

Behind Closed Doors: A Narrative Reflection on Domestic Violence Against Women

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90300010>

Received: 13 February 2025; Accepted: 24 February 2025; Published: 26 March 2025

ABSTRACT

This research highlighted the lived experience of survivors of domestic violence and abuse, and its implication on their general well-being. This research uses a qualitative method, phenomenological design wherein six female adult participants, whom all are residing within the BARMM region, were purposively selected to share their lived experiences on violence against women through a face-to-face interview, guided by an interview questionnaire. A Semi-structured interview guide with probing questions, and conversational interview technique was used to gather the data and was transcribed and interpreted using a thematic analysis.

This research posed three statements of the problems; (a) the profile of the respondents, (b) their lived experiences, and (c) how they coped to the situation, during and after the domestic violence and abuse. Still, this research highlights that violence against women and their children is very much a relevant concern that is yet to be fully realized, especially in far-situated areas where government services is yet to be fully implemented. Given its relevance, more research is needed to better shed light and understanding on this matter. Through this research, it was discovered that among 6 participants, all of them had no stable income and was financially dependent on their partners prior to separation. It was also discovered that the respondents are also challenged throughout the separation process due to cultural implications. Also discovered in this study is the profound effect of witnessing domestic violence on the children of the victims. More importantly, this research discovered that despite being victims, all 6 participants grew to be more resilient both emotionally, mentally, financially and physically.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, BARMM, VAWC, Abused Women, Survivor.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and children is a pervasive problem that is perpetuated in the Filipino society. Violence referred to is not only limited to marital disputes between a husband and wife, but also violence among interrelationships in a family, a work environment, and a social group. Violence does not only mean physical abuse, but also includes verbal, mental, emotional, financial, sexual, and psychological abuse (Philippine Commission on Women, 2022).

The 1994 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined violence against women as “any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, with or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.”

Recorded statistics of intimate partner violence in the Philippines has shown to be in a decline for the past year (Olobia, 2023, Masongsong, 2023), yet the least decline aspect in domestic violence is sexual abuse. This phenomenal decline can fairly be attributed to the continuing effort of the government in its national campaign project to mitigate VAWC in the country (Philippine Commission on Women, 2024). As there are many contributing factors to the continued perpetration of violence against women, a primary motivator are

economic factors, wherein most victims come from marginalized or poor communities (Olobia, 2023, Masongsong, 2023).

In a patriarchal society existing in the Philippines, the vulnerabilities of women are exploited. There are at least 55.9 million women in the country, and one in every four Filipino women aged 15-49 is a victim of domestic violence (Philippine Commission on Women, 2022). At least 5,333 VAWC cases have been logged by June 2022 according to the Philippine National Police 2022 records (Abad, 2023), a statistic that is said to be underreported due to the pandemic lockdowns.

The effects of violence go beyond bruising and broken bones. Studies have shown that victims of domestic violence have a high predisposition to develop depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and low self-esteem (Bonomi et. Al, 2009). The implementation of basic human rights, and the preservation of welfare and safety of every woman and child, is constitutionalized and therefore indemnifiable.

Hence, this study is conceived to provide an understanding and give attention to the lived experiences of women (and their children) victims of domestic violence, and attempts to find out how these experience affects their physical, mental, emotional, financial, sexual, and psychological well-being.

The need to determine and discover facts that would be derived from this study is of consequential value. As families are a basic foundation of the society, a mother (and their children) is equally indispensable and important. Their experiences may affect their personality and mental well-being, and might lead to a dysfunctional life, which would be materialistically detrimental, on a personal and as well as societal level.

Statement of the Problem

The main focus of this study was to highlight the lived experiences of victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions

1. What are the common profile characteristics typical among victims of survivors of VAWC
2. What are the lived experiences of the research participants on domestic violence?
3. What compensatory behavior/s did the respondents developed as coping mechanism?

The study focused on the lived experiences, the effects on coping mechanisms, and personality of 6 willing and selected respondents who are domestic violence survivors, aged 18 to 51 within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Area. The study was conducted using in-depth interview among the domestic violence victims.

Significance of the Study

The result of this study will prove to be beneficial and of material value for the government agencies, humanitarian and socio-civic organizations, offices, and for the general Bangsamoro population. This study will serve as a testament to the current situations of the Bangsamoro women who are yet victims of domestic violence and abuse, and that the BARMM government may continue to further impose and implement the laws accordingly and efficaciously, and to prove that much effort is still needed to be made in pursuit of the resolution of this societal problem. This study is also a formal effort to supplement and support the projects, programs and activities it undertakes for the benefit of the Bangsamoro women and children, particularly in the topics of Domestic Violence and Women's Rights and Preservation.

Republic Act 9262

According to Republic Act 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004, VAW is "any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or

against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, with or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.” (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, 2004).

Despite the numerous efforts in crafting policies, and implementing laws pertaining to VAWC, according to the National Demographic Health Survey (2017), two out of five women who were victims of domestic violence and abuse, never sought help or any form of assistance from any authority. The prevailing reason would be the stigmatized perception in the Filipino society. Cases would go unreported do to the so-called “Culture of Silence” (Philippine Commission on Women, 2022). Victims are ashamed of relating their experiences to others, and some writes off the experience simply due to the lack of faith in this country’s justice system.

