lived Experiences of Mamaratbat in Tacloban's Yolanda Death Commemorations

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of *mamaratbat* elderly women prayer leaders during the annual death anniversary commemorations of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in Tacloban City. Deeply rooted in Waray culture and Catholic tradition, the *mamaratbat* play a crucial spiritual and cultural role by leading prayers in Latin and *Waray-Waray* for the dead. Despite their central role in communal mourning and healing, their experiences have remained largely undocumented, particularly in the context of large-scale disaster remembrance. Employing a transcendental phenomenological research design, the study engaged ten elderly *mamaratbat* through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The research examined their spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical preparation; the challenges they encounter; their emotional reflections during Yolanda anniversaries; and their perceptions regarding the relevance and future of their tradition. Data were analyzed thematically and guided by theories of phenomenology, emotional labor, spiritual coping, cultural transmission, embodied cognition, and community resilience. Findings revealed that leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries reawakens painful memories of loss while simultaneously fostering shared grief, compassion, and deep spiritual connection with bereaved families. Despite physical fatigue, emotional heaviness, and social pressures, the *mamaratbat* continue to serve with faith, hope, and a strong sense of purpose. Their role extends beyond ritual performance, positioning them as cultural bearers, emotional anchors, and agents of communal healing. The study underscores the indispensable role of *mamaratbat* in sustaining cultural memory, spiritual resilience, and collective healing in post-disaster Tacloban City. It contributes to cultural studies, disaster research, and gendered perspectives on spiritual leadership, emphasizing the need for recognition, support, and intergenerational transmission of this sacred tradition.

Keywords: Mamaratbat, Lived Experiences, Death Anniversary, Rituals, Super Typhoon Yolanda, Cultural Resilience, Spiritual Leadership, Waray Culture, SDG

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, death anniversary traditions hold a deeply significant place in the cultural and spiritual life of communities. These meaningful rituals are ways for families and neighbors to honor and remember their departed loved ones. Such commemorations often involve communal prayers, gatherings, and rites that reflect a rich blend of indigenous beliefs and Christian influences particularly Catholicism which has profoundly shaped Filipino mourning practices (Cannell, 2013; Pertierra, 2018). In Tacloban City, these traditions reveal a unique harmony where ancestral customs meet religious liturgies, often expressed through local dialects and traditional prayers. Practices such as *pa-siyam* (nine-day prayers), *pa-kwarenta* (forty-day prayers), and *anibersaryo* (death anniversaries) are integral to the cycle of mourning, and it is within this cultural fabric that the *mamaratbat* are commissioned to lead these sacred rites. These customs not only foster spiritual connection with the deceased but also reinforce social bonds, emphasizing the collective responsibility of the community to remember and pray for departed souls (Santos, 2020). At the heart of these death anniversary rites are the *mamaratbat* or *purupangadi* elderly women respected for their role as spiritual guides and cultural custodians. They are the entrusted leaders of prayers during death anniversaries, often commissioned by bereaved families to ensure that sacred rituals are properly conducted. These women carry the legacy of prayers recited in Latin or Waray-Waray, preserving a living heritage that has been passed down through generations (Delgado, 2021). Their presence is more than ritualistic; it embodies faith, cultural identity, and community cohesion. As such, the *mamaratbat* hold a vital place in maintaining this deeply rooted tradition, serving as a bridge between the past and present.

The devastation wrought by Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in November 2013 exactly 12 years ago dramatically reshaped the cultural landscape of Tacloban City. As one of the strongest typhoons ever recorded in the world history, Yolanda caused widespread destruction and claimed over 6,000 lives in the region (NDRRMC, 2014). The scale of loss left a profound social and emotional impact on survivors, compelling the community to heighten the importance of death anniversary commemorations for Yolanda victims. These commemorations have since become essential communal rituals for mourning, healing, and remembrance. However, with more than 6,000 recorded deaths, the demand for *mamaratbat* to lead prayers on this particular day far exceeds their numbers, making their role physically and emotionally exhausting. Despite these challenges, their prayers remain central to the collective effort to honor those lost and nurture resilience in

the face of tragedy (Ortega, 2017). Recognizing the importance of this solemn occasion, Tacloban City institutionalized the commemoration of the Yolanda anniversary through local laws and official declarations. Since 2014, the date of the typhoon's landfall has been declared a local holiday, prompting twelve consecutive years of remembrance ceremonies. These observances include religious activities and cultural programs that reinforce community solidarity and collective healing (Tacloban City Ordinance No. 45, 2014). In these ceremonies, the *mamaratbat* play an indispensable role, leading prayers that serve as spiritual intercessions and symbols of cultural continuity and communal strength. Their presence helps bind the community together in shared grief and hope. Despite the crucial role of *mamaratbat*, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly research focusing on their lived experiences, especially in the context of Yolanda death anniversaries. Most existing literature overlooks how these elder women many of whom are already advanced in age and physically vulnerable prepare spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically for the demands of their sacred duties. On the day of the commemoration, they are expected to cater to the prayer needs of thousands of grieving families, which can be physically exhausting and emotionally overwhelming. Given their age and frailty, their continued commitment to serve despite personal limitations is both admirable and deeply moving. Furthermore, little is known about the personal challenges they face while fulfilling their roles or their emotional reflections during such deeply meaningful events. Their perspectives on the relevance and future of this tradition, especially amid changing generational attitudes, remain largely unexplored (Delgado, 2021; Santos, 2020). This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of *mamaratbat* as they lead prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries in Tacloban City. It seeks to understand the holistic preparation these women undergo spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically and to identify the challenges they encounter in fulfilling their roles. Beyond this, the study will capture their emotional reflections during the commemorations, investigate their views as "*suki*" (regularly commissioned prayer leaders), and examine their perceptions on the tradition's relevance and sustainability among younger generations. Guided by these aims, the study will explore six key questions: the lived experiences of *mamaratbat* leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries; their spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical preparations; the personal challenges they face; their emotional reflections during commemorations; their perceptions as "*suki*" prayer leaders; and their views on the tradition's relevance and future among younger generations.

Knotting altogether, the significance of this research is diverse. It contributes to Filipino cultural studies by documenting the voices of an often-overlooked group of elder women spiritual leaders. It also enriches disaster studies by illuminating how cultural mourning practices support community resilience and healing after Yolanda. Moreover, the study offers valuable insights for cultural preservation, promotes intergenerational dialogue, and recognizes the spiritual contributions of elder community members. In doing so, it lays a foundation for future qualitative studies on indigenous prayer practices and women's spiritual leadership in the Philippines. This study is anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). It emphasizes the moral responsibility of leaders and communities to challenge gender-based violence, advocate for women's leadership, and uphold the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals regardless of background, thereby addressing social inequalities. At the same time, the study highlights the pursuit of peace, justice, and strong governance through collective reflection and prayer, recognizing the vital role of fair institutions and the reduction of violence and injustice in fostering inclusive, peaceful, and just societies. In conclusion, this study is timely and relevant, preserving and honoring a vital cultural practice that embodies resilience, spirituality, and identity in Tacloban and beyond. By illuminating the experiences of *mamaratbat*, this research enriches cultural and historical understanding and fosters appreciation for enduring traditions that shape Filipino communal life and collective memory. Most importantly, through this study, their struggles, voices, and lived experiences will be heard offering a profound understanding of their essential role as *mamaratbat* during Yolanda death anniversary commemorations and beyond.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research Methodology

This study explored the lived experiences of *mamaratbat* elderly women who lead traditional prayers during the annual death anniversaries commemorating the victims of Super Typhoon Yolanda in Tacloban City. The goal was to capture their lived experiences, understand their spiritual and emotional preparations, and document the meanings they attach to their roles in preserving this sacred tradition.

2.2 Research Design

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological design, grounded in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, which seeks to explore and describe the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have undergone a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, bracketing or *epoché* was employed to suspend the researcher's preconceived notions and personal biases, allowing the participants' voices to emerge more authentically. This approach was appropriate for understanding the deeply reflective and spiritual experiences of *mamaratbat* during Yolanda death anniversaries, where cultural, religious, and emotional dimensions intertwine in meaningful ways.

2.3 Research Locale

The research was conducted in Tacloban City, a highly urbanized capital of Region VIII (Eastern Visayas), which was severely devastated by Super Typhoon Yolanda in November 2013. With more than 2,000 confirmed deaths (NDRRMC, 2014), Tacloban has become a focal point for annual death anniversaries and spiritual reflections, particularly among local communities who engage in traditional forms of prayer led by *mamaratbat*.

2.4 Respondents and Sampling Technique

The main instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide composed of demographic questions based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria, and core questions derived from the research questions. This format ensured consistency across interviews while also allowing flexibility to pursue relevant follow-up questions, ensuring depth and authenticity in participant responses (Kallio et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted in Waray-Waray or Filipino, depending on participant preference.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the research. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using codes instead of real names and by securely storing all data. The study also ensured respect for participants' emotional well-being, particularly given the sensitive nature of disaster-related memories, and interviews were conducted with care and empathy.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences of Mamaratbat as they Lead Prayers During Yolanda Death Anniversaries in Tacloban City

This study revealed three major themes that explain the lived experiences of the *mamaratbat* during Yolanda death anniversaries. The first theme, *Pait nga Panumduman* (Painful Memories Reawakened), shows how prayer brings back deep feelings of loss and trauma. The second theme, *Ginsasaro nga Kasubo* (Shared Grief as a Spiritual Connection), highlights how praying together allows grief to be shared and understood within the community. The third theme, *Pagserbi nga May Paglaum* (Service Anchored in Hope and Faith), reflects how the *mamaratbat* continue to serve through prayer, guided by faith and hope despite emotional pain.

Theme 1: Pait nga Panumduman (Painful Memories Reawakened)

Mamaratbat describe the prayer sessions during Yolanda death anniversaries as emotionally intense and spiritually heavy. Many still carry the grief of the tragedy themselves. According to Participant 1, “Bisan yana, kun nag-aampo ako para ha mga namatay han Yolanda, nababalik an sakit. Naabat ako hin kabug-at han akon dughan.” (Even now, when I pray for those who died during Yolanda, the pain returns. I feel a heaviness in my heart.) In addition, according to Participant 7, “Ha kada pag-ampo, бага hin ginbubuksan liwat an akon kasingkasing. Nababatan ko la gihapon an kasakit han pagkawara ngan an kahadlok nga diri gud nawawara.” (In every prayer, it feels as though my heart is opened again. I still feel the pain of loss and the fear that never truly goes away.) Simply put, participants shared that each prayer rekindles memories not only of the departed but also of the trauma of survival. This emotional burden becomes part of their offering. The theme highlights how leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries is not only a sacred responsibility but also an emotionally challenging task for the *mamaratbat*. Their accounts show that while guiding the community in remembering the departed, they often relive their own pain. This experience reflects Waray mourning practices, where rituals closely connect memory, faith, and emotional expression, making prayer gatherings spaces of deep spiritual and emotional intensity (Javellana, 2004; Buenaventura, 2018). Studies on post-disaster rituals support this, showing that such commemorations help communities process trauma, yet they can also bring back painful memories of loss and survival (Eyerman, 2015; Gaillard & Texier, 2010; Dela Cruz & Mendoza, 2016). In line with the Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), the *mamaratbat* manage their private grief while maintaining composure and respect during public prayers. Similarly, the Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997) helps explain how enduring this emotional burden becomes meaningful, as their pain is transformed into an act of faith. Moreover, the persistence of these painful memories reflects the ongoing collective trauma experienced by Yolanda survivors (Tan et al., 2015; Ortega & Santos, 2017). This shows that remembrance is not just looking back, but an active emotional process. For the *mamaratbat*, leading prayer is therefore both a way of serving the community and a continual encounter with loss one that preserves cultural memory, honors those who passed, and demonstrates resilience.

Theme 2 Ginsasaro nga Kasubo (Shared Grief as a Spiritual Connection)

The *mamaratbat* felt that their role deepens their bond with the grieving families and the community. They do not only lead prayers they carry collective sorrow and offer comfort. Participant 10 highlighted, “Diri la ini trabaho, kundi usa nga paagi para makig-usa han kasakit han iba. Naabat ko an ira kasubo.” (This is not just a task; it is a way to share in the sorrow of others. I feel their grief.) Similarly, Participant 4 shared, “Kun nag-aampo ako, nababalik an akon kaluoy ngan kasakit, labi

na kun nakikita ko an pag-araba han pamilya.” (When I pray, my own compassion and pain come back, especially when I see the family weeping.) Many mamaratbat recounted that families often weep with them, hold their hands, and express deep gratitude after the prayers. Some participants said they are embraced by family members as if they were also part of the loss. The accounts of the mamaratbat in this study illustrate how shared grief strengthens their spiritual connection with grieving families and the broader community. As Participant 10 expressed, leading prayers is not merely a task but a way to feel and share the sorrow of others, a sentiment echoed by Participant 4, who described how personal compassion and pain resurface when witnessing the families’ grief. These experiences align with Waray death and mourning practices, where rituals such as novenas, pangangadi, and pamisa transform homes and chapels into spaces of communal solace and spiritual presence (Javellana, 2004; Buenaventura, 2018; Gorospe, 2010). Moreover, research on post-disaster commemorative rituals shows that such gatherings not only help process trauma but also reinforce social bonds and collective identity (Eyerman, 2015; Gaillard & Texier, 2010; Dela Cruz & Mendoza, 2016). The findings also support Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), demonstrating how mamaratbat manage their private grief while maintaining composure to comfort others, and Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), which highlights how enduring emotional burdens becomes meaningful when framed as an act of faith. In addition, the mamaratbat embody cultural transmission, passing down prayer traditions in Latin and Waray-Waray to sustain communal memory and cultural identity (Mead, 1930s–1970s). In this way, their role is both emotionally demanding and spiritually significant, showing that shared grief is not only a source of empathy but also a channel for resilience, cultural continuity, and the reaffirmation of faith, confirming the critical contributions of women in post-disaster healing and spiritual leadership (Estrella, 2020; Alejo, 2016; Roces, 2012).

Theme 3: Pagserbi nga May Paglaum (Service Anchored in Hope and Faith)

Despite the sadness, the mamaratbat emphasized that leading prayers during Yolanda anniversaries is also a source of spiritual fulfillment and purpose. Over time, this role has deepened their faith and their sense of mission. As mentioned by Participant 2, “Naglalaum ako nga pinaagi han akon pag-ampo, bisan pa guti, mabuligan ko hira han ira gin-aabat na mga kasakit.” (I hope that through my prayers, even just a little, I can help them recover from their sorrow.) Likewise, Participant 7 shared, “Bisan ako mismo nasasakitan, pero kun nakikita ko an pagtuok han pamilya, nababatian ko an ira kasubo, iba gud an akon kaluoy ha ira.” (Even though I feel pain myself, when I see the family crying, I feel their sorrow and I place my compassion upon them.) In the interview, several noted that the experience has evolved. At first, it was marked by confusion and immense sorrow, but now it is also about remembrance, resilience, and helping the living move forward. The stories of the mamaratbat leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries reveal a powerful blend of grief, faith, and meaningful service, showing how emotional effort, cultural care, and spiritual strength come together in the aftermath of disaster. As Participants 2 and 7 shared, even while carrying their own sorrow, their prayers offer comfort and hope to grieving families, illustrating the delicate balance between personal burden and fulfillment described by Hochschild’s Emotional Labor Theory (1983). This resonates with local studies highlighting that Waray rituals, especially when led by elder women, provide both spiritual comfort and a sense of community resilience (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017). By performing embodied acts like chanting, kneeling, and gesturing, the mamaratbat bring Lakoff and Johnson’s Embodied Cognition Theory (1980s–1990s) to life, where body and mind work together to deepen focus and spiritual connection. At the same time, their dedication to preserving Waray-Waray prayers and ritual sequences reflects Mead’s Cultural Transmission Theory (1930s–1970s), ensuring that younger generations can carry these traditions forward despite changing times (De Mesa, 2010; Medina, 2001). Through Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), these practices help them turn personal grief into meaningful service, reinforcing faith and social bonds. Ultimately, their experiences remind those leading prayers is far more than a ritual duty it is a heartfelt calling that nurtures hope, strengthens communities, and gives life and warmth to the act of mourning, proving that healing after disaster is as much spiritual and emotional as it is material. In conclusion, the lived experiences of the mamaratbat during Yolanda death anniversaries reveal that leading prayers is a deeply human endeavor, intertwining sorrow, compassion, and faith into a meaningful act of service. Across the three themes Pait nga Panumduman, Ginsasaro nga Kasubo, and Pagserbi nga May Paglaum these women navigate their own grief while providing comfort, sharing communal pain, and offering hope to bereaved families. Their stories show that prayer is not only a spiritual obligation but also a channel for emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), embodied practice (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s), cultural transmission (Mead, 1930s–1970s), and spiritual coping (Pargament, 1997). By guiding families through remembrance, fostering resilience, and sustaining Waray ritual traditions, the mamaratbat transform personal and collective loss into enduring strength, demonstrating that post-disaster healing is lived, felt, and shared. Their dedication exemplifies how faith, culture, and human connection converge, offering both the bereaved and themselves a path toward hope, continuity, and communal restoration (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017; Buenaventura, 2018).

3.2 Mamaratbat Preparations` for the Death Anniversary Prayers for the Commemoration of the Yolanda Anniversary

The mamaratbat of Tacloban City engage in a deeply reflective, multi-dimensional process of preparation before leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries. Their readiness extends across four key areas: spiritual preparation, emotional preparation, mental preparation, and physical preparation. From these emerged eight distinct themes: (1) Pagpangandam Pinaagi han Pag-ampo (Spiritual Grounding Through Prayer), (2) Paglimpyo han Kalag (Inner Purification Before Service),

(3) Ginbabalik an Kasakit (The Pain Returns Anew), (4) Pag-antos han Balatian, Pero Padayon (Enduring Emotions to Continue the Duty), (5) Pag-andam han Hunahuna (Mental Readiness Through Focused Rehearsal), (6) Pagpugong han Kabaraka (Containing the Anxiety of Responsibility), (7) Pag-andam han Lawas ngan Gamit (Preparing the Body and Materials), and (8) Kapoy pero Ginkakaya (Fatigue That Must Be Endured). These themes reflect the layered and holistic nature of how mamaratbat ready themselves spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically to fulfill their sacred role.

3.2.1 Spiritual Preparation

Theme 1: Pagpangandam Pinaagi han Pag-ampo (Spiritual Grounding Through Prayer)

Before attending the prayer rituals, mamaratbat often seek divine guidance through novenas, rosaries, or moments of silence. They describe this practice as a vital source of strength and clarity. As Participant 3 said, “Nag-aampo ako hin Rosario antes kumadto ha balay han namatyan, para humangyo hin kusog ngan giya ha Ginoo.” (I pray the Rosary before going to the home of the departed, asking God for strength and guidance.) Also, Participant 6 added, “Naglilinuho ako ha harani han altar kay diri ko kaya kun waray an presensya han Ginoo.” (I kneel near the altar because I cannot do it without the Lord’s presence.) This spiritual readiness becomes a private ritual itself, ensuring they are aligned with their role. This aligns with Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), which states that prayer and personal devotion help individuals endure emotionally challenging tasks. Literature also emphasizes that spiritual leaders in post-disaster communities rely on inner reflection to fulfill roles of comfort and guidance (Estrella, 2020; Buenaventura, 2018). These practices show the mamaratbat’s reliance on their faith not just during the ceremony but in their personal preparation for it.

Theme 2: Paglimpyo han Kalag (Inner Purification Before Service)

Several participants described the importance of avoiding conflict or sin on the day of prayer. They believe their effectiveness is rooted in purity of heart and intention. Participant 7 shared, “Diri ako nagbubuhay hin sayop hito nga adlaw, diri ako nakikipag-away, para limpyo an akon kalag samtang nag-aampo.” (I avoid doing wrong that day, I avoid conflicts, so that my soul is clean when I pray.) Also, Participant 1 added, “Nag-aayuno ako ha aga, para magin limpyo an akon lawas ngan kalag.” (I fast in the morning to cleanse my body and soul.) These acts are not just symbolic but are viewed as prerequisites for prayer leadership. The emphasis on inner purity reflects the Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), where individuals prepare internally to fulfill an emotionally demanding task. It also relates to the Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–70s), showing how ritual purity is a value passed through generations. These self-regulations demonstrate how the mamaratbat integrate spiritual discipline into their leadership.

3.2.2 Emotional Preparation

Theme 3: Ginbabalik an Kasakit (The Pain Returns Anew)

As they prepare emotionally, mamaratbat acknowledge that the grief of Yolanda is never truly gone. The rituals reopen wounds. Participant 9 said, “Ginpapahinomdom liwat ha akon han Yolanda... usahay naghihingatuok ako ako samtang nag-aampo, epupugnan ko la.” (It reminds me again of Yolanda... sometimes I hold back tears while praying.) Meanwhile, Participant 5 also shared, “Ginbabalik han kada ngaran han kalag nga ginbabasa ko an ira presensya ha akon huna-huna.” (Each name read brings their presence back to my thoughts.) These emotional preparations are sobering and necessary to hold space for communal grief. This experience is best understood through Community Resilience Theory and Emotional Labor Theory, which frame the act of emotionally bearing witness as both community service and personal sacrifice (Norris et al., 2008; Hochschild, 1983). Literature confirms that remembrance rituals in Tacloban are emotionally intense, requiring leaders to be vessels of sorrow and relief (Gonzales, 2017; Reyes & Lizada, 2019).

Theme 4: Pag-antos han Balatian, Pero Padayon (Enduring Emotions to Continue the Duty)

Despite the overwhelming emotion, mamaratbat persist in their duty. Participant 10 admitted, “Nagpapadayon la ako, bisan masakit. Tungod ini han pagtoo ngan respeto ha mga kalag.” (I continue even when it hurts. It’s because of faith and respect for the souls.) Also, Participant 4 added, “An ira kasakit, akon liwat kasakit. Pero kinahanglan magpadayon.” (Their pain is also my pain. But I must continue.) This tenacity reflects not just resilience, but devotion. This echoes Spiritual Coping Theory and Community Resilience Theory, which assert that persistence in faith-based duties becomes a form of healing and solidarity (Pargament, 1997; Norris et al., 2008). The literature supports this, noting how mamaratbat transform personal pain into collective strength (Alejo, 2016; Estrella, 2020).

3.2.3 Mental Preparation

Theme 5: Pag-andam han Hunahuna (Mental Readiness Through Focused Rehearsal)

Mental focus is critical. Mamaratbat mentally rehearse sequences and language, especially Latin prayers. Participant 3 shared, “Ginbabalik ko ha akon huna-huna an sunod han pag-ampo. Gintututdo ko liwat an Latin basi diri ako mabaraka.” (I run through the prayer order in my mind. I also review the Latin so I don’t get anxious.) Meanwhile, Participant 6 added, “Danay nagsusurat ako han script ha papel, barasahon, para may kopya ako kun kinahanglan.” (Sometimes I write the script down on paper so I’ll have a copy if needed.) This preparation minimizes errors and builds confidence. This reflects Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), which suggests that mental and physical rehearsal strengthens cognitive and emotional readiness. It also supports literature on ritual leaders maintaining memory and tradition through discipline and repetition (Cannell, 1999; Buenaventura, 2018).

Theme 6: Pagpugong han Kabaraka (Containing the Anxiety of Responsibility)

Participants acknowledged anxiety before ceremonies. They center themselves through silent prayer. Participant 8 stated, “Usahay nababaraka ako, pero ginpapahinundom ko an akon kalugaringon ha pag-ampo la anay hin hilom.” (Sometimes I get anxious, but I calm myself through silent prayer first.) Participant 5 added, “Ginlalakip ko ha akon pag-ampo nga mahimaya an Ginoo bisan kon may kahadlok ako.” (I include in my prayer the hope that God is glorified even when I am afraid.) These reveal their quiet strategies to stay composed. Using Emotional Labor Theory and Spiritual Coping Theory, these acts are seen as self-regulation techniques that enhance ritual performance while managing internal fears. Scholars have long noted how prayer leaders manage public expectations through spiritual centering (Roces, 2012; Pargament, 1997).

3.2.3 Physical Preparation*Theme 7: Pag-andam han Lawas ngan Gamit (Preparing the Body and Materials)*

Practical preparations are essential. Mamaratbat wake up early and ensure all ritual items are ready. Participant 2 said, “Gin-andam ko an kandila, rosaryo, ngan libro. Mayda liwat panyo kay kabaraka ko nga maturo it akon luha.” (I prepare the candles, rosary, and book. I also bring a handkerchief in case tears fall.) Participant 9 added, “Namata ako temprano para diri ako ma-late, labi na kun ha hirayo nga barangay.” (I wake up early so I won’t be late, especially if it’s a far barangay.) These acts show the embodied dimension of service. This is explained by Embodied Cognition Theory, emphasizing that spiritual preparation is not just mental or emotional but also physical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Literature supports that the sensory and material aspects of prayer enhance ritual gravity and mindfulness (Gorospe, 2010; Buenaventura, 2018).

Theme 8: Kapoy pero Ginkakaya (Fatigue That Must Be Endured)

Finally, some spoke of enduring physical exhaustion. Participant 7 noted, “Bisan masakit na an tuhod, nagpapadayon ako. Importante nga mapadayon an pag-ampo.” (Even if my knees hurt, I continue. What matters is that the prayer goes on.) Participant 10 added, “Basta nakabulig na ako ha pamilya, ok na bisan makapoy.” (As long as I can comfort the family, it’s okay even if I’m tired.) This shows their body as a site of spiritual offering. This theme fits with Community Resilience Theory and Embodied Cognition Theory, where physical acts are seen as expressions of devotion, commitment, and cultural continuity. The *mamaratbat* embody faith through effort, supporting findings by Gonzales (2017) and Estrella (2020).

Overall, the preparation of *mamaratbat* for Yolanda death anniversary prayers is holistic, encompassing spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical dimensions. These preparations reflect profound emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), spiritual coping (Pargament, 1997), ritual embodiment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), and cultural preservation (Mead, 1970s). As revealed in literature, their readiness is not passive it is an active commitment to sacred duty, a form of spiritual resistance, and a continuation of Waray death rituals that provide healing for both the living and the dead (Buenaventura, 2018; Estrella, 2020). Their multi-layered efforts reveal that prayer leadership is not simply a tradition; it is a demanding vocation that integrates memory, grief, resilience, and sacred service ensuring that even in suffering, the spiritual voice of the community continues.

3.3 Personal Challenges Encountered While Leading the Prayers for the Departed on the Day of Yolanda Anniversary

This section presents the personal challenges experienced by *mamaratbat* while leading prayers for the departed during Yolanda death anniversaries. Four key themes emerged from their narratives. First, *Kapoy nga Lawas, Pero May Kusog ha Pagtoo* (Tired Body, But Strength from Faith) highlights the physical fatigue, aches, and voice strain endured, yet sustained by devotion. Second, *Mabug-at han Emosyon* (Heavy Emotion) reflects the deep grief and spiritual heaviness they carry, sometimes resulting in tears and emotional exhaustion. Third, *Ginsusulayan han Katawhan* (Tested by People’s Doubts and Demands) captures the social pressures, criticism, and interruptions they face while fulfilling their sacred duties. Finally, *Pagbaton han mga Hagit han Kalibungan* (Enduring Environmental Challenges) shows the logistical and environmental obstacles, such as extreme weather, noise, and long distances, that *mamaratbat* overcome to continue their mission. Together, these themes illustrate how the *mamaratbat* balance physical, emotional, social, and environmental hardships with faith and commitment to their role.

Theme 1: Kapoy nga Lawas, Pero May Kusog ha Pagtoo (Tired Body, But Strength from Faith)

Most *mamaratbat*, being elderly, experience physical fatigue, body aches, voice strain, and exhaustion due to multiple prayer requests and long hours of standing or walking. Despite the toll, they press on out of duty and devotion. During the interview, participant 7 said, “Masakit na it ak tuhod ngan abaga, labi na kun damo an gin-aampohan. Pero kinahanglan gud magpadayon.” (My knees and shoulders already hurt, especially when I pray for many. But I have to continue.) Moreover, participant 9 confirmed that, “Usahay nauubos an akon tingog tungod han kadamo han mga kalag nga ginsasampit.” (Sometimes I lose my voice because of the number of souls I call upon.) The findings reveal that despite physical fatigue, body aches, and voice strain, the *mamaratbat* continue to lead prayers with unwavering devotion, reflecting the interplay of faith, duty, and resilience. Their experiences resonate with the literature on Waray mourning

practices, where elderly women serve as central spiritual figures, guiding communities through grief and preserving cultural continuity (Javellana, 2004; Buenaventura, 2018; Gorospe, 2010). This endurance aligns with Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), which explains how mamaratbat regulate personal discomfort to fulfill communal expectations, and with Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s), highlighting how physical exertion is intertwined with spiritual focus and ritual efficacy. Moreover, their commitment exemplifies Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), demonstrating that faith acts as a source of strength in navigating both personal and collective trauma, particularly in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Lagmay et al., 2015; Dela Cruz & Mendoza, 2016). These findings underscore that the mamaratbat's physical sacrifices are not mere endurance but active participation in cultural preservation, spiritual mediation, and communal healing, humanizing their role as resilient custodians of tradition who transform pain into purposeful service.

Theme 2: Mabug-at han Emosyon (Heavy Emotion)

Emotionally, many mamaratbat feel grief, sorrow, and spiritual heaviness when recalling the Yolanda tragedy. Some admit crying during prayers or feeling spiritually drained after the ceremony. In the narratives, participant 2 said that, “Damo nga higayon nga nanluluha ako samtang nag-aampo, kay ginbabalik ha akon an kahadlok ngan kabido.” (Many times, I cry while praying, because the fear and sadness return to me.) Meanwhile, participant 8 confirmed that “Parang nauubos ako pagkatapos. Bug-at gud an akon aabatan.” (It feels like my spirit is drained afterwards. My feelings are really heavy.) The narratives of the mamaratbat reveal that leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries is not only a ritual duty but also a profound emotional journey, where grief, sorrow, and spiritual heaviness intertwine with their sense of responsibility. As Participant 2 shared, crying while praying brought back fear and sadness, while Participant 8 expressed feeling drained and burdened by the experience. This aligns with Hochschild's (1983) Emotional Labor Theory, which explains how individuals manage personal emotions to meet the emotional demands of a role, highlighting the unseen emotional toll of ritual leadership. The findings also resonate with local studies emphasizing the centrality of elderly women in Waray death practices (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017), where mamaratbat act as cultural and spiritual anchors, preserving the pangangadi and pamisa traditions while supporting grieving families. From the perspective of Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s) and Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), their actions serve both as a conduit for intergenerational knowledge and as a source of resilience, enabling them and the community to find meaning amidst loss. Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s) further explains how their physical enactment of prayer rituals chanting, gestures, and bodily presence reinforces emotional processing and spiritual connection. In synthesis, the mamaratbat's lived experiences reflect a dynamic interplay of emotion, culture, and spirituality, where heavy emotions are both a burden and a sacred pathway for communal healing, affirming that grief, memory, and ritual are inseparable in the post-Yolanda Waray context.

Theme 3: Ginsusulayan han Katawhan (Tested by People's Doubts and Demands)

Some mamaratbat have faced criticism, questions, or interruptions from individuals who doubt the authenticity of their prayers or who impose unrealistic expectations. Participant 6 said that “Mayda la iba nga diri tinuod an pagrespeto nag-aaligutgot o nagpapakiana kun sayop an akon ginsisiring.” (Some people don't really show respect they criticize or question if what I'm saying is wrong.) Also, participant 4 noted that “May mga higayon nga ginsisingabot pa kami bisan kapoy intalon, biskan diri man sadang pagdagmiton an pag-ampo.” (Sometimes we're rushed when we're tired, even though prayers shouldn't be hurried.) The experiences of the mamaratbat, as reflected in the accounts of facing criticism and unrealistic expectations, reveal the multifaceted challenges inherent in their sacred roles during Yolanda death anniversaries. While their leadership is anchored in deep cultural knowledge and spiritual authority, they must navigate the tension between community expectations and the emotional labor of guiding prayers under scrutiny (Hochschild, 1983; Estrella, 2020). The criticisms and interruptions described by participants underscore the social pressures placed upon these women, yet their persistence demonstrates resilience and commitment to cultural continuity, aligning with Mead's Cultural Transmission Theory, which emphasizes the preservation of traditions across generations. Moreover, their ability to maintain composure and spiritually guide mourning families illustrates the application of Pargament's Spiritual Coping Theory, as they transform personal and communal grief into acts of hope and connection. Embodied practices chanting, gesturing, and performing ritual sequences further reflect the principles of Embodied Cognition Theory, showing how physical enactment strengthens mental focus and spiritual engagement (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In harmony with local studies (Gonzales, 2017; Abad, 2018) and international findings on women's leadership in post-disaster rituals (Singh & Patel, 2019; Johnson, 2020), these narratives affirm that despite societal doubts and pressures, mamaratbat continue to serve as vital custodians of memory, faith, and communal resilience, humanizing the process of mourning while upholding Waray cultural and spiritual identity.

Theme 4: Pagbaton han mga Hagit han Kalibungan (Enduring Environmental Challenges)

The mamaratbat also face logistical difficulties such as extreme heat, heavy rain, noise, and long distances to prayer locations, often with little to no transportation support. Participant 3 stated that, “Bisan umuran o naka-tiil la an pagsulod ha lugar, ginpapadayon ko an akon misyon.” (Even if it rains or I have to walk far, I continue my mission.) Meanwhile, Participant 10 said “Danay mayda nakakadisturbo nga aringasa, o natunog na mga sugad hiton cellphone nga nakakadiskaril han amon konsentrasyon.” (Sometimes there's disruptive noise or cellphones that distract us during the prayer.) The

experiences of the mamaratbat in enduring environmental challenges during Yolanda death anniversary rituals reveal their remarkable resilience and commitment to spiritual service, despite extreme heat, heavy rain, long distances, and distractions (Participant 3; Participant 10). These findings align with local studies that emphasize the indispensable role of women as spiritual leaders in post-disaster contexts, particularly in Tacloban, where elderly female prayer facilitators maintained communal mourning practices and guided grieving families through pangangadi and pamisa (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017). International literature similarly highlights how ritual engagement amid adversity provides both psychological relief and social cohesion (Okuyama, 2015; Schuller, 2016), reflecting universal patterns of embodied ritual, emotional labor, and spiritual resilience. Theoretically, Hochschild's Emotional Labor Theory (1983) explains how mamaratbat regulate their emotions to uphold calmness and empathy despite personal grief, while Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s) underscores their role in preserving Waray-Waray and Latin prayer traditions for younger generations. Additionally, Pargament's Spiritual Coping Theory (1988) and Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s) illustrate how faith and ritualized physical acts enable them to sustain focus, emotional stability, and spiritual connection. In synthesis, the mamaratbat embody the intersection of cultural preservation, emotional labor, and spiritual resilience, demonstrating how Filipino communities transform environmental and personal challenges into meaningful acts of remembrance, faith, and communal healing.

In conclusion, the mamaratbat's endurance of environmental challenges during Yolanda death anniversary rituals exemplifies the vital role of women as cultural and spiritual anchors in post-disaster communities, confirming both local and international studies on ritualized coping and communal resilience (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017; Okuyama, 2015; Schuller, 2016). Their ability to navigate physical hardships while leading prayers highlights the embodiment of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and the sustaining power of spiritual coping mechanisms (Pargament, 1988). At the same time, their dedication ensures the transmission of Waray-Waray and Latin prayer traditions to future generations, reflecting the principles of Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s) and reinforcing the cognitive and physical integration emphasized in Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s). Anchored in these theoretical and empirical foundations, the mamaratbat's experiences demonstrate how ritual, faith, and cultural continuity collectively enable communities to process grief, preserve heritage, and foster long-term resilience in the face of environmental and personal adversities.

3.4 Emotional Reflections During the Commemoration of Yolanda Anniversaries

The emotional reflections of the mamaratbat during the commemoration of Yolanda anniversaries reveal a profound and multifaceted inner world shaped by grief, empathy, and hope. Three key themes emerged from their narratives: *Balik ha Butnga han Bagyo* (Back to the Heart of the Storm), which captures the vivid reliving of the typhoon's traumatic events; *Pag-uyon han Kalag ngan Kasingkasing* (Union of Soul and Heart), reflecting the deep spiritual connection they feel with the departed; and *Pag-ampo nga Mayda Paglaum* (Praying with Hope), highlighting how their prayers serve as a source of healing and light for both the community and themselves. Together, these themes illustrate the mamaratbat's emotional depth as they navigate sorrow, maintain sacred bonds, and transform collective grief into acts of remembrance and hope.

Theme 1: Balik ha Butnga han Bagyo (Back to the Heart of the Storm)

Many mamaratbat confess that each Yolanda anniversary feels like reliving the pain and chaos of the typhoon. The act of praying revives memories of drowned neighbors, lost family members, and cries for help that still echo in their minds. Participant 7 said “Kun nag-aampo ako, sugad hin binabalik ako ha adlaw han bagyo. Nakikita ko liwat an mga nawawara, an mga nahitabo” (When I pray, it feels like I'm brought back to the day of the storm. I see again the missing people, the things that happened.) Participant 2 also stated that “Diri la akon kalugaringon an akon ginpapag-ampo kundi pati an akon kasakit nga waray pa gud maupay.” (I don't just pray for others I also carry my own pain that has never fully healed.)

The emotional reflections of the mamaratbat during Yolanda death anniversary rituals reveal the profound interplay of personal grief, communal responsibility, and spiritual resilience. As captured in the first theme, *Balik ha Butnga han Bagyo* (Back to the Heart of the Storm), their prayers bring back vivid memories of the typhoon's destruction and loss, echoing findings from local studies that emphasize the persistence of trauma among survivors (Dela Cruz & Mendoza, 2016; Abad, 2018). This aligns with the principles of Emotional Labor Theory, as mamaratbat consciously regulate their own sorrow to provide calm and empathetic guidance during rituals (Hochschild, 1983).

Theme 2: Pag-uyon han Kalag ngan Kasingkasing (Union of Soul and Heart)

They often express feeling a spiritual connection with the souls of the departed. This emotional and metaphysical bond allows them to pray not just for the dead but with them, as if they are present in spirit. Participant 3 confirmed that “Bisan diri ko hira kinikita, waray ako kita ha ira, pero harani ha akon it ira presensya samtang hira in akon gin-aampo.” (Maybe I don't see them, but I can feel their presence close to me while I pray.) Meanwhile, participant 10 said “Parang nakikig-istorya ako ha ira tagsa nga kalag naabat ko an ira kasubo.” (It's like I'm conversing with each soul I can feel their loneliness.) The experiences of the mamaratbat in establishing a profound spiritual connection with the souls of the departed during Yolanda death anniversaries reflect the deep interweaving of emotion, culture, and faith in Waray mourning practices. As Participant 3 and Participant 10 revealed, their prayers are not merely ritualistic but relational, embodying

both empathy and presence, which aligns with the Emotional Labor Theory of Hochschild (1983) by demonstrating the conscious management of personal grief to provide spiritual comfort. This union of heart and soul is also consistent with Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s), as these women actively sustain Waray prayer traditions in Latin and Waray-Waray, passing down knowledge while bridging generational gaps. Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997) further explains how this intimate engagement with the departed provides resilience, offering meaning and solace amidst the trauma left by Super Typhoon Yolanda (Lagmay et al., 2015; Ortega & Santos, 2017). Moreover, Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s) illuminates how physical acts of prayer chanting, gestures, and ritual presence enhance the mamaratbat's cognitive and emotional connection with the souls they honor. These findings resonate with local studies highlighting the role of women as cultural and spiritual anchors in post-disaster Tacloban (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017) and with international research on ritualized grief and female-led spiritual practices (Singh & Patel, 2019; Johnson, 2020). Collectively, the data affirm that through their prayers, the mamaratbat do not merely commemorate the dead; they actively embody a sacred dialogue between the living and the departed, fostering communal healing, preserving cultural identity, and sustaining spiritual resilience in the aftermath of tragedy.

Theme 3: Pag-ampo nga Mayda Paglaum (Praying with Hope)

Despite the sorrow, the mamaratbat believe their role contributes to healing not just for the families, but for themselves and the broader community. Their prayers offer peace and meaning, turning remembrance into a sacred mission. Participant 8 said during the interview that, “Bisan masakit, an pag-ampo usa nga paagi para maipakita naton kumo bungto an aton hinay-hinay na pagtambal han mga samad han naglabay.” (Even though it's painful, praying is a way to heal the wounds of the community.) Meanwhile participant 3 said, “Damo pa an may kasubo, pero kon gin-aampo ko hira, бага hin may kahayag nga nasulod ha ira kasingkasing.” (Many are still grieving, but when I pray for them, it's like light enters their hearts.) The mamaratbat's role in praying with hope during Yolanda death anniversaries exemplifies the profound interplay of faith, culture, and emotional resilience in post-disaster Tacloban. As participants expressed, their prayers, though emotionally taxing, serve as conduits of healing not only for grieving families but for the community and themselves, reflecting the principles of Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997) and Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983). This aligns with local studies highlighting the therapeutic and communal function of post-Yolanda rituals, where prayer and collective mourning foster social cohesion and restore meaning amid loss (Dela Cruz & Mendoza, 2016; Gonzales, 2017; Estrella, 2020). Their work also embodies Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s), as the mamaratbat preserve ancestral prayers in Waray-Waray and Latin, ensuring continuity of Waray spiritual traditions for future generations. Through their embodied practice chanting, gestures, and ritualized movements they enact the principles of Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s), where physical engagement deepens emotional and spiritual connection. Moreover, the recurring light described by participants symbolizes hope, reflecting the transformative potential of faith-centered rituals to convert grief into a sacred mission of communal healing. In essence, the mamaratbat illustrate how gendered spiritual leadership, grounded in tradition and emotional labor, sustains cultural identity, fosters resilience, and instills hope, confirming both local and international findings that communal prayer and ritual are vital mechanisms for coping with collective trauma (Alejo, 2016; Okuyama, 2015; Schuller, 2016).

In conclusion, these emotional experiences underscore that the mamaratbat serve not merely as prayer leaders but as vital custodians of collective memory and healing. Through their grief, empathy, and dedication, they bear witness to the community's sorrow while transforming it into acts of spiritual solace and hope. Their prayers and rituals extend beyond personal devotion, fostering communal reconciliation, sustaining cultural traditions, and offering comfort to both the living and the departed. In this way, the mamaratbat embody resilience, turning remembrance into a meaningful and sacred practice that nurtures both hearts and heritage.

3.5 Perception of Mamaratbat on their Roles as Regularly Commissioned Prayer Leaders, or “Suki,” in the Tradition of Praying using Latin or Waray-Waray During Death Anniversaries and Funerals.

The responses to Research Question 5 illuminate how mamaratbat perceive their roles as regularly commissioned prayer leaders, or “suki,” during funerals and death anniversaries. Two key emotional themes emerged from their accounts: first, “Dako nga Dungog, Dako nga Pas-an” (A Great Honor, A Heavy Responsibility), which reflects the pride and pressure they experience from being frequently chosen by families; and second, “Pagpanalipod han Tradisyon ngan Kalag” (Guarding Both Tradition and Soul), highlighting their commitment to preserving the sacred language and spiritual essence of prayers in Latin and Waray-Waray. These themes reveal the mamaratbat's deep sense of duty, portraying their role as both an emotional privilege and a sacred responsibility that connects them to the community, the tradition, and the departed.

Theme 1: Dako nga Dungog, Dako nga Pas-an (A Great Honor, A Heavy Responsibility)

Many mamaratbat view being a “suki” a regularly requested prayer leader as both a privilege and a burden. They feel a strong emotional weight from the expectations of families, while also feeling a deep sense of respect and affirmation of their role in the community. According to participant 4, “Dako an akon kalipay nga ginpipili ako permi, pero dako liwat an akon responsibilidad nga diri ko dapat pakyasun.” (I feel great joy that I'm always chosen, but I also carry a big responsibility that I must not fail.) Meanwhile, participant 1 said, “Pareho ak hin gin-aataman han komunidad. Pero may mga panahon nga nabubug-atan ako, labi na kun damu it nagpapa-schedule ak ha usa la ka adlaw.” (It feels like I'm being

cared for by the community. But there are times I feel overwhelmed, especially when many book me in a single day.) The theme reflects how mamaratbat experience a complex interplay of pride, duty, and emotional strain as regularly commissioned prayer leaders, or suki. Their narratives reveal that while being chosen to lead prayers affirms their respected position within the community, it also carries a significant emotional and physical weight, particularly when managing multiple engagements in a single day. This aligns with Emotional Labor Theory, which underscores how individuals regulate personal feelings to meet the emotional demands of a role (Hochschild, 1983), highlighting the hidden labor mamaratbat perform to maintain composure while guiding grieving families. Furthermore, Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1970) situates their role as custodians of Waray and Latin prayer traditions, emphasizing the responsibility they feel to preserve and pass on these sacred practices. Their experiences also resonate with findings from local studies on post-Yolanda mourning, which document the essential role of female spiritual leaders in facilitating communal grief, reinforcing social cohesion, and promoting cultural continuity (Gonzales, 2017; Estrella, 2020; Buenaventura, 2018). Through this lens, the honor of being a suki is inseparable from the burdens it entails, revealing a deeply humanized balance of fulfillment, fatigue, and spiritual dedication. In essence, the mamaratbat exemplify how gendered, embodied, and culturally rooted emotional labor sustains both community resilience and the sacred continuity of tradition in post-disaster Tacloban.

Theme 2: Pagpanalipod han Tradisyon ngan Kalag (Guarding Both Tradition and Soul)

Being a mamaratbat is not just about leading prayers it is seen as a form of cultural and spiritual guardianship. Their use of Latin or traditional Waray prayers is a sacred craft they strive to protect and pass on. They take pride in maintaining the connection between the past, the language of prayer, and the souls of the departed. Participant 7 said, “An akon panuyo, diri la para mag-ampo kundi para mapadayon an tinuod nga paagi han pag-ampo nga ginbilin han una.” (My goal is not just to pray, but to preserve the authentic way of praying passed down to us.) Meanwhile, participant 5 revealed that “It Waray ngan Latin nga ampo, may gahum ini baga hin mas halarom an koneksyon ha Ginoo ngan ha kalag.” (The Waray and Latin prayers have power as if they create a deeper connection with God and with the soul.) The theme serves as both spiritual guides and cultural custodians, embodying a sacred responsibility that extends beyond mere prayer. Their commitment to preserving the Waray and Latin forms of prayer reflects the principles of Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead, 1930s–1970s), as they consciously pass on ancestral knowledge to ensure continuity despite generational shifts and modern challenges. The emotional demands of leading these rituals, particularly in the context of Yolanda’s collective trauma, resonate with Hochschild’s Emotional Labor Theory (1983), showing how mamaratbat regulate personal grief to provide solace to families while maintaining communal spiritual cohesion. Furthermore, their practices exemplify Pargament’s Spiritual Coping Theory (1980s), as the act of prayer not only honors the deceased but also reinforces the mamaratbat’s own resilience, fostering hope and meaning amid loss. Embodied Cognition Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980s–1990s) further explains how ritualized gestures, chanting, and bodily participation enhance both cognitive focus and spiritual presence, creating a holistic connection between body, mind, and soul. Consistent with local studies on Waray death rituals and female-led mourning practices (Estrella, 2020; Gonzales, 2017; Buenaventura, 2018) and international research on post-disaster spiritual leadership (Okuyama, 2015; Singh & Patel, 2019), the findings reveal that mamaratbat are indispensable in sustaining cultural identity, fostering communal healing, and guarding the souls of the departed. Their dedication demonstrates how tradition and spirituality converge, humanizing grief while affirming that cultural survival relies not only on memory but on active, embodied, and intergenerational stewardship.

In essence, serving as a suki mamaratbat represents both a heartfelt calling and a solemn responsibility, intertwining personal devotion with communal and spiritual duties. Their role goes beyond leading prayers for families; it embodies the stewardship of cultural heritage, the preservation of the Waray and Latin prayer traditions, and the safeguarding of the souls of the departed. This dual commitment brings deep fulfillment and recognition, yet also carries significant emotional and physical demands, reflecting the delicate balance between honor and burden revealed in their lived experiences.

3.6 Perceived Relevance and Future of Mamaratbat’s Tradition Among the Younger Generation

This section presents the mamaratbat’s reflections on the relevance and future of their sacred tradition among the younger generation. Their narratives reveal a profound emotional engagement with the possibility of continuity or loss of this spiritual role. Three interrelated themes emerged from their accounts: fear of cultural extinction, longing for youthful interest, and hopeful legacy through guidance. These themes highlight the mamaratbat’s deep concern over the waning involvement of the youth, their heartfelt memories of rare moments of interest from younger individuals, and their strong desire to pass on not only the prayers but also the faith, devotion, and sense of calling embedded in the tradition. Together, these reflections illuminate the tension between uncertainty and hope that shapes their vision for the future of mamaratbat practice.

Theme 1: Nahadlok kami nga mawawara an amon tradisyon (We fear our tradition will disappear)

A recurring feeling among participants is fear and sadness that the tradition of mamaratbat may not continue because of the younger generation’s apparent disinterest. The elders worry that with them aging, the sacred role they uphold may vanish. Participant 2 said that “Yana nga panahon, waray na kabataan nga interesado hini. Nahadlok kami nga kun kami mawawara, mawawara na liwat an amon mga ampo.” (These days, no youth seem interested in this. We fear that when

we're gone, our prayers will disappear too.) In addition, participant 8 emphasized that "Diri na ini uso sa ira, tungod siguro han teknolohiya ngan modernidad. Pero para ha amon, halarom ini nga butang. Kay usa ini nga pagtawag." (This is no longer popular among them, maybe because of technology and modern ways. But for us, this is a deep calling.) In conclusion, the fear expressed by the mamaratbat that their tradition may disappear reflects a deeper anxiety about cultural loss, spiritual continuity, and intergenerational disconnect. This finding strongly aligns with related literature showing that Waray death and mourning practices are sustained through oral transmission and community trust, particularly by elderly women who serve as spiritual anchors (Gorospe, 2010; Buenaventura, 2018). As younger generations gravitate toward modern and digital lifestyles, similar studies have noted a declining engagement with traditional rituals, language, and mentorship, placing cultural practices at risk of extinction (De Mesa, 2010; Medina, 2001). The mamaratbat's fear is therefore not merely personal but culturally grounded, echoing Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead) which emphasizes that traditions survive only through active intergenerational transfer. At the same time, their emotional struggle resonates with Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), as they continue to perform sacred roles with composure despite grief, aging, and uncertainty about the future. Moreover, in the post-Yolanda context, where commemorative rituals serve as vital tools for collective healing and remembrance (Eyerman, 2015; Pargament, 1997), the possible loss of mamaratbat leadership threatens not only tradition but also communal resilience. Thus, this theme confirms earlier studies that position prayer leaders as custodians of faith, memory, and identity in disaster-affected communities (Cannell, 1999; Estrella, 2020), while humanizing their quiet fear that when their voices fall silent, a sacred bridge between the living, the dead, and the future may also fade.

Theme 2: Ginhihinumdom namon an kabataan nga may aram ngan nag-iinteres (We remember the youth who showed interest)

Although rare, some mamaratbat have encountered young individuals who asked about the tradition. This created a sense of hope and a deep emotional longing for continuity. Participants 7 said, "May-ada usa nga apo han akon igkasi-mamaratbat nga nasiring, 'Lola, tuturuan mo ako?' Nalipay kami han amon nabatian." (There was a grandchild of a fellow mamaratbat who said, 'Grandma, will you teach me?' It warmed our hearts to hear that.) Meanwhile, participant 10 claimed that "Bisan usa la nga kabataan nga interesado, inspirasyon na namon ito para magpadayon." (Even just one young person who shows interest is enough inspiration for us to keep going.) In contrast to their fear of loss, the mamaratbat's recollection of young people who showed interest reveals a quiet but powerful source of hope, suggesting that cultural continuity, while fragile, is still possible. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing that Waray death and mourning traditions survive through intimate, relational spaces often within families and homes where elders mentor the young through observation and invitation (Javellana, 2004; Gorospe, 2010). The simple act of a grandchild asking to be taught mirrors Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead), which holds that culture is sustained not through mass participation but through meaningful intergenerational encounters. Moreover, this moment of interest reflects what De Mesa (2010) and Buenaventura (2018) describe as "entry points" for youth engagement, where relevance emerges through personal connection rather than obligation. Emotionally, these encounters also ease the heavy burden of emotional labor carried by mamaratbat, giving renewed strength and purpose to continue their sacred role (Hochschild, 1983). In post-Yolanda contexts, where commemorative rituals serve as pathways for healing and memory (Eyerman, 2015; Pargament, 1997), even a single interested youth becomes a symbol of resilience and spiritual survival. Thus, consistent with related studies on prayer leaders and female ritual authority (Cannell, 1999; Estrella, 2020), this theme shows that hope for the tradition's future does not rest on numbers, but on one willing heart proof that the sacred chain of memory, prayer, and faith can still be passed on, one generation at a time.

Theme 3: Gusto namon igbiling ini nga kabilin (We want to leave behind our soul and legacy)

Many expressed a strong emotional desire to pass down not just the knowledge, but also the devotion that comes with being a mamaratbat. They want to mentor the next generation, especially young women, so the tradition and spiritual impact will continue. Participant 9 said, "An akon la karuyag antes ako lumakat, may mga kabataan nga mabinuligon, magmamana han akon ginkakaptan." (Before I leave this world, I just want one young person who will help carry on what I've held onto.) Meanwhile, participant 5 advised "It akon sagdon ha kabataan, ayaw kamo kaawod. An amon gimbubuhay, panawagan ini ngan serbisyo ha Ginoo ngan komunidad." (My advice to the youth is not to be ashamed. What we do is a calling and a service to God and the community.) Ultimately, the mamaratbat's desire to leave behind a soul-filled legacy reflects a deeply human hope for continuity, meaning, and remembrance beyond their own lives. Their wish to mentor even one young woman affirms what related literature consistently shows that Waray death and mourning practices survive through intimate mentorship, oral transmission, and women's spiritual leadership rather than formal institutions (Javellana, 2004; Gorospe, 2010; Buenaventura, 2018). This finding strongly conforms with Cultural Transmission Theory (Mead), which emphasizes that traditions endure through lived teaching and relational encounters, as well as with Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), since the mamaratbat continue to guide, comfort, and inspire others despite aging and personal grief. Moreover, their framing of the role as a calling and service resonates with Spiritual Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), showing how faith becomes both a source of strength and a legacy to be passed on, especially in post-Yolanda commemorations where prayer rituals remain vital for communal healing (Eyerman, 2015; Alejo, 2016). In line with local and foreign studies on female ritual leaders in disaster-affected communities (Cannell, 1999; Estrella, 2020; Singh & Patel, 2019), the mamaratbat's voices reveal that legacy is not about preserving words alone, but about transmitting devotion,

courage, and love. Thus, amid fear and uncertainty, their longing to teach embodies a quiet resilience a belief that as long as one heart listens and one voice learns to pray, the tradition will continue to live.

Over and above, the narratives of the mamaratbat reveal a profound emotional tension an aching fear that their sacred role may fade, alongside a quiet but enduring hope that it will live on. Though they mourn the growing distance of the youth from tradition, they remain steadfast in their longing for someone who will inherit the prayers, chants, and faith that define their calling. What emerges is not merely a concern for continuity, but a deep spiritual urgency to safeguard their shared identity and purpose. For the mamaratbat, the future is non-negotiable: the tradition must not end with them. They dream of awakening even one willing heart especially among the younger generation to carry the mantle forward, so that the departed are remembered and prayed for not only through spoken words, but through a living tradition sustained by devotion, spirit, and love.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of mamaratbat elderly women prayer leaders during the annual death anniversary commemorations of Super Typhoon Yolanda in Tacloban City. Through a transcendental phenomenological approach, the research illuminated how these women prepare spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically; the challenges they encounter; and the meanings they attach to their sacred role in post-disaster remembrance. The findings reveal that leading prayers during Yolanda death anniversaries is a deeply emotional and spiritually demanding experience for the mamaratbat. Each commemoration reawakens painful memories of loss and trauma, not only for grieving families but also for the prayer leaders themselves, many of whom are Yolanda survivors. Despite this emotional burden, the mamaratbat continue to serve with compassion, embodying shared grief as a form of spiritual connection that strengthens communal bonds. Their prayers function as collective acts of mourning that transform individual pain into communal resilience. The study further shows that the mamaratbat's preparation for their role is holistic. Their readiness involves spiritual grounding through prayer and inner purification, emotional endurance despite recurring grief, mental discipline in memorizing and rehearsing prayer sequences, and physical perseverance despite fatigue, illness, and advanced age. These layered preparations highlight the significant emotional labor, embodied practice, and spiritual coping involved in their service labor that often remains unrecognized yet is essential to the continuity of Waray mourning traditions.

Despite numerous challenges including physical exhaustion, emotional heaviness, social pressures, and environmental constraints the mamaratbat persist in their role out of deep faith, cultural responsibility, and devotion to the departed. Their narratives reflect a profound sense of purpose anchored in hope and belief that their prayers offer comfort, healing, and dignity to grieving families. In this way, their service becomes both an act of remembrance for the dead and a pathway toward healing for the living. Importantly, the study also highlights the mamaratbat's concerns regarding the future of their tradition. While they recognize the cultural and spiritual value of their role, they express apprehension about declining youth participation, language barriers, and the absence of systematic mentorship for younger generations. These concerns underscore the fragility of oral prayer traditions and the urgent need for intentional cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission. In conclusion, this research affirms that the mamaratbat are indispensable cultural bearers, spiritual leaders, and agents of resilience in post-Yolanda Tacloban City. Their lived experiences reveal that healing after disaster is not solely material or psychological but deeply spiritual, cultural, and communal. By documenting their voices, struggles, and reflections, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Filipino mourning practices, women's spiritual leadership, and disaster recovery. Ultimately, honoring and sustaining the role of the mamaratbat is vital not only for preserving cultural heritage but also for nurturing collective memory, faith, and hope in communities shaped by profound loss.

Based on the findings of this study on the lived experiences of mamaratbat during Yolanda death anniversaries in Tacloban City, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen cultural preservation, promote community healing, advance academic understanding, and ensure the intergenerational continuity of this sacred tradition. These recommendations recognize the shared responsibility of individuals, communities, institutions, and future generations in sustaining the vital role of mamaratbat as cultural custodians, spiritual leaders, and emotional anchors in post-disaster contexts:

Elderly Women Prayer Leaders (Mamaratbat). Greater recognition and sustained support should be extended to the mamaratbat as indispensable bearers of cultural and spiritual heritage. Considering their advanced age and the physical and emotional demands of their role, programs focusing on their well-being such as regular health check-ups, psychosocial support, adequate rest schedules during commemorations, and logistical assistance are strongly recommended. Opportunities for mentorship and guided knowledge-sharing may be encouraged, allowing willing mamaratbat to transmit prayers, rituals, and values to younger women. With informed consent, the documentation of their prayers, narratives, and ritual practices may be undertaken to preserve their knowledge while upholding their dignity, agency, and the sacred nature of their role.

Local Communities and Families in Tacloban City. Local communities and families are encouraged to continue valuing, supporting, and protecting the mamaratbat, not only during Yolanda anniversaries but also in other death-related

rituals. Community members may help reduce the burden on prayer leaders by assisting with transportation, scheduling, and other logistical needs, especially during peak commemoration periods. Families are encouraged to involve younger members in commemorative rituals, fostering intergenerational transmission of prayer practices and appreciation of Waray-Waray and Latin liturgical languages. Strengthening communal participation nurtures shared responsibility, deepens empathy, and sustains the collective spirit of healing and solidarity that the mamaratbat help cultivate.

Researchers and Academicians. Researchers and academicians are encouraged to expand this line of inquiry by exploring themes such as gendered spiritual leadership, aging and cultural labor, emotional labor in ritual leadership, and the long-term sustainability of oral prayer traditions. Longitudinal studies may be conducted to examine how the role of mamaratbat evolves over time, particularly as communities continue post-disaster recovery and younger generations renegotiate cultural identity. Comparative studies with other post-disaster or indigenous communities may further enrich understanding of grassroots spiritual leadership and culturally grounded coping mechanisms.

Educators and Cultural Workers. Educational institutions in Eastern Visayas, particularly those offering programs in social studies, culture, religion, and values education, are encouraged to integrate local mourning practices and the role of mamaratbat into curricula and community-based learning initiatives. Educators and cultural workers may collaborate with mamaratbat to conduct storytelling sessions, oral history projects, cultural forums, and heritage workshops. These initiatives can strengthen cultural pride, bridge generational gaps, and ensure that indigenous prayer traditions remain meaningful, accessible, and relevant to younger generations.

Policy Makers and Local Government Units (LGUs) in Partnership with Religious Organizations. Policy makers, LGUs, and religious organizations are strongly encouraged to formally recognize the mamaratbat as cultural heritage bearers and contributors to community resilience. Local ordinances or programs may be developed to provide institutional support during annual commemorations, including honoraria, health assistance, transportation support, recognition programs, and designated rest periods. Collaborative efforts may also be undertaken to document and safeguard this intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that preservation initiatives respect the sacred, community-based, and non-commercial nature of the mamaratbat's role.

Future Generations and Youth-Oriented Community Programs. Future generations, particularly the youth of Tacloban City, are encouraged to actively engage with local traditions through participation, observation, and respectful inquiry. Youth and community programs may develop initiatives such as prayer apprenticeship, storytelling circles, and oral history documentation to cultivate interest in Waray language, prayer practices, and cultural rituals. By engaging with these traditions, the youth become active carriers of cultural memory, ensuring that faith, resilience, and communal remembrance continue beyond the present generation.

In conclusion, these recommendations underscore the collective responsibility of mamaratbat, families, communities, educators, researchers, policy makers, and future generations in sustaining a sacred tradition deeply rooted in faith, memory, and resilience. Supporting the mamaratbat not only preserves an essential aspect of Waray cultural heritage but also strengthens communal healing, honors the memory of those lost during Super Typhoon Yolanda, and reinforces the spiritual foundations of post-disaster recovery in Tacloban City. Through intentional recognition, documentation, education, and intergenerational engagement, the enduring legacy of the mamaratbat can be safeguarded for generations to come.

Compliance with ethical standards

Authors declare that the present research work complies with the institutional and ethical standards. It does not contain any studies performed on animals or human subjects by the author.

Conflict of interest statement

All authors declare no conflict of interest or competing interest related to the publication of this manuscript or any institution or product mention herein.

Statement of ethical approval

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals/humans' subjects by any of the authors.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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