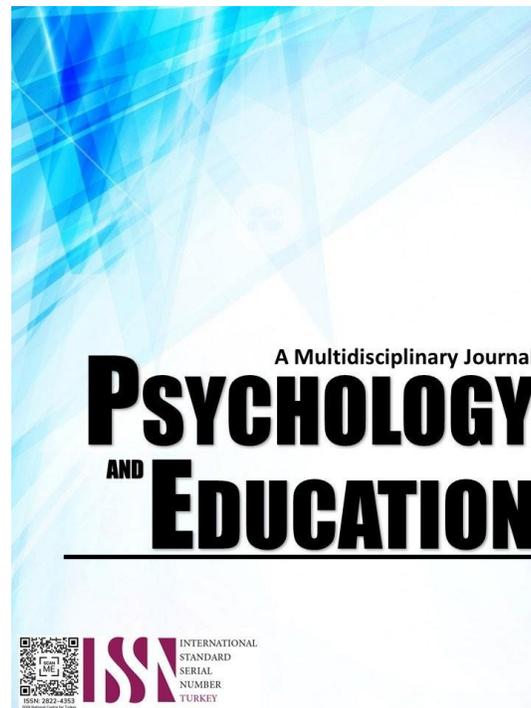


THE PLIGHT OF SCHOOL HEADS DURING ARMED CONFLICT: THE UNTOLD STORIES



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The Plight of School Heads During Armed Conflict: The Untold Stories

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Abstract

In this study, school heads in Cawayan East District, Division of Masbate, share their experiences, coping strategies, and insights before, during, and after armed conflict. Thematic examination of coded replies reveals the emergence of numerous major themes. When there is gunfire, school administrators first react instinctively, putting students' and instructors' safety first. They also display a range of fears, from complacent to post-traumatic, underscoring the nuanced emotional cost of these experiences. Even in the face of chaotic events, logical reactions take hold, such as proactive information sharing and dispelling false information. Modular learning, self-care techniques like self-healing or staying occupied, and expert mental health help are examples of coping mechanisms. The significance of being organized, following child protection procedures, and giving communication and safety procedures top priority are all emphasized by insights. The research comes to an end.

Keywords: *school heads, experiences, coping strategies, insights, armed conflict*

Introduction

United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution promotes peace and aims to end conflicts and violence by working with governments and communities. This is because armed conflict and violence destructively affect a country's development and lead to recurring grievances (United Nations, 2015). In addition, several international humanitarian laws, for example, "The Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)," set rules to reduce the effects of armed conflict out of humanitarian reasons (United Nations, 2011). In relation, DepEd Order No. 032, s. 2019, or "National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Peace Zones," stated that armed conflict greatly affects access, quality, and governance in education, and adversely creates an unsafe and insecure learning environment. Thus, the Department of Education commits to protecting the learners and schools and to safeguarding the continuity of education in times of armed conflict by coordinating with government and non-government units. Yet, in relation to the gruesome event in Masbate (stated below), the aim to make schools peace zones were prevented as the rebel groups intentionally retreated (as accused by the Philippine Army) to schools and make the learners and teachers as human shields (Santos Jr., 2023, March 30).

In March 2023, armed hostilities between the Philippine Army (PA)/Philippine National Police (PNP) and the New People's Army (NPA) occurred in the Municipalities of 3rd Congressional District of Masbate including Dimasalang, Cawayan, Placer, and others (Santos Jr., 2023, March 30). This incident involving explosions, gunshots, and casualties near or within the school grounds traumatized learners and teachers, and school heads especially in public schools in the district. One could only imagine the fear on the faces of students and teachers because of this dreadful armed conflict. Recently returning to in-person classes, the affected public schools were forced to return to modular learning modality.