Although reports show a decline in VAWC reported cases as of today (Philippine Information Agency, 2023), the Philippine Commission on Women still argues that any violence is always unacceptable, and will never be justifiable at any cost. PCW believes that there are still unreported cases, as misinformation, and the lack of concrete information about the contents and provisions of VAW is still prevalent.

VAW Desk implementation

The implementation of internal rules and regulations of the Republic Act 9710, also known as The Magna Carta of Women, have set in place various safeguarding policies, and welfare preservation laws (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, 2009), one of which is the implementation of VAW (Violence against women) Desks. Even before the implementation of RA 9262, and RA 9710, it was already the duty of the Barangay Elected Officials to ensure the safety and welfare of their constituents (Philippine Information Agency, 2023), however for the sake of precise and timely delivery of public service, each barangay should have, within its premises a VAW Desk, and designated VAW officer (Philippine Commission on Women). The establishment and presence of a VAW desk in every barangay will serve as a frontline service provider, in efforts to provide immediate relief as well as reduce the gap of unreported cases.

Women and Children Protection Center

Given in the provisions of the law under the Anti-Violence against Women and Children Act of 2004, as well as the Magna Carta for Women Act of 2009, a criminal liability shall be enforced in the violators of the said provisions (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, 2004).

As such, The Philippine National Police have been tasked to process, initiate and conduct investigations, undertake surveillance, and capture perpetrators regarding the implementation of the VAWC laws (Women and Children Protection Center – PNP, 2023), and to cooperate with other relative agencies concerned and involved in such relevant matters. There are also VAW desks in every police station, as well as corresponding VAW desk officers.

Sociocultural Perspective

Gender-based Violence is indeed a sickness to humanity. In the modern society, Gender-based Violence is already considered on an international magnitude, even labeled as a ‘global pandemic’ (World Bank Group, 2023). This is because, for most society, gender-based violence is less of a priority. Safety from sexual exploitation is one of the most overlooked and neglected human rights that are often violated and unpunished (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

To societies that still adhere heavily on cultural and religious principles, Freedom is viewed more as a political privilege rather than a basic human right, hence, if a household or a family exists to accommodate only the needs of its people, a perceived privilege is no more than a second option (Rose, 2021). This way of living and

belief opens up an avenue where certain rights can be ignored, among those denied freedom is the safety for women and children.

Cultural beliefs and religion can be common avenues for gender-based violence. A question to such belief is considered to be sacrilegious and can be punished brutality without reservation such as in the situation of Extreme Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar, as well as highly conservative Islamic values in Sudan who persecutes women that challenges the status quo (Bradley, 2022).

Violent men are either cunning nor unreasonable, as most resort to masculinist rhetoric when confronted of their acts to justify their violence and exonerate themselves from whatever liabilities. Even some often threaten their own victims with legal actions (Fillod-Chabaud, 2016). Because of standing practices and beliefs, justice is perceived in a different manner in this certain situation and society.

The essence of Gender-based Violence is highly stigmatized up to a point it is almost considered as culturally tolerated. Most congress or parliaments around the world have legislated laws criminalizing various acts related to Intimate-partner violence, however adherence to these laws remain to be patronized due to the standing cultural implications that roots down to individual levels (Bradley, 2022).

A multicultural perspective should be adopted in viewing what intimate-partner violence is, as it is not limited to just religion, socioeconomic status, gender and gender dynamics, or race, but also contains cultural nuances that makes each gender-based violence case circumstantially unique (Bailey & Vieux, 2021).

Gap between theory and application

Of the feminists who contributes to the study of intimate partner violence, most of these researches are presented in a nuanced way. Rather than accepted as a separate, individual topic by itself, intimate partner violence is often interred under journal discussions of general violence. This manner of presentation becomes a reason why issues of gender-based violence is isolated rather than mainstreamed (Bjørnholt, 2021).

However, on circumstances that these studies are mainstreamed, Ironically, these particular researches are conducted with regards to feminist violence in general, both received and perpetrated, however, most of these researches fails to pinpoint particularly and dedicatedly study in-depth the main issues of intimate partner violence (Alcoff, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative, and phenomenological research to describe, record and assess the lived experiences, the influences on personality and coping mechanisms, of domestic violence in women and children.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao area, particularly in the island province of Sulu as it is the residential vicinity of the respondents.

Sulu (5.9749 N, 121.0335 E) was a province under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, with an estimated population of 1,000,000 people, the dominant ethnic tribe in the province are known as Tausug while the dominant practiced religion is Islam. Sulu is also considered as one of the poorest provinces in the province, with the driving economic trade as fishing and agriculture.

Profile of the Respondents

The participants of the study were domestic violence survivors, ages 18 to 51 years old who resides within the BARMM Region. Participants of the study were chosen by means of purposive selection, who are a (a) domestic violence survivor and (b) fits in the age category.

Participant 1 alias “Ofelia”, is a 37-year-old woman. She has 4 children. She had been married to her partner for at least 15 years, but has since been legally separated from his ex-husband for at least 2 years to date of this research. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, however her residence is somewhere around Magelco, Awang, Datu Odin Sinsuat. Her highest educational attainment is College graduate, with a degree in education. “Ofelia” is currently unemployed, which makes her monthly income unstable.

Participant 2 alias “Leng”, is a 38-year-old woman. She has 2 children. She had been married to her partner for at least 13 years. The legal document pertaining to their separation is still in the process of being certified. She has since been separated from her husband for at least 2 years, although parental circumstances dictates that sometimes her husband lives with them in the same household. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, and her residence is somewhere around Nurul Islam Compound, KM2, Brgy. Kajatian, Indanan, Sulu. Her highest educational attainment is College graduate, with a degree in education. “Leng” has no permanent and sustainable job except for occasional online selling, her monthly income cannot be fairly determined.

Participant 3 alias “Ganso”, is a 34-year-old woman. She has 6 children. She had been married to her partner for at 13 years, but has since been legally separated from his ex-husband for at least 2 years to date of this research. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, and her address is somewhere around in Brgy. Kajatian, Indanan, Sulu, refusing to disclose her exact residence. Her highest educational attainment is High school graduate from the old curriculum before K12. A notable distinction, “Ganso” is a recovering patient of a mental/nervous breakdown, an exact diagnosis cannot be ascertained due to the lack of a psychologist or psychiatrist in the Sulu province as well as lack of financial means to admit her to an institution. Because of her condition, she is dependent on the care of her family.

Participant 4 alias “Mona”, is a 28-year-old woman. She has 1 child. She had been married to her partner for only 2 years, but has since been legally separated from his ex-husband for at least 4 years to date of this research. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, and her residence is somewhere around Hji Hassiman Subdivision, KM2, Brgy. Kajatian, Indanan, Sulu. Her highest educational attainment is College undergraduate, meaning she is still studying in college. “Mona” has no job, and is dependent on her parents for sustenance for both herself and her son. A notable distinction, “Mona” is the youngest participant of this study, as well as the least amounts of years married to their partner.

Participant 5 alias “Baluan”, is a 51-year-old woman. She has 8 children. She had been married to her partner for almost 40 years, but has since been legally separated from his ex-husband for at least 4 years to date of this research. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, and her residence is somewhere around Brgy. Kajatian, Indanan, Sulu. Her highest educational attainment is elementary level, only reaching up to 2nd grade. A notable distinction, “Baluan” was a product of early marriage, a common Tausug custom during her time. She is also the older participant in this study, and has the highest amounts of years married to their partner, and the highest number of children. “Baluan” is a laundry maid, with her income fairly undeterminable.

Lastly, Participant 6 alias “Sawadjaan”, is a 48-year-old woman. She has 4 children. She had been married to her partner for at least 20 years. Legally they are separated after having executed a contract of separation, although parental circumstances dictates that her husband lives with her in the same household. Her ethnic tribe is Tausug, and her residence is somewhere around KM2, Brgy. Kajatian, Indanan, Sulu. Her highest educational attainment is High school graduate. “Sawadjaan” is currently unemployed, which makes her monthly income unstable and undeterminable.

The selection of these participants was made in coordination with the Bangsamoro Women Council Sulu, a Local Government Agency Unit that oversees the rescue and rehabilitation of domestic violence victims in the province of Sulu.

Research Instruments

The researcher used participant interview in-person, a conversational interview technique. a 19-question interview guide was purposively made to address the research problems, and was used to guide the interview

and derive answers from the participants. The interview questions were semi-structured where main questions were posed and probing questions were used to further examine and supplement the participant responses.

Audio recordings and photo-documentation was taken, which was consented by the respondent. After the interview, a full transcription was made out of the gathered interview statements, which was then analyzed thematically.

Data Gathering Procedure

An approval to conduct the study from the Office of the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, Cotabato State University is required. After its procurement, the researchers established contact with representatives from the Office of the Bangsamoro Women's Council, Ministry of Social Services and Development – BARMM, and Ministry of Interior and Local Government – BARMM.

A letter of request was also sent to the Local Government Unit in-charge of the prospected area, as well to any other relevant authorities that requires their permission to allow the researcher to conduct an interview in the area.

Proper documentation was secured, the researcher strictly ensured than the individuals signed an informed consent to research participation, which ensured that any legal and ethical requirement was met, on the end of the researcher and the respondents. The researcher then commenced the interview sequenced by interview guide questions. The researcher recorded the gathered data via voice and/or video recording, which was used to come up with a reliable result. All gathered data is considered as sensitive materials; hence the confidentiality of the case/s is of utmost importance.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed during the course of this study, and assurance of greatest confidentiality was expressed to the participants. The researcher made sure of the confidentiality of the data gathered, and participant identity were kept secret by using aliases.

Before the conduct of the interview proper, the researcher explained what the study was about, and as well as the rights of the participants to refuse answering if uncomfortable doing so, the informed consent form was explained, and the request for their cooperation.

No compulsion was forced on all participants, and all of their answers are given out of their own free will, with utmost respect to their privacy. For the purpose of privacy and utmost confidentiality, participants were not asked of their identities and were given code names for clarity.

Analysis of Data

The data collected and recorded were presented in a narrative discussion, including the interviewee opinions, and researcher inferential knowledge and observation. The data gathered was presented efficaciously and reliably. The gathered recordings were analyzed and transcribed into a narrative transcription. Using thematic analysis and themes, narrative analysis of responses and text analysis were used to derive a result.

RESULTS

Lived Experiences of the Participants

Theme 1 LOSS OF CONTACT WITH EX-HUSBAND

To examine the experiences and situation in regard to communication, participants are asked the status and nature of their communication with their ex-partners.

When asked if her ex-husband still has contact with her after their separation, one participant states on the record that she has no established contact with her ex-husband since the day of their separation.

“Not anymore, no more. Maybe with the cellphone of my children, he calls them directly, but (to me), no more. Maybe he accepted it already. I have spent 15 years in sacrifice, but he has some other attitude. He was never supportive. . . it was hard, but I endured him so much. I was pushed to my limits.”

Another participant stated:

“I have not talked to him ever since. I don’t give him any attention even though he wants to talk to me.”

This is a recurring scene among all six participants, having no contact with their previous partners except on the unavoidable incidental occasions of communicating due to parental obligations to their children. The foundation of a relationship is communication, (McDermott, 2024), hence a situation in which communication does not form as an integral part of the relationship is bound to be challenging.

It is established at some point that the participants were once in an emotional relationship with their partners, and at times, just like strong emotions like pain are not easily forgotten, strong emotions such as love reacts the same way (Middle, 2023). It is almost impossible to suddenly wake up one day and void oneself of all feelings they have been experiencing for a long time. Hence, because of these lingering emotions, some victims may even be tempted to contact their abusers in order to chase the fleeting euphoria (Baberi, 2024).

Still, victims may decide to cut out altogether their abusers from their lives entirely (Fagan, 2024). It is only natural, considering it is natural for a person to want to forget horrible memories, including the memory of the times they were abused (Morales-Brown, 2023). In that manner, it is only natural that victims of domestic violence and abuse choose to cease communications with their ex-partners.

Theme 2 DEPRIVATION OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND MONEY

The participants of the study have highlighted their abusive experiences concerning having little to no financial sustenance. The following statements given by the participants during the interviews showed the kinds of struggles they have faced. One participant stated:

“We do not have contact with each other, not anymore. It has almost been two years already. He does not even send any form of sustenance for his kid, none. He has no love for his child.”

Another participant stated:

“It lasted for 5 months, successively, not even a single Peso did he ever give, that is one (of our problems), every time I remember it, it’s too much. . . he did not have any pity, not even for his children.”

Another participant also added:

“But whenever we have disagreements, he confiscates the money I save, it hurts. . . there are times that he would give me money this month, then the other he gives nothing, it’s as if he has some sickness to his mind, it’s all according to his whimsy. . . so not stable.”

The societal standard, and as evidenced, by default, men earn more than women does (Greenwood & Greenwood, 2024), so naturally, it is expected that men are the primary provider in a typical family set-up (Parker, 2024). Despite being considered as a provider for their children’s sustenance, the absenteeism of these ex-husbands in their financial responsibility is also considered as an offense (Duran & Duran-Schulze, 2024).

The notion of men providing for their families is a product of social expectation, and not a legal obligation. Considering the Philippine Constitution, there is a suggestion for the payment of child support, however there are no laws yet that penalized the abandonment of payment (Cervantes, 2022). Because of this, as it is

evidenced in this study, abusive husbands have no second thoughts when depriving their wives and family any means of financial sustenance, since it is not a crime under the law.

Theme 3 GETTING HURT PHYSICALLY

To highlight the physical abuse experienced by the participants, they were asked what particular experiences they have had so far. All of the six participants of this study shared in their interviews that they suffered physically due to the maltreatment of their partners.

Subtheme 3.1 Fist and Open-hand Assault

At the very basic, all participants of this research have been physically beaten. Their partners either used an open-hand assault on their person, or punches with a closed fist. One participant stated:

“Last July, I have lost consciousness. I suddenly fainted because he punched me here [points to the back of her head], and this part right here got cut [points to her right brow], . . . not even medicine, I could not drink. I could only lie down and cry. I could not even move; I could not eat.”

Another participant added:

“One, he chased after me [to beat me up]. Even it was in public, and even after all the people stared at us. Even my father-in-law, he beat me up once.”

Another participant also added:

“Yes, he really stalks me. He beats me up wherever we come in contact, even in front of a crowd. He would drag me, slap me, kick me.”

Subtheme 3.2 Assault with a Weapon

An unwanted form of escalation is when beating evolves with the use of common household objects that when utilized as a weapon, or with intention of assault, could also cause serious bodily harm. One participant stated:

“To make the story short, whenever he comes home from fishing, we drink coffee together. I was already drinking when he got home, so I beckoned him to join me. He instead called his other mistress, that is why I stood up to scooch over for some space, I brought my coffee with me, then out of the sudden he thrown a mug at me.”

Another participant stated:

“I asked him to buy me some laundry soap for the cloth diapers, he got irritated because he said he was playing basketball outside, so much was his anger that he took a bolo knife and aimed it high at me, he tried to stab me with it but it got stuck by our wall. Just a small difference, and it would have been my neck that got struck.”

Another participant also stated:

“One time, he hit me with a piece of wood. He suddenly got up, all angry, and he then have beaten me [with the wood].”

Subtheme 3.3 Being Physically Restraint

Getting restraint physically means being prevented from moving, or going out of the house, which participants have experienced during their marriage. One participant stated:

“It came to a point he chained me down [she stroked her hips] but it didn’t last long, just for a whole day. He does not like letting me go outside the house, he wants that I am always in his sight.”

Another participant also stated:

“Yes, he always terrorizes me. I am fearful of going out. He tried to tie me down once, with a nylon string [participant smiles], I only get out of the house if I truly force myself to escape.”

The fundamental hallmark and traditional definition of domestic violence, and as perceived by the society starts with physical abuse (NCADV | National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.). Many statistics shows that the most common form of domestic violence is physical beatings (Kippert, 2023).

Physical beatings are the most documented kind of abuse in surveys on domestic violence against women, even according to National Demographic and Health Survey (2022), at least 40% of the recorded cases involved physical beat-downs. It is not surprising that men would resort to use their fists over women, biologically, men are hotwired by nature to be stronger and faster than women are, hence it is easier for them to overpower a woman, especially one that is emotionally, mentally, and even physically exhausted and abused.

It is in the instinctive nature of men to be violent (Strickland, 2024), hence it is not surprising in particular to this study that the husbands of the participants are capable of outburst of aggression and violence.

Theme 4 ATTEMPTING TO FIGHT BACK

To highlight the lived experiences of the participants, they shared throughout the interview their experiences on defending themselves. The participants of this research at some point during their abuse, struggled and fought against their ex-husbands. One participant stated:

“Yes! I fight back. I did not allow myself to be unlucky, I grabbed from him a small blade that he always keeps in his person . . . it was not my intention to hurt him . . . but he tried to jump me, that is why he got cut by it.”

Another participant stated:

“I realized that he can actually afford to kill me. He lifted me up and then slammed me down to the floor, that is when I punched him back. I fought back now.”

Another participant also stated:

“But me, my faith is strong. It’s only when I really am at my limit from his beatings, that’s only when I fight back.”

Another participant also stated:

“I was carrying my baby. . . when I stood up, I kicked him in his knees, and then we wrestled [and punched], I was full of bruises that day.”

Some women who are victims of domestic violence, feels cornered or fed up, decides to fight back against their abusers (Oklahoman, 2023). Most woman are scared of fighting back because of the physical difference between themselves and their partners (Strickland, 2024), and in some instances, cultural perspective and beliefs enshrines the supremacy of the husband over his wife (Bailey & Vieux, 2021).

Regardless, there is a natural fight-or-flight instinct within our brains, and victims may finally decide its fight response out of means such as desperation, or even fear (Katz, 2022). Victims makes the decision to finally take control of their own situation and decides to do something about it.

Theme 5 GETTING ABUSED EMOTIONALLY

Violence against women does not stop at physical violence. To highlight the emotional experiences of the participants, they were asked to share their experiences concerning emotional abuse.

Subtheme 5.1 Accusations of Infidelity

Marital infidelity is considered as a type of psychological violence (PIO, 2023). In common instances where a man would cheat on his wife, for the six participants of this research, it was the other way around, being accused of infidelity, one participant stated:

“He shames me and accuses me of infidelity. I take care of my dignity, but sometimes the insults with his accusations are too much. All I want was to be wooed, but he flips the narrative and suddenly I am the one accused of having cheated.”

Another participant stated:

“. . . Not really, but he does threaten me. He is too hurtful with his words. He shames me, telling me that I am unfaithful with another man.”

Another participant also stated:

“In his thoughts, he thinks I am having an affair. I tell him, if it was true, then why would I suffer staying with him. . . would I be cheating? Really, at this age?”

Subtheme 5.2 Subjection to Public Humiliation

One of the Salient Feature of the VAWC Law of 2004 is the protection for women and children against humiliation and ridicule in public (RA 9262: The Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, n.d.). The participants of this study had experienced different ways of being publicly humiliated. One participant stated:

“Yes, he really stalks me. He beats me up wherever we come in contact, even in front of a crowd. He would drag me, slap me, kick me. . . Yes. I really feel ashamed. . . the people would flock around us to watch. . . I feel ashamed.”

In the situation of another participant, she was forced to endure the abuse of her husband because she was accused of infidelity, if she decided to leave him, it would make her look more guilty, which is exacerbated by common cultural beliefs in her community. The participant stated:

“What I want is for him to divorce me, but my uncle said if I did that, I would be placed in more shame, because people would think that the accusations against me are true.”

Subtheme 5.3 Assault on Emotions

Domestic violence cases are emotionally charged situations. All of the participants of this study consider their experiences highly emotional, and often borders on their partners using their own emotions to manipulate them or hold leverage against them.

Another participant stated:

“. . . I love him more than he loves me, . . . but sometimes the insults with his accusations are too much. All I want was to be wooed, but he flips the narrative and suddenly I am the one accused of having cheated.”

Emotional Abuse is one form of violence that is recognized and sanctioned under the VAWC Law. It is common among cases of domestic violence that a perpetrator exerts harmful and undue influence upon a victim through their emotions (United Nations, n.d).

Emotional Abuse is not as obvious as physical abuse, since it is something that can be seen outright by anybody, hence it is easier to hide since it does not necessarily leave any kind of cuts or bruising. Studies have implied that the Emotional abused, may lead to psychological afflictions, and even physical afflictions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, n.d.)

Theme 6 LACK OF SUSTAINABLE INCOME

Examining further deep into this study, interviews with the participants revealed that all of them had no sustainable work, had no stable income, and no determinable monthly income.

A Common denominator among six participants of this study is all of them are unemployed, and could not source a stable financial income. According to Francis, 2024, after a divorce or separation, the standards of living for both the man and woman substantially decrease, however the percentage of decrease of a woman compared to a man is figuratively higher. This is particularly evident in this research, since all of the participants were dependent on their partner's contribution prior to the separation. The lack of means to secure a stable job result to unstable income.

Additionally, because of the evident pay gap (Greenwood & Greenwood, 2024), a woman out of an abusive relationship but is now burdened with the responsibility of taking care of children besides herself challenges the odds, given that most of the high-paying jobs, if not good-paying jobs are reserved, if not given to men, earning almost meagerly.

Theme 7 MATERNAL CONCERNS OVER CHILD WELFARE

To highlight some of their concerns during their relationship, it was revealed through the interviews that one of the major concerns they have had was the welfare of their children over the course of their struggle.

According to one participant, she learned to become distrustful and wary of her ex-husband, especially when her children is staying on the side of their father. The participant stated:

“Before I sent them to their father, I briefed them on what to do like ‘you, don’t take a bath naked when your father is in the house, if you can, rather don’t take a bath, wait for him to go somewhere else before you do so’, and to my son I say ‘you, if its already 5pm . . . you already know what time to go home, don’t stay out too late . . . if your father asks you to buy him cigarettes, say no, and if he forces you, tell me. . .”

With one particular situation of a participant, her child witnesses her father beat her, so the mother decided to send her daughter away to their grandmother to shield her from further harm. This decision however, only seemingly exacerbated the stress of the child. The participant stated:

“One time, I had a fight [with my husband], I sent them [my children] to my mother in Zamboanga City, but I was forced to follow them right after immediately to fetch them. My daughter told me “Whenever I see your photos, I sometimes shout [out of fear], and I keep on crying over here. I am bothered for you Mother; I miss you so much. Father might beat you up again. . . I can’t breathe; I can’t eat.”

Another participant also stated:

“I did not think of anything else. I only thought of our children, as long as I can still take care of them, I will endure [everything] for the sake of my children.”

Appropriate parental instinct would influence a parent to be concerned for their children witnessing their parent's disagreements, and to violent extent, domestic violence. All of the six participants during their interviews suggests concerns over the welfare of their children after the culmination of incident.

As much as it is proactive to say that children learn to cope positively with the situation (Winfield et al, 2023), some children fail to recover from the shock and other negative emotions after witnessing domestic violence (Plumptre, 2023), hence the concern of the parents is well-situated by context. Still, maternal instinct may

overcome any fear of abuse for themselves, out of pure love and concern of a mother for her children (Institute for Family Studies & Whiting, 2016).

Theme 8 WORRIES OF BEING ABUSED AGAIN

To understand the experience of the participants, they were asked what were some of the worries they have had, and during the course of interviews, it was discovered that one of their major worries was being subjected to repeated abuse over and over again.

During the interview, a participant commented that she would choose not to remarry. Her reason is the same as to why she decided to endure her husband for 15 years – she loves him, but at least not enough to allow him to continue his abuse on her, hinting her concerns on the possibility of relapse or recidivism on violent outburst. The participant stated:

“For now, no more. It’s hard, but rather than for us to stay toxic together, the relationship is gone, it’s not healthy, and the children are victims, I feel pity . . . I love him more than he loves me.”

In most domestic violence cases, the incident of abuse may happen on more than one occasion, before the victim would decide for a marital divorce or separation. Among other reasons why this practice is tolerated by victims is the hope that their abusers would change (Gregory et al., 2022). The rate of recidivism in domestic abuse cases are concerningly high (Walden University & Payne, 2017), and it is evidenced that because of familiarity with a victim, abuse is more accessibly dealt, increasing the opportunities for it to be committed frequently.

Theme 9 IMPACT OF EVENTS ON MENTAL HEALTH

During the course of interviews, it was discovered that all of the participants underwent serious physical and emotional trauma that had left an impression on their mental health. More importantly, this had subliminal influences on their behaviors.

One participant stated that although he could not hurt her physically anymore, she took a protection order against him as a way of precaution. The participant stated:

“He could not hurt me physically anymore; I had to secure a protection order against him for myself as a way to protect myself. Nobody could say for sure if something bad would happen to me or what.”

Another participant stated:

“I don’t talk to him anymore. I don’t even give him any attention even if he wants to talk to me. I can never forget the things he did to me; those can never go away. My heart has already grown cold.”

Another participant also stated:

“I always feel envious when I see other husbands supportive of their wife. I told him that indeed he is different [from all other men].”

Victims who survive marital disputes and domestic violence experiences changes in their personalities, which may vary in intensity, depending on the degree of abuse they endured, as well as the rate of recovery they have. Needless to say, most of the women who survives categorically describes themselves as “sad, apathetic, lonely, angry, quarrelsome and less sociable” (Avdibegovic et al., 2017).

Theme 10 EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

To understand the extent of effect of domestic violence on their children, the participants were asked what were some of the observed and perceived changes their children had after experiencing or witnessing the domestic violence they endure, the participants answered different effect that were observed on their children.

The daughter of one participant is objectively the most severe case in this study. The daughter was already aware of the abuse, and of the fact that it is not something that is good. The participant stated:

“. . . My daughter told me “Whenever I see your photos, I sometimes shout [out of fear], and I keep on crying over here. I am bothered for you Mother; I miss you so much. Father might beat you up again. . . I can’t breathe; I can’t eat. When my daughter finally reunited with me, she does not even get out of her room. She was scared she might get beaten up, even having conversations with her scares her. I thought to myself, it’s as if she developed some sort of phobia or trauma. Now, I noticed she starts to answer back, sometimes a bit aggressive even, so I try to accommodate to her.”

Another participant also stated:

“I think my son got traumatized. Even just a little, I know he remembers some of what happened, and he was already conscious enough to remember. He does not even want to look at his father’s photo.”

Another participant stated:

“Our children asked him if he had forgotten that they almost died because of his abuse and maltreatment before . . . some of my children never forgave him, for them, they could never forget the things they have suffered from their father.”

In every study of domestic violence on women, it is an indispensable and dismaying fact that children become collateral victims of this violent affair (DeKeseredy et al, 2017). As evidenced in this research, all of the children of the participants were negatively affected by the abuse they have witnessed.

Studies of similar nature to this study has also discovered that children are often overlooked as equal victims as their parent in a marital dispute that involves violence (Sohrabji, 2023). It should be implied that children are the main casualty of a fight, especially the young ones, since the lack of maturity on their part would make comprehending and understanding the situation virtually confusing.

Coping Mechanisms of Survivors

During and after the phases of abuse, all participants of this study had developed coping mechanisms commonly seen on domestic abuse survivors. These are psychological displacement, social avoidance and distancing, psychological regression, mild paranoia, a heightened sense of distrust, and an intensified feeling of religiosity and faith.

Theme 10 COPING MECHANISMS

To highlight their experiences, participants were asked what were the things they did in order to cope up to the stressful situation. This study revealed that all of the participants coped uniquely in comparison to each other.

Subtheme 14.1: Displacement

Displacement means taking up the negative charge in one’s mind and channeling it into another form of expression that is calmer and peaceful.

One participant shared during her interview that she used to maintain a diary where she could write there her feelings. It was her own way of “processing everything” she was going through while another participant shared during her interview that instead of gossiping with other people and ranting her heartaches, she instead communicates with her own mother or her sisters.

Subtheme 14.2: Avoidance

Most people avoid the things and situations that causes them hurt, or make them uncomfortable as a way of easing one’s mind. One participant relates in her interview that she went full no-contact with her partner, in

hopes of leaving her experiences in the past. Another participant relocated into a new residence, the place unbeknownst to her husband and husband's family to this date.

The participant stated:

"I now live by the province. I went as far away as possible from my husband and his family."

One participant shared that she started to just be silent about the situation, and prefers not to talk about it, saying she does not like conflicts, quoting:

"It has been so long since I last saw him. The last time we saw each other as at the barangay, so around 2 years ago already. Sometimes, I see him across the street, but I choose to ignore him and go the other way instead."

Another participant stated:

"I don't like being approached by him."

Subtheme 14.3: Regression and Denial

In order to cope with the negative and nightmarish experiences, one participant simply choose to pretend and try to forget that those things have ever happened. The participant stated:

"[Our story] its really long, if I chose to retell it all, its too long, but I try to forget all of it instead."

Another participant also added:

"Yes, but I choose not to feel, I try to forget all of it. I was thinking I don't want to be blamed [if I ever fought back]."

When asked by her siblings, one participant would simply deny the fact of the abuse. The participant stated:

"It's not just a couple of times did he ever beat me, but I am tough. Yes, even when my own siblings ask me where did I got my bruises, I keep on telling them 'I slipped and fell'."

In some instances, the victim denies the fact that their partner is an abuser, such as in the instance of one participant:

"I confronted his mistress and told her my husband was not like this when she was still out of the picture, but when she came, my husband was now more aggressive than I ever was."

One participant used to deny the fact of her abuse, and reason's out why she had cuts and bruises on her body. The participant stated:

"I was full of bruises that day. My sister told me, I eat punches for breakfast. Sometimes, my parents witness what happen to me, but they choose to turn a blind eye instead anyway."

Subtheme 14.4: Paranoia

In some cases of domestic violence, victims often have to survive the burden of developing PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Staff, 2023). The participants of this research, at some point, developed an overly-sensitive caution that would mirror what is considered as being paranoid. One participant stated:

"I cannot even sleep, I watch him very closely because he used to threaten me, he tells me 'Remember this, I will kill you first before you could ever escape me'."

Another participant stated:

“That is why I decided to leave him for good. I told myself, if this continued, I will lose my mind, and nobody would take care of my children if ever that happened.”

Subtheme 14.5: Silent Suffering

Some victims of domestic abuse, for whatever personal reasons conceive, prefers to endure the ordeals and suffer in silence (Team, 2023). In domestic violence, “silence means yes” does not apply in any shape, form, or interpretation. One participant stated:

“But I chose to ignore it, just for the sake of my children, especially for the sake of my sanity, because if something bad happened to me, it’s my children that would suffer most. That was what’s on my mind.”

Another participant stated:

“I kept it [my problems] to myself, I don’t tell anything to anybody.”

Subtheme 14.6: Religiosity

Among six participants, all of them in their interviews implied that one way of coping up to the situation is by having faith in God, which gives them patience and strength. One participant stated:

“I am lucky I have great patience. I stood firm with my faith for the Lord.”

Another participant stated:

“I instead chose to hold on to my faith [in God], and to trust my mother and my other sisters.”

Subtheme 14.7: Socially Distancing

Some victims of domestic violence may choose to be reclusive from the public, evidence by the statements of the participants of this study. One participant stated:

“When we separated, I grew comfortable staying at home with my kids, rather than go and hang out with my friends. . . personally, I would rather spend time with my mother or my sisters instead.”

Due to stress and danger, and the wanting of self-preservation, the human mind consciously finds means to adapt to the stressful situations, hence coping mechanisms develop throughout their ordeals (Algorani & Gupta, 2023).

Although having coping mechanism by itself may be considered as a footstone on where to start the healing process, it is still implied that women who are domestic violence victims should still be closely supported despite the virtual appearance of them seemingly “coping up” to the situation (Yusof et al., 2021). Women empowerment and reminding them of their rights in order to promote self-realization is one way to enforce a good coping mechanism (Yusof et al., 2021).

DISCUSSIONS

Implication of the Study

It is within human nature for a person to yearn for a partner, and to eventually settle down and have their own families. It is unfortunate however that not all marriages are successful, and some partnerships turn out to be abusive and detrimental to one’s general well-being.

First, although violence against women spans throughout different society, cultural implications had a profound influence on how these cases are treated by their respective society. All of this research’s participants belong to a conservative, traditional, and Islam-dominated denomination and culture. This culture places value

on personal dignity (Ozturk, 2022), leading to a reason why these instances, instead of being mainstreamed for public awareness, are settled amicably to save face (Brossard, 2015). It has been implied through various related literatures that some cultures endorse a higher tolerance for violence against spouses (Ozturk, 2022, Rose, J. 2021). This is one of the influences why women, including those participants in this study, are hesitant to voice out their concerns, because of fear for public persecution and judgement (Smith, 2024). Thankfully, the participants of this study are one of the commendable women who decides that enough is enough.

Second, economic and financial circumstances have an undeniable impact on the choices available for women seeking for reparations. Because in a traditional perspective, it is the men who are the sole providers and breadwinners of a family (Greenwood & Greenwood, 2024, Parker, 2024), and women is reduced to housewives to take care of the kids. This is the reason why women have no choice but to tolerate their partner's abuse, because of the lack of means to sustain themselves if they decide to leave the relationship for their own sake (Bieber, 2023, Greenwood & Greenwood, 2024).

Third, the legal system held in place to protect the welfare of women and children is not imposed religiously and in a way that it should be imposed. According to Republic Act 9262, any person who is accused and proven guilty of Violence against women is ought to be sent to jail, without any recourse (Manila Bulletin, 2024). Most commonly, agencies tasked with enforcing this law would offer the victims if it could be settled amicably (Bautista, 2021), which is frowned upon by some advocates of the VAWC law today. A woman who is a victim is highly emotional, and offering her a compromise might influence her decision, because out of her love for her partner, she would forgo the charges.

This has a serious implication, because related studies show that partners who had encounter the law, and seemingly suffered no real consequences, are more empowered to become recidivists, and would start a whole cycle of abuse with women (Brossard, 2015). This is one reason why compromise is not a suggested solution. Unfortunately, not all agency officers are up to standard, which brings us to our next implication (Manila Bulletin, