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LIVING WITH TRAUMA: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A HINDU'S RESILIENCE AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS IN SIGI BIROMARU

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Abstract

The natural disasters that struck the Sigi Biromaru area resulted in PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder), as experienced by a Hindu survivor. Nevertheless, he organised resilience that focused on emotional and spiritual concerns. This research aimed to investigate a Hindu survivor's resilience after natural disasters in Sigi Biromaru. Based on qualitative methods utilised the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, this research identified three main themes: traumatic experiences, emotional resilience, and spiritual resilience. The research evidenced that the participant has emotional and spiritual resilience as a foundation for overcoming trauma. Emotional resilience is when the survivor can deal with traumatic experiences by developing skills that support emotional balance, such as engaging in positive activities, pursuing hobbies and maintaining a healthy mindset. In addition, spiritual resilience, such as belief in God, praying and giving alms, is important in strengthening theological, psychological and sociological balance. Ultimately, this research contributes to an understanding of the strength of emotional and spiritual resilience that plays a role in shaping the spirit to survive and continue life of an individual who is still experiencing trauma, as well as its implications in the context of handling trauma after natural disasters.

Keywords: Emotional Resilience, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Natural Disasters, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Spiritual Resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters are sudden events, as happened on 28 September 2018. At that time, several areas were affected. One was Sigi Biromaru, hit by an earthquake and liquefaction (Nole, 2024b). The impact of natural disasters makes people lose their homes, families, and possessions (Nole & Sinaga, 2025). On the other hand, natural disasters impact individual psychological problems.

Although natural disasters have long since passed, the problem that still occurs is that specific individuals still have trauma. In this case, some survivors of the 2018 natural disaster trauma have symptoms of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) (Nole et al., 2025). The symptoms allow individuals to reflect on natural disaster events with repetition, avoidance, changes in thoughts and mood, and changes in arousal and reactivity (Nasri et al., 2020). Despite having PTSD symptoms, individuals must strive to live based on resilience (Wu et al., 2013), as a Hindu trauma survivor in Sigi Biromaru do.

This research also arises because it realises the gap, namely the lack of research focusing on particular religions. In other words, research on resilience in the aftermath of the 28 September 2018 natural disasters has often focused on specific regions, such as Palu, and focused on specific religious or ethnic groups (Arif, 2024; Darlis et al., 2020; Khairil et al., 2020; Nole, 2024c; Nole et al., 2024). However, there is no sign of exploring the resilience of the specific lived experience of a Hindu trauma survivor in an area affected by a natural disaster, such as Sigi Biromaru. In that regard, this research's novelty lies in substance and methodology.

This research aims to answer the question of the resilience of a Hindu after natural disasters in Sigi Biromaru. Resilience is important, especially for individuals experiencing psychological distress trying to rise and survive after natural disasters (Kusumastuti et al., 2014). On the other hand, it is also important to study how a Hindu survivor frames overcoming trauma with resilience.

The researcher argues that a Hindu, as a survivor of natural disaster trauma in Sigi Biromaru, has emotional and spiritual resilience.

Therefore, this research aims to investigate the resilience of a Hindu living with post-natural disaster trauma in Sigi Biromaru through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach analysed from the perspective of the psychology of religion. With this research, readers also can understand religion's role in supporting the resilience process.

II. METHOD

This research used a qualitative method with a case study design through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach that is analysed based on the psychology of religion perspective. The case study is about resilience after natural disasters in Sigi Biromaru from the perspective of a Hindu survivor of trauma experiences.

An IPA approach combined with a case study design is well-suited for in-depth exploration involving a single participant (Eatough & Smith, 2006; Geraldi Gauci, 2019; Nizza et al., 2017; Rhodes & Smith, 2010). In this context, the researcher set one participant as a survivor of natural disaster trauma in Sigi Biromaru. The participant in this research is a father with the initial PB, who is Hindu. He has a job as an employee in an office. He is a survivor of natural disaster trauma in Sigi Biromaru. This research centred on an in-depth exploration of the experiences of one Hindu survivor of the natural disasters in Sigi Biromaru. The researcher used the qualitative method and IPA approach to focus on an in-depth case study to understand unique experiences, including those of an individual.

This research procedure began with determining the location of Sigi Biromaru. The selection was because it was also the location of the 28 September 2018 incident and had rarely been explored in research. Then, the researcher determined a participant based on the purposive sampling technique with inclusion criteria as a trauma survivor with PTSD symptoms who experienced the natural disaster event of 28 September 2018. Using the International Trauma Questionnaire (ITQ) assessment, the participant is detected to have PTSD symptoms. After that, the researcher

conducted data collection with semi-structured interviews and analysed them.

The researcher analysed the data using an IPA approach (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). In this approach, the researcher understands life experiences and finds their meaning. The purpose of IPA is to explore in detail how participant understands their personal and social worlds, and the main point of IPA is the meaning of specific experiences, events and circumstances for the participant (Nole, 2023). The IPA researcher asks a participant to describe events or objects experienced, emotions felt, relationships, and so on (Smith et al., 2022). The stages of this approach are the researcher reading and re-reading transcripts, making initial notes, emergent themes, and superordinate themes from a single participant. Consequently, the researcher reported the results of the research and discussed them.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Traumatic Experiences

Drawing from personal life experiences, PB recounted firsthand encounters with earthquakes and liquefaction (D'Errico & Hunt, 2022; Exline et al., 2005). Apart from losing his home, another urgent thing is that he still has trauma to this day. In psychological studies, symptoms of natural disaster trauma can be stored in long-term memory (Futterman et al., 2023), as experienced by the participant. The following was the story of PB's traumatic experience:

“Yeah, I am traumatised because my house was affected by the liquefaction. The incident traumatised me severely because maybe people cannot imagine it. I witnessed the ground and the buildings moving. All of that, I felt the movement, like I was dead. At that time, my family and I surrendered; there was no way to run, and we were stuck in a location of about 400 metres between the house and the road. So, we could not save ourselves from that distance. However, it was during the second earthquake that we were able to escape while I was looking for a way.”

Trauma is a psychological condition experienced by a person due to the impact of certain events that are very impressive, such as natural disasters. Furthermore, trauma has specific types of conditions with certain symptoms. This trauma due to natural disasters also makes individuals have PTSD symptoms (Farooqui et al., 2017). In this case, PB is identified with these symptoms.

A prominent feature of participant's PTSD is flashbacks due to the influence of loud sounds from particular objects (Nasri et al., 2020), namely the sound of a car truck when it starts. According to him, the sound is similar to the sound of liquefaction that he has experienced. He testified to the symptoms as follows:

“Traumatically, it is clear that all this time, for example, when there is the sound of a huge truck, that is the sound of rumbling soil and buildings like that. That is why, for me personally, the traumatising is there, but I do not want the situation to distract me.”

“The response when I hear the sound of a big truck when turned on reminds me of the rumbling related to liquefaction. The rumbling sound (liquefaction) occurs from the collision of buildings and is in the ground itself, which sounds like a truck being started.”

The movement of the situation, similar to natural disasters, also illustrated the participant's PTSD. In addition to making him relive the events of 2018, he also immediately faints due to fear and overthinking when confronted with activities or phenomena similar to his traumatic experiences (Taylor et al., 2024). He gave the following statement:

“Psychological distress arose when I boarded the plane in bad weather conditions. The aircraft felt unstable, as if it were swaying; it felt like that. It reminded me of the 2018 natural disaster tragedy because the position during the disaster was like we were

swinging anyway.”

“The body feels weak because thinking about the incident, the lost property, it might be raging in the mind.”

PB takes precautions when the situation is traumatising (Nasri et al., 2020). The way he exercises vigilance is by staying away from tall buildings, including large objects. He says monitoring and being careful in the surrounding natural environment is very important. On the other hand, he emphasises that people should pay attention to the signs of nature, learn from their ancestors’ knowledge about the situation, and be aware of natural disasters (Nole, 2024b). The following was the participant’s statement:

“Most importantly, with disaster mitigation, so that I am always aware of taller buildings. Large objects, I must avoid. I always monitor my surroundings; whether dangerous or not, I must be observant.”

“Humans have imagination, memory, and learning power, so we can read natural signs, adapt to natural codes, and read existing natural cycles. That is because this has been told from time immemorial, not as superstition. That is the knowledge our ancestors gave to the modern era until today. Modern society believes more in sciences but does not believe in the knowledge possessed by our ancestors. We are trying to convey that to our fellow citizens, especially spiritual people who can read the signs of nature. That is what we collaborate with; we convey with the language of the community that we should always be vigilant and careful.”

As victims of natural disasters, PB realises that the 2018 event is a phenomenon that still traumatises people today. Based on this, PB, as a trauma survivor with PTSD symptoms, will feel offended when other people have not experienced it directly but tend to give answers that the earthquake in Central Sulawesi was not significant. In other words, he takes offence when someone compares disasters without

seeing them firsthand. Here was his statement:

“I take offence when I hear someone comparing natural disasters without seeing them firsthand.”

3.2. Emotional Resilience

PB is having symptoms of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder). Nonetheless, he can survive and has the strength to rise optimistically after the natural disasters. In science studies, this ability is called resilience, a way of individual resilience (Herrman, 2012; Herrman et al., 2011). If there is a psychological imbalance, the individual copes with it uniquely. He responds to it also based on his beliefs. Hinduism places a strong emphasis on value-based practices as they positively influence emotional well-being (Singh et al., 2023). Hindus experience healthy and peaceful lives because of transformative and mystical experiences (Kang, 2010; Murphy et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2023).

PB has the resilience that keeps emotions healthy after natural disasters. Emotional resilience is a person’s ability to cope with and bounce back from stressful, traumatic conditions (Pahwa & Khan, 2022). By understanding the significance of positive emotions, individuals build emotional resilience for healthy balance and resilience (M. C. Davis, 2009; Wang et al., 2016). That involves healthy management of emotions, the ability to remain calm under stress, and the ability to adapt positively in difficult situations.

According to PB, the best way to live a healthy life is when individuals do many positive activities in the temporal and spatial dimensions. Those activities include self-actualisation in implementing hobbies that can enhance positive emotional mood (Lawrence & Lee, 2014; Li et al., 2019). Positive emotional mood can arise when individuals do constructive activities (M. C. Davis, 2009; Murden et al., 2018). With this, individuals have a busy life that concentrates more on the positive reality of the present, so

there is no time to dwell on the stress of trauma. He stated as follows:

“For me personally, it is to stay away from the memories so that I do not remember. Then, to avoid it, I do many activities, both in the office and outside the office, such as in houses of worship, namely the temple.”

“I do many activities, from Monday to Friday, I work in the office. With work, I will forget about it a little. Outside the office, obviously, I do activities at the house of worship while I spend my hobbies and positive activities in the community and religion, including in my own family.”

“I have hobbies, usually hiking, raising birds, raising chickens, keeping busy with friends, raising goats, discussions, that is all. That way, my brain is refreshed because I get the sweat, the scenery, and the inner satisfaction.”

Furthermore, PB nourishes his emotions when he has a sincere view. According to PB, sincerity is accepting reality in various conditions while continuing life as a social responsibility. He even re-emphasised the significance of carrying out various positive activities as a step to avoid being overwhelmed by PTSD symptoms (Horn & Feder, 2018). He gave the following answer:

“I learn about sincerity, how sincerity is accepting everything, the trials of life, and the journey while carrying out activities. I did not forget. I shared it with some elders, friends, and victims. I release the phenomenon of trauma with positive activities, which I do a lot, such as involving myself in the process of building a temple in Sigi Biromaru. I found that sense of sincerity when I met with the elders who advised me that it is a journey of life.”

3.3. Spiritual Resilience

Living with trauma means that life is always orientated around what it means to live in the world. There is an essential meaning associated

with spirituality that endeavours to revive and survive. In this regard, spiritual resilience becomes a way for trauma survivors. Spiritual resilience refers to a person's ability to find strength through religious beliefs in facing life's challenges. People with spiritual resilience may cope with adversity in ways that reflect their religious beliefs, such as seeing suffering as part of a larger plan, gaining peace from religious rituals, or strengthening their relationship with God and others (Agarwal et al., 2022; Dein, 2020; Papaleontiou-Louca, 2021). Religion has functional properties that provide recovery, protection and psychological well-being (AbdAleati et al., 2016; Agarwal et al., 2020; Fisher, 2013; Unterrainer et al., 2014).

For PB, life as a trauma survivor has a connection to the existence of God. In other words, he mentioned that God, including his family, is the saviour of his life. The survivor sees disasters not as punishment but as a sign of God's love that leads one to evaluate and improve oneself (Kang, 2010). He sees natural disasters as an opportunity to reflect on life, understand the reasons behind trials, and realise that God loves and wants to elevate a person to a better position after passing the test. In his view, God's love is manifested through a testing process that will ultimately bring about positive transformation. Here was the participant's answer:

“By saving me, God loves me and my family. God gives trials, but God saves so that my regeneration is safe, and the location of the previous incident is unsuitable for my family. That is why God gives love in this way. I explore with my family, and this is what is best for my family and me. That is God's way of loving me.”

After the natural disasters, the survivor prefers to surrender to God as a form of acceptance of the situation he experiences. With thoughts based on God's existence, he surrenders to the Divine through prayer, also manifests in meditation or yoga as spiritual processing (Tarakeshwar, 2013). Hindu

practices—such as prayer, meditation, and yoga—positively contribute to the promotion of well-being (Gairola & Singh, 2023). Activities that practice mind-body practices have a positive impact on the treatment of PTSD (Kim et al., 2013). In this spiritual process, the survivor makes meaning of life by engaging in deeper worship and ritual practices. He said the following statement:

“After the natural disasters, I surrenders to God. I learn to be sincere, which means I pray, and after praying, I meditate. This becomes my therapy. By learning meditation or yoga, I do spiritually deeper activities.”

“As a Hindu, I pray in each day, from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m., or 6 p.m. again. I spend at least 30 minutes praying with my family daily because that is how I learn to meditate.”

“Spiritually, being alone is part of it. On average, spirituality is being alone to find oneself. With that, I will meet the creator and find the codes of nature. It will refresh and perfect, improve mindsets; that is what I feel. Besides that, I like to socialise because it is mandatory. We are social creatures. We must be good at organising and managing ourselves in a group.”

PB also embodies worship by socially sharing or giving alms to others. The survivor stated that besides performing prayers, he feels responsible for giving alms to others, which he sees as part of human duty. In this case, the survivor not only focuses on the spiritual aspect of praying but also involves social action as a manifestation of his beliefs (Kang, 2010). Hindu spirituality emphasises that the existence of others signifies a reality of life that strives to foster positive coexistence (Nole, 2024a; Rambachan, 2019). Giving alms and providing education or encouragement to others becomes a form of devotion that connects the survivor to their social environment. By giving to others, the survivor senses that there is positive feedback for themselves. This action benefits the person

receiving it and provides satisfaction and meaning for the survivor as if the kindness helped heal him. Through this process, he balances his vertical relationship with God and his horizontal relationship with fellow humans. He stated as follows:

“I get closer to myself a lot by praying. After praying, there is something called I have to give alms or something that is the duty of humans to other humans; I provide education and encouragement. That is what gives feedback to me.”

“The implementation is that I socialise and show kindness to the community, and I have to start this because I am the pioneer. So with that, it gives the spirit for the spirit in the future to build myself or get closer to God. However, with one note, the results are that I do not expect anything from God because God gives me more than I ask for.”

According to PB’s confession, social interaction is a core value in human life. Humans have many differences, but what binds them together is the awareness to establish social cohesion. Furthermore, he asserts that to do good to others is to do good to oneself (Kang, 2010; Tarakeshwar, 2013). He conducts social interactions in a heterogeneous and positive environment. By associating with people who build each other up, he finds much meaning behind social experiences. He gave the following statement:

“I enjoy it; I socialise with the community as needed. I do my activities within the office. Outside of that, I am heterogeneous; I am always not monotonous in this group of people; I try to be heterogeneous.”

“I prefer to hang out with parents who are above me. That is because the parents I associate with have experience and provide positive value to me. For example, I will implement and study the experience of spiritual life and the experience of migrating.”

“The way I build relationships with other people is I communicate interactively in my position, be it colleagues, in the community, at the level of religious activities. I always do that, especially after natural disasters; I was appointed as a temple administrator and would control activities within the temple.”

As a trauma survivor, PB makes meaning of this life by understanding the purpose and enjoying life (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2021). According to PB, life’s purpose is transforming oneself, others, and the environment. Then, he acquires the ability to enjoy life by accepting its complex or happy conditions (Prastyadewi et al., 2024). His statements reflect a profoundly spiritual view of the meaning of life, acceptance and gratitude in the face of difficult situations. The survivor demonstrated a holistic understanding of the purpose of life, which is to better oneself, others and the environment around her. He also emphasises the importance of acceptance of the realities of life. In this view, gratitude when experiencing a disaster is a form of acceptance that God is giving his love through trials that serve as warnings or lessons for oneself. He stated as follows:

“The purpose of life is to improve oneself and others and the environment.”

“I enjoy life by accepting both good and bad circumstances. Do not be grateful for God’s favour when you are happy. If you are grateful for God’s favours when you are happy, you are not grateful and look hypocritical. The most important thing is, when I encounter a disaster, I am grateful that God has given me his love; I was given a warning by God, and after that, I evaluate myself about why God gave me trials, meaning that God loves me more and puts me back to a high position. That is God’s love.”

The survivor of natural disaster trauma’s response regarding his belief in Hinduism

reflects a strong spiritual outlook on life, causality and reincarnation (Kang, 2010). The idea of reincarnation has a connection with the idea of karma, which means the accumulated actions of a human life (Tharoor, 2019).

Hinduism has the teaching of karma as a moral law of human behaviour that has causality meanings. The survivor explained his belief through *karmaphala*, the Hindu law of cause and effect stipulating that all human actions, both in this life and previous lives, will have consequences that must be lived to the fullest. Regardless of social status, a person with bad karma—whether powerful or of high rank—would be reborn in unfavourable conditions, while someone of low status but with good karma would attain a more favourable rebirth in their next life (Shukla-Bhatt, 2023, p. 100). People’s evil utterances or misdeeds in this life will damage the soul’s prospects in the next, whereas good deeds, righteous actions, and the fulfilment of dharma without expectation of reward will ensure rebirth at a more advanced stage, ultimately leading to *moksha* (Tharoor, 2019). Individuals reflect on their past actions, and their current choices will determine their future, so they endeavour to do good deeds as best they can (Tarakeshwar, 2013). In the Hindu worldview, humans must live the present life with prudence because every action taken in the world has consequences regarding the future. A participant in this research saw life as a repeating cycle, where each individual is reborn to complete good works. The belief in *karmaphala* gives him a way to accept his suffering as inevitable and part of his spiritual journey. It is also a source of strength for him to continue living life by accepting that every event, good or bad, has a purpose in the life cycle. Here was the participant’s answer:

“Hinduism presents the process of life with the law of *karmaphala*, which is the law of cause and effect, in which humans are born and reincarnate again, and it all has to be done and completed.”

IV. CONCLUSION

A trauma survivor of the 2018 natural disaster event in Sigi Biromaru experiences PTSD stemming from the event. Nevertheless, in dealing with this trauma, the participant demonstrates the significance of intense emotional and spiritual resilience. He counters traumatic experiences by developing capacities that nourish emotions, such as doing positive activities, implementing hobbies, and thinking positively. The participant draws closer to God through religious rituals such as prayer, meditation, yoga and giving alms. The belief that trials are part of God's love helped him accept natural disasters as an opportunity to learn and improve. Emotional and spiritual resilience are sources of inner calm and coping that enliven the present while looking forward. The research only had a small sample size of one participant. Traumatic experiences and resilience differ between individuals or groups from different religious, cultural or regional backgrounds. Therefore, the researcher recommends increasing the number of participants to help enrich the results while maintaining the depth of the discussion analysis for new findings.

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