The traumatic experience during armed conflict is detrimental to learners, teachers, and school heads. However, the Governance of Basic Education Act 2001 (Republic Act [RA] 9155) as cited by De Guzman & Guillermo, 2007; Yap & Adorio, 2008) redefined the school principals' duties, creating new difficulties. Primarily, school principals are expected to: create a school climate conducive to learning; improve teaching practices and therefore the results achieved (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Elmore, 2000; Terehoff, 2002); support and guide their teachers through supervision and one-to-one sessions (Tyagi, 2010); manage the implementation of the national educational program in a way relevant to their school; and ensure professional development programs are effective. While previous studies have explained the pivotal role of principals in ensuring school effectiveness (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000; Su, Adams, & Mininberg, 2000; Hallinger, 1992; Kruger, 1996), success (Portin, 2000) and superior operations (McGough, 2003). The school principal shall function both as an instructional leader and administrative manager to ensure that goals for quality education are met and shall be assisted by office staff for administrative and fiscal services (RA 9155). As cited by Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008), there has been a growing recognition of both the importance of working in conflict-affected contexts and the growing evidence of the very particular effects of conflict on educational access and quality and vice versa – the importance of education in driving conflicts or building peaceful societies.

Although teachers can be effective in delivering the intervention to children exposed to armed conflict (Slone, Mayer, & Gilady, 2021) under the guidance of the school head, they could suffer from total confusion, fear, and a feeling of displacement, especially, those who experience armed conflict for the first time (Catoto & Flores, 2016). In areas where there are problems in peace and order, armed conflict reduces teaching performance and affects the personal life of teachers as educational leaders who play an important role in molding learners as future leaders (Campos, Daclan, & Gempes, 2016). Teachers' experience of serious psychological traumas could lead to demoralization, unproductivity in the classroom, or even to resignation from the job (Agbor, Etta, & Etonde, 2022). Teacher absenteeism out of fear of going to work because of armed conflict also results to a reduction of teaching staff and an increase in the

teacher-pupil ratio (Cervantes-Duarte & Fernandez-Cano, 2016, as cited by Agbor, et al., 2022). It is, thus, important that teachers assigned in war zone areas or where armed conflict usually occurs should be given prompt warnings and intensive preparation regarding the risks and hazards (Catoto & Flores, 2016). But since this is not usually provided, it is then pertinent that the government looks into the effects of armed conflict in the teaching-learning efforts of teachers, thereby identifying areas for intervention (Agbor et al., 2022). It is also necessary to look into the mental health status of the teachers exposed in armed conflict and the coping mechanism of school heads on how they strategize that education will continue amidst armed conflict.

In order to accommodate the special circumstances brought on by armed war, school administrators may modify the curricula and schedules. To maintain educational continuity amid disturbances, this may entail changing lesson plans, including peace education or conflict resolution programs, and putting alternate teaching strategies into practice. School administrators must also put their personal wellbeing and resiliency first. They exercise self-care by asking for help from their peers or mentors, attending training sessions or workshops on stress management, and whenever they can, finding moments of reprieve or relaxation. School administrators must also put their personal wellbeing and resiliency first. They exercise self-care by talking to their peers or mentors for support, attending classes or workshops on stress management and self-care, and taking breaks (GCPEA).

Research Questions

This research specifically sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of school heads in schools of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate during armed conflict?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of the school heads in terms of learning continuity in Cawayan East District Division of Masbate during armed conflict?
3. What are the insights of school heads in schools of Cawayan East district of the Division of Masbate during armed conflict?

Methodology

The approach employed in this qualitative investigation is presented in this section. This covers the study's design and methodology, the researcher's role, the participants, data collection and analysis techniques, reliability and credibility, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The qualitative phenomenological design was the method used in this study for it explored the structures of consciousness in human experience. This is qualitative phenomenological since it found out the experiences, coping mechanism and insights of school heads assigned in the areas of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate S.Y. 2022-2023.

Phenomenology is an approach to study whereby the investigator ascertains the core of human experiences regarding a phenomenon based on participant descriptions (Creswell, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology also looks for meaning in appearances and determines essence by introspection and intuition regarding conscious acts of experience. These processes result in concepts, judgments, and understanding.

In phenomenological research, it is crucial to precisely explain the phenomenon while adhering to the facts and avoiding preconceived notions. Understanding social and psychological phenomena from the viewpoint of those experiencing them is the focus of the phenomenologist. Phenomenological research can employ a range of techniques, such as focus groups and interviews (Groenewald, 2004).

This is to find common meaning/s to the varying experiences of the participants, in this context of the public school heads of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate during armed conflict. A phenomenological description and analysis were used to reveal: the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of school heads in times of armed conflict.

Participants

In this study, the participants are the 4 school heads who were assigned to elementary and secondary schools in Cawayan East District, Division of Masbate for S.Y. 2022-2023.

Purposive sampling was used in identifying the participants to this study. Two public elementary school heads and two public secondary school heads were identified to be the participants who are assigned in the area. Purposive sampling was widely used and popular in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990; Palinkas, 2015). There were four school heads for in-depth interviews (IDI) using a semi-constructed questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

A formal acceptance of the letter of consent by the participants of this study was necessary to obtain their permission. They will be informed about the conduct of in-person interviews. Any in-cash or in-kind benefits for the participant was disclosed appropriately. The participants were told about the use of audio-recording devices. And the identities of the participants were treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Analysis

The transcripts of the interview were used directly in the translation, coding process, and data analysis leading to themes development. The researchers conducted open coding to identify: the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of school heads in times of armed conflict- as related to the participants' performance as educational leaders—how they experience armed conflict; and the rational coping mechanisms developed by the participants as educational leaders and significant insights in times of armed conflict. Direct quotations from the participants were included as supplementary evidence of the authenticity of the identified themes or categories.

Results

This part presents the experiences of four school heads in schools of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate. The responses were taken from an in-depth interview conducted which was anchored on the research questions raised in this study.

Following the in-depth interviews, a significant amount of qualitative data was collected, consolidated and made easier to handle and comprehend. The researchers looked over the data several times to get a feel for the responses and to rapidly identify the common responses given. The group responses were classified to look for themes. Data display was utilized to present the data in a structured and ordered manner. Data display is the arrangement of data so that the reader can deduce its meaning using matrices, charts, and graphs (Boyatzis, 1998). A careful analysis of which information should be removed and which crucial data should be included while interpreting the report was done. The reader was given enough information to understand the foundation for the interpretation, which in turn allowed the reader to understand the description (Polkinghorne, 1995; 2007). Ultimately, in order to validate the conclusions that were formulated, further rounds of data analysis and verification were conducted. The facts were connected to the theories and concepts selected in this study. The information interacted as conceptual categories and descriptive themes developed. These topics were developed so that they were all related to one another and made sense (Van Maanen, 1983).

What are the experiences of school heads in schools of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate during armed conflict?

The experiences of school heads assigned in areas where the incidence of armed conflict took place are accounted for as follows, grouped by main themes supported by the core ideas. ("SH" means school head; "1/2/3/4" means the number assigned to a respondent; and "F/M" means the gender.)

Before the incident took place, SH1F attended "a meeting with the BSP coordinator about the preparation for the upcoming Camp-Oral in the district regarding meals, and other matters." Whereas SH2M just arrived from the division office because he was "manag[ing] [a] team for provincial meet." And SH3F was "observing classes in the Senior High School when that happened." On the other hand, SH4F was quite incognizant of the matter for she could barely hear the commotion and was shocked to hear the news from parents.

Initial Response to Gunfire

These are the initial responses of the school heads after hearing gunfire:

SH1F: "When we heard the gunshot, we lay on the floor, the three of us in the office, and...when the gunshot stopped, I ran from one room to another. When there was a gunshot, I just lay on the floor and ran again when it stopped. One problem during that time was that our megaphone was low in battery, that is why I needed to [shout to] everyone...to secure the safety of the students and teachers."

SH2M: "I called [instantly] my DRRM coordinator and instructed [him] to proceed...and lock the gate.... I immediately proceeded to the guardhouse [and] stayed there with my OIC [and] DRRM coordinator. [Then] I [ordered] the DRRM coordinator to go back and [direct] the teacher[s] in the makeshift classroom[s] to transfer to the concrete classrooms."

SH3F: "...around 11 a.m., after my observation, while walking at the bridge, our guard...came running towards me and said "Ma'am, let's secure the children because there is [a military] encounter. [I was somehow relieved to know that] during that time the students had just entered in the classroom for their last period in the morning... Then, I asked two [school employees] to secure...children...[are] inside their classroom[s]."

SH4F: But outside the school, it's like they already knew. It seems like they heard something, but us at the school, we didn't hear anything.... It's like it didn't really affect us.... We really weren't scared."

Experience of Fear

Some school heads somehow did not feel grave fear when the incident happened.

