

Homelessness Caused By
Unemployment and Typhoon Aftermath

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Abstract

This paper will discuss how homelessness has been an ongoing issue for the people of Saipan. Many are unemployed and there are still residents recovering from the aftermath of both Typhoon Soudelor and Super Typhoon Yutu. The island with the highest unemployment rate in the Northern Marianas Islands is currently the island of Saipan. Surprisingly, many residents are not just unemployed, but homeless as well. Just when the island was finally recovering from the damages of Typhoon Soudelor, the Northern Marianas Islands was drastically hit again by Super Typhoon Yutu. The damages caused by this typhoon has brought a heavier burden on those who were still struggling and recovering from Typhoon Soudelor. Saipan's unemployment rate and the aftermaths of previous typhoons has greatly impacted the homelessness issue in our community.

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On October 24, 2018, a powerful storm made its way across the Pacific. The Northern Marianas Islands was hit by Super Typhoon Yutu. It has been recorded as the most intense storm to ever hit the Northern Marianas Islands, obtaining maximum sustained winds of 180 mph, making it equivalent to a Category 5 storm. This typhoon has made catastrophic impacts on the lives of everyone affected by the storm, leaving many devastated, hopeless, and even homeless. Homelessness has been an ongoing issue for the people of the Northern Marianas Islands. A handful of residents are still recovering from the aftermath of Typhoon Soudelor, which occurred in late 2015, and the recent Super Typhoon Yutu. In addition to that, many of our residents are unemployed, resulting with many families dealing with a delay in the recovery process due to financial issues and heavily relying on federal government assistance.

Three years prior to Super Typhoon Yutu, the island of Saipan was struck by Typhoon Soudelor. This typhoon was known as the third most intense tropical cyclone worldwide during that year. It had completely washed out the entire island of its agriculture, local businesses, and residential homes. According to the Annual Homeless Count which was conducted two years prior to Typhoon Yutu, there are approximately 672 homeless individuals and 257 homeless families on the island of Saipan alone (CNMI Homeless Coalition, 2017). As stated in their 2nd Annual Homeless Count, conducted a year after, the results of the survey found that there are over 130 homeless individuals in the island of Saipan alone. The islands of Tinian and Rota were not included in these surveys. Furthermore, research has shown that homeless individuals on island are unemployed due to being unable to work or not planning on working.

As stated by the Labor Force Participation Measures by Island and District, approximately 2,465 individuals residing in the island of Saipan are currently a part of the unemployed population (CNMI Department of Commerce, Central Statistics Division, 2018). Statistics show that the unemployment rate

for the island of Saipan was at 10.8% (2017). Unemployment has been a major factor of homelessness on our island for many years. Without a stable income, it can be difficult to keep a home. There are many individuals who seek support and assistance provided by the federal government as a result of this issue. However, federal government assistance may not always cover all financial expenses. In addition to that, not everyone may qualify to obtain full assistance. Some federal aid programs place individuals on a waiting list, due to the copious amount of homeless people in need. However, there are people who choose to be unemployed due to the amount of financial assistance available for low-income families and individuals.

Super Typhoon Yutu has been the most intense storm to ever hit the commonwealth. It has left about 800 homes damaged or completely destroyed. This resulted in over a thousand residents in homeless conditions. It had even left the island looking like a war zone. There was no electricity and running water for months. Plus there were very limited sources due to agricultural wipeouts, shutdowns of gas stations, and other outcomes due to the damage left by the storm. Not only were homes destroyed, the typhoon completely demolished many businesses and school facilities. The Northern Marianas Homeless Coalition conducted the Third Annual Point-in-Time Count last January. The current amount of homeless families and individuals on our island is still unknown. However, it is expected to be higher than the previous year due to the aftermath of the storm.

Homelessness has been an ongoing issue for the people of Saipan due to the fact that many are unemployed and there are still residents recovering from the aftermath of both Typhoon Soudelor and Super Typhoon Yutu. The island with the highest unemployment rate in the Northern Marianas Islands is Saipan. Surprisingly, many residents are not just unemployed, but homeless as well. Just when the island was finally recovering from the damages of Typhoon Soudelor, we were drastically hit again by Super Typhoon Yutu. The damages caused by this typhoon has brought a heavier burden on those who were still

struggling and recovering from Typhoon Soudelor. Saipan's unemployment rate and the aftermaths of previous typhoons has greatly impacted the homelessness issue we are currently facing in our community.

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