According to SH1F, "during the incident, I [didn't] feel any fear for myself, because I [was] think[ing] [about] the safety of my teachers and students.... I felt fear [when] I went home...[when] I was watching a video posted on Facebook by the students, that's the time I felt sorry to myself. Because if you are in that situation, as a leader, I [was more worried...that there are naughty students [who would] to run [towards] the window to [watch the scene]. When we heard a bomb..., we [lay] on the floor automatically....[We used] two

cabinets...[to] the lock the door and windows.... The armed group...enter[ed] the school [premise for a while and left].

SH2M also related, "...I cannot describe the fear I feel during the incident because I focused on giving instruction...[Although]...I noticed that children are crying and the teachers looked pale, I need to overcome the fear that I feel during that time. [For instance]...I went to [a sobbing teacher and told] her to just calm down, [so that her kids would also calm down]. [I explained that...[w]e [were] far enough [from the place of] the incident, 100 – 200m away. On the other hand, I became angry to a teacher who panicked, so I explained again that our school have a concrete fence. I wanted my teachers to show courage so that their pupils may feel the same."

As regards SH3F, she said "I only [thought] that I have to secure the children, I [didn't] feel...fear. I roam[ed] around..., I went to the gate, [and] I guarded [it together with the guard and two school employees]." She added that she needed "presence of mind....When the children [were] already secured..., I open the sound system, announced about what happened, [and] told them the reason why I [had them on hold]."

Lastly, SH4F said "We're not scared because...we're not the ones being targeted, but those [armed rebel]. [They are public[ly] know[n]. They're just around the community." She added that they are familiar with the military and the police, and jokingly said that even a "second-grade kid" could identify an "undercover police" officer.

Chaotic Experience

SH1F stated, "the incident [lasted] for almost one hour. Gunshots [were intermittent]. There was an exchange of gunfire between the two groups. And then there was a bomb which was very loud. [A]ccording to the bomb squad, it was an improvise explosive device (IED) that hit and destroy the roof of one classroom. I didn't think any more about myself; I just cried when I arrived home because I realized how life-threatening it was. What if I was hit while I was running from one room to another? She also added, "actually after the incident, there were students who transferred to other places and even to Manila because of fear and trauma. Even some teachers sought for transfer of station, but we didn't really have a choice because we are here."

SH2M also revealed, "the most frightening [was the] intense crying by the students hearing the gun shots...[I]f it happened during recess time, I would not know if I could manage the crowd.... Another problem also was that there were parents who insisted to fetch their child home. I explained that the school is safer so they should stay...the gate was locked." Although he had a lot of other tasks to do, SH2M also stated that, it was timely that he was able to "discuss during a meeting with HRPTA about armed conflict."

According to SH3F, "...it was really scary.... [T]he army were running towards [here]...in Tomas Rivera, coming from Madbad. They [passed] by our school. [T]he children were scared to go out." She added that the children are already hungry, so she told them to "ask their parents to [come] pick them up.... [When] they were going out...our school, there was a checkpoint. So, all [had to] undergo the checkpoint."

Lastly, SH4F narrated, "The parents rushed to fetched their children, so I had to send them away. In a land area in front of the school, that's where the NPAs were. The kids were still crying. Teachers had to pull the curtains. A grade-4 pupil said 'Ma'am! I won't go to school anymore, I'm too scared.'"

Rational Response

Prior to the incident, SH2M stated, "we should be proactive.... Students, parents, and the community should be well-informed about security measures and the importance of safety. If they are well oriented of what to do..., they will be guided. It is different if you conduct orientation to the member of the community...compared to posting the policy the in the wall without proper dissemination and communication.... [For example], we have one gate policy, our school are enclosed to prevent children from going anywhere."

Yet during the incident, SH1F said, "I ensured that all classrooms were close and locked, and all students are inside in their classroom during the incident. We did not allow the release of students without their parents or guardians.... [O]ne hour later, the LGU and RHU personnel arrived because they receive a news that there are students who are wounded, but I explained that it was a fake news. There are students who fainted out of fear but they were attended to and brought to the hospital.

In relation, SH3F said, "I [commanded] total lock down of the school. The classrooms were locked then I hold them for one hour. I assessed the situation first if they can go home, then I informed the parents. So I gave the [Wi-Fi] password [so the students] could contact their parents. They cannot go out because they need to pay for Piso Wi-Fi.... After that, [the teachers and I] had our emergency meeting...about where will be the evacuation areas.... We [also] agreed about modular...mode of learning delivery."

"The following day," SH4F narrated, "...classes were suspended.... [Yet few] parents...came to school to fetch their children."

What coping mechanisms did you employ to maintain learning continuity at your school after the turmoil?

Learning Modality

"After the incident," SH1F narrated, "...we had a modular distance learning for a month...to continue the learning process.... I regularly contacted the PNP and the army if it was safe to go to school. We cannot risk our lives.... We had our work from home—all the school personnel, both the teaching and non-teaching staff.... We extended the suspension of classes because we want, before the

students go back to school, the fence is finished... With the help of parents and with permission from private owners, we cut all the trees in the backyard of the school because it serves as the meeting place of the armed group.... The central office conducted psychological first aid (PFA) to students and teachers.... They conducted assessment, debriefing, and activities intended for all.... As the classes resumed, I instructed the teachers to have...sharing of their experiences and other activities that can ease the pain and fear of the students.”

In relation, SH2M said “...the learning process should not be compromised..., so I instructed my teachers to provide answer sheets and activity sheets for the students to use so that we...could recycle the modules.... Learning continued after the incident through alternative delivery mode using modular distance learning.

In addition, SH3F “ke[pt] in touch with the DRR in the Division on what [to] do.” She added “...[the parents and I] had our meeting to agree [whether] we are going to have modular distance learning.”

Personal Well-being

SH1F related, “slowly my fear subsided; I made myself busy to forget those experiences. I diverted my attention to school reports and other tasks. I need to be busy because when I was not doing something, memories were coming back and people find me unconsciously weeping. Worse was that, the boarding house I was staying is just a block away from the shooting scene.”

SH2M also narrated, “[I] give time to heal.... It is needed for us to heal because...if you report to school, you would not [experience] the beauty of the school but the fear you felt during the incident.... How can you perform better if you have problem within yourself?... Self-healing is very important.”

Meanwhile, SH3F said, “I just told myself that [the feeling] will pass.... [I] still reported to the school: [I] worked hard there until evening; [I] even slept there. [It seems like there is still danger because] there were five drones [flying] over the school that evening.... [So, I] packed up all the documents, went to City and do our work there. I stayed in Girls Scout Office for how many days...to finish the liquidation [report]...for that quarter.”

On the other hand, SH4F admitted, “...I was just used to it because I grew up in a place like that...because my father was in the military. [B]efore I became a school head..., I was assigned to [a similar] area.”

Professional Life

SH2M expressed, “lucky are those who can cope-up easily.... [O]ur mental health coordinator...conducted a lot of activities that helped us and the children. We had a freedom wall to express our feelings like fears so that we can monitor it without judging them. You must guide [the teachers and students] and tell them that it is normal to have feelings of fear and to live with it.... [Y]ou must show empathy and sympathy....”

Relevant to this, SH3F said, “I monitored [the teachers] through group chat. I also assigned Department Heads to monitor their subordinates...and the school operation.... I [felt] really brave going back to school despite the fact that my colleagues are still afraid.... I accomplished my reporting duties to higher officials in the Division Office.”

In contrast, SH4F briefly stated, “[I] just continued on [with my work], as if nothing happened.”

What are the insights of school heads in schools of Cawayan East district of the Division of Masbate during armed conflict?

Lessons from Armed Conflict Experience

SH1F said, “we need to be strong at all times; we should stay vigilant because we do not know what will happen next. I have a “fighter” personality: my mind is set towards readiness and attentiveness.”

SH2M stated, “...we should have a great and deeper understanding about child protection policy regarding armed conflict because when it happens the most affected are the students.... [we] should never compromise the welfare of our students. This could lead to rational and fair decision-making.”

SH3F answered, “we should have contingency plan to know what we should do during [armed conflict]: how to lay down, where to hide, and how and where to evacuate. Let us always remember the learners.”

Actions Needed During Armed Conflict

When caught in the middle of an armed conflict, SH1F advised, “we need to relax during the incident and to stay focused on what is expected from us as leaders: to [make sure] the safety of all. Because once we lose our focus and our fear dominate us, then our teachers will do the same. With that, we cannot think of good decisions and give proper instructions to our colleagues.” She added, “stay focused and be strong [so as to] have a good decision for the welfare and safety of all, especially to the learners....” Then she regretfully said, “...if we have a radio during the incident...we could have managed the situation [and] communicate properly. Communication is a must, truly.... [I]t is really needed in an organization. SH1F also stated, “...actually [armed conflict drill] was added to our Earthquake drill....”

According to SH2M, “You should know protocols in handling incidents like [armed conflict].... [S]chool heads who are not well-versed to protocols and policies [find] difficulty in decision-making regarding [the] incident.... [K]nowledge [of policies] should [be disseminated to] the learners and parents.... Sometimes the problem [is] we...disregard those policies.... [F]or me, being transparent is not just about financial matters in the school but also about all programs and policies.... [T]he [whole] community should also know...so they can give their support.” He added, “always put on your top list priority the child protection policies. When you put that [in mind], you will properly manage the situation, such as armed conflict.... [You put premium on the] safety and security of the learners.... [T]ake our [learners] as our top priority we can get the ideal output.”

In relation, SH3F also suggested, “we should have a drill regarding armed conflict because we are already prepared for earthquake and fire drill but [not] for this incident.... [W]e should have food supply in case of emergency like this..., at least we can prepare foods for the students. One good thing is we have canteen, and there are canned goods but the problem is the rice. During the incident, we [could] let the vendors...bring food to the students instead of letting the students to go outside.”

Discussion

Table 1 shows the summary of coded responses and the emergent categories and themes.

Table 1. *The Summary of Coded Responses, Categories, and Themes.*

<i>Coded Responses</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Themes</i>
RQ1: Experiences of school heads during armed conflict RQ1.1 SH1F: When we heard the gunshot, we lay on the floor, and when the gunshot stopped, I ran from one room to another to secure the safety of the students and teachers SH2M: I called instantly my DRRM coordinator and instructed him to lock the gate to direct the teachers and learners in the makeshift classrooms to transfer to the concrete classrooms SH3F: I asked two school employees to make sure the children are inside their classrooms. SH1F: and when the gunshot stopped, I ran from one room to another to secure the safety of the students and teachers	Staying low physically Calling for help from DRRM coordinator Calling for help from other school employees	Initial Response to Gunfire
SH2M: direct the teachers and learners in the makeshift classrooms to transfer to the concrete classrooms	Securing the learners and teachers	
SH3F: make sure the children are inside their classrooms. RQ1.2 SH1F: During the incident, I didn't feel any fear for myself, because I was thinking about the safety of my teachers and students. I felt fear when I went home and watched a video about the event. SH2M: I cannot describe the fear I feel during the incident because I focused on giving instruction; I need to overcome the fear that I feel during that time. I wanted my teachers to show courage so that their pupils may feel the same. SH3F: I only thought that I have to secure the children, I didn't feel fear. I needed presence of mind. SH4F: We're not scared because we're not the ones being targeted; we are familiar with the police and the military.	Post-traumatic fear Courageous fear Attentive fear Complacent fear (oxymoron)	Experiences of Fear
RQ1.3 SH1F: I didn't think any more about myself; I just cried when I arrived home because I realized how life-threatening it was. What if I was hit while I was running from one room to another? SH2M: the most frightening was the intense crying by the students hearing the gun shots, but I explained that the school is safer so they should stay. There was a meeting with HRPTA about armed conflict after the event. SH3F: It was really scary; the children were scared to go out. All had to undergo the checkpoint. SH4F: The parents rushed to fetched their children, so I had to send them away. The kids were still crying. Teachers had to pull the curtains. A grade-4 pupil said 'Ma'am! I won't go to school anymore, I'm too scared.	Ambivalent feeling towards threat Staying rational despite chaos Still feeling fear despite the assurance of security The feeling that the school is not a safe zone anymore	Chaotic Experience



SH2M: We should be proactive. Students, parents, and the community should be well-informed about security measures and the importance of safety.	Proactive information-dissemination about safety and security	
SH1F: LGU and RHU personnel arrived because they receive a news that there are students who are wounded, but I explained that it was a fake news. There are students who fainted out of fear but they were attended to and brought to the hospital.	Combatting fake news	Rational Response
SH3F: I gave the Wi-Fi password so the students could contact their parents. They cannot go out because they need to pay for Piso Wi-Fi.	Sharing resources during emergency	
RQ2: Coping mechanisms of school heads after armed conflict RQ2.1		
SH1F: We had a modular distance learning for a month to continue the learning process. We cannot risk our lives. We had our work from home—all the school personnel, both the teaching and non-teaching staff	Modular Learning; Work-from-home	
SH2M: The learning process should not be compromised, so I instructed my teachers to provide answer sheets and activity sheets for the students to use so that we could recycle the modules. Learning continued after the incident through alternative delivery mode using modular distance learning	Modular Learning; Recycling modules	Learning Modality
SH3F: I kept in touch with the DRR in the Division on what to do. The parents and I had our meeting to agree whether we are going to have modular distance learning.	Modular Learning; Constant communication with officials and stakeholders	
RQ2.2		
SH1F: I made myself busy to forget those experiences. I diverted my attention to school reports and other tasks. I need to be busy because when I was not doing something, memories were coming back and people find me unconsciously weeping.	Getting busy;	
SH3F: I just told myself that the feeling will pass. I still reported to the school: I worked hard there until evening to finish the liquidation report for that quarter.	Making work (i.e. reports) as a diversion	Personal Well-being
SH2M: "I give time to heal. It is needed for us to heal. How can you perform better if you have problem within yourself?... Self-healing is very important.	Giving significance to self-healing	
SH4F: I was just used to it because I grew up in a place like that because my father was in the military. Before I became a school head, I was assigned to a similar area.	Getting used to armed conflict	
RQ2.3		
SH2M: Our mental health coordinator conducted a lot of activities that helped us and the children. We had a freedom wall to express our feelings like fears so that we can monitor it without judging them.	Monitoring and valuing mental health of co-workers	
SH3F: I monitored the teachers through group chat. I also assigned Department Heads to monitor their subordinates and the school operation.		Professional Life
SH2M: You must guide the teachers and students and tell them that it is normal to have feelings of fear and to live with it. You must show empathy and sympathy.	Showing empathy with co-workers	
SH3F: I felt really brave going back to school despite the fact that my colleagues are still afraid. I accomplished my reporting duties to higher officials in the Division Office.	Being brave as a school head	
SH4F: I just continued on with my work, as if nothing happened.		
RQ3: Insights of school heads during and after armed conflict RQ3.1		
SH1F: We need to be strong at all times; we should stay vigilant because we do not know what will happen next. I have a "fighter" personality: my mind is set towards readiness and attentiveness.	Fighter personality: being ready and attentive	Lessons from Armed Conflict Experience
SH2M: We should have a great and deeper understanding about child protection policy regarding armed conflict because when it happens the most affected are the students. We should never	Child protection policy awareness: being rational and fair	



<p>compromise the welfare of our students. This could lead to rational and fair decision-making.</p> <p>SH3F: We should have contingency plan to know what we should do during armed conflict: how to lay down, where to hide, and how and where to evacuate. Let us always remember the learners.</p> <p>RQ3.2</p> <p>SH1F: We need to relax during the incident and to stay focused on what is expected from us as leaders. Because once we lose our focus and our fear dominate us, then our teachers will do the same.</p> <p>SH1F: Communication is truly a must. It is really needed in an organization.</p> <p>SH2M: Knowledge of policies should be disseminated to the learners and parents. Being transparent is not just about financial matters in the school but also about all programs and policies.</p> <p>SH2M: “You should know protocols in handling incidents like armed conflict. When you put that in mind, you will properly manage the situation, such as armed conflict.</p> <p>SH2M: You put premium on the safety and security of the learners. Take our learners as our top priority we can get the ideal output.</p> <p>SH1F: Actually, armed conflict drill was added to our Earthquake drill.</p> <p>SH3F: We should have a drill regarding armed conflict.</p> <p>SH3F: We should have food supply in case of emergency like this, at least we can prepare foods for the students.</p>	<p>Contingency planning: remembering the learners</p> <p>Setting an example of a leader demeanor</p> <p>Proper and constant communication with stakeholders</p> <p>Knowing the protocols to manage the situation</p> <p>Prioritizing the learners</p> <p>Conducting armed conflict drill</p> <p>Providing for food supply</p>	<p>Actions needed during and after armed conflict</p>
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The experiences of school heads in schools of Cawayan East District Division of Masbate during armed conflict were varied. Their initial response to gunfire were: (1) staying low physically; (2) calling for help from DRRM coordinator; (3) calling for help from other school employees; and (4) securing the learners and teachers. There was a primal “save-yourself-first” tendency. Orlando, 2013 cited that teachers who are assigned in far flung areas tend to value prudence and alertness. There was also a feeling of helplessness that is why the school heads asked for help from their subordinates. They made sacrifices in order to carry out their duty as educators, and they are pleased to have contributed to their pupils' success. (Campos et.al, 2013). Yet despite all this yelling, there was the intention to direct and manage, especially in relation to the safety of the learners and teachers.

During the armed conflict, the school heads experienced fear in various kinds. One school head undergone post-traumatic fear. Another school head exhibited courageous fear. Also, one of the school heads showed attentive fear. And finally, a school head simply experienced a complacent fear, which is quite oxymoronic. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as a process of bouncing back from difficult experiences and adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress (APA.org 2014).

From the fear the school heads had felt arose the chaotic experience towards armed conflict. One school head had an ambivalent feeling towards threat. She wants to save other people yet she did not want to die. Another school head still felt fear despite the assurance of security. Also, there was a general feeling among school heads that the school is not a safe zone anymore. But despite the chaotic experience, one school head remained rational.

Rational response was all that was need to execute by the school heads. One of them said that, even before the armed conflict, there must be a proactive information-dissemination about safety and security inside and outside the school. A school head actually combatted the spread of fake news or misinformation. Lastly, one of the school heads practiced the sharing of resources during emergency cases. Bonanno et al. 2015, Community resilience expresses the interaction between individuals and their community and refers to the success of the community to provide for the needs of its members, and extent to which individuals are helped by their community.

Thus, to cope up with the distressing experience, school heads devised mechanisms to maintain psychological balance. In terms of learning modality, all the school heads opted for modular learning with various techniques such as work-from-home scheduling, recycling of modules, and constant communication with officials and stakeholders. In terms of their personal well-being, school heads tried different means such as getting busy and making work, i.e. accomplishing reports, as a diversion. One school head gave significance to self-healing. In contrast, one school head coped up with the situation by just getting used to it. At war times and under threats of terror individual resilience is positively predicted by a sense of coherence, well-being, and economic condition, and is negatively affected by a sense of danger and level of distress symptoms (Eshel and Kimhi 2016a).

As regards the professional life of the school heads, they valued as well as monitored the mental health of their co-workers. They showed empathy to their co-workers in that trying times. But the best thing they have demonstrated was being brave as school heads. As Cacioppo et al. (2011) define it as “the capacity to foster, engage in, and sustain positive relationships and to endure and recover from life stressors and social isolation.

Looking back at the experience of armed conflict, school heads learned some lessons which can be worthy of reflection. One school head said that a leader must show a “fighter” personality by being ready and attentive especially during those times of trouble. Yet another school head reiterated the importance of child protection policy awareness because this leads to being rational and fair when it comes to managing people during an armed conflict. Also, a school head emphasized contingency planning by, first and foremost, remembering the learning more than anything else. As what CARRI (2013) claims that resilience represents the community’s “capability to anticipate risk, limit impact, and bounce back rapidly through survival, adaptability, evolution, and growth in the face of turbulent change.

With regard to the actions necessary to show leadership during armed conflict, the school heads suggested: (1) setting an example of a leader’s demeanor; (2) proper and constant communication with stakeholders; (3) knowing the protocols to manage the situation; (4) prioritizing the learners; (5) conducting armed conflict drill; and (6) providing for food supply.

Conclusion

Based from the results of the interview and analysis of responses concerning the experience of school heads in Cawayan East District during armed conflict, the following conclusions were formulated. (1) The experiences of school heads in schools of Cawayan East District, Division of Masbate during armed conflict can be thematically described as: (a) initial response to gunfire; (b) experience of fear; (c) chaotic experience; and (d) rational response. (2) The coping mechanisms of the school heads in terms of learning continuity in Cawayan East District, Division of Masbate during armed conflict can be described thematically in relation to: (a) learning modality; (b) personal well-being; and (c) professional life. (3) The insights of school heads in schools of Cawayan East District, Division of Masbate during and after armed conflict can be presented as: (a) lessons learned from armed conflict experience; and (b) actions needed during and after armed conflict.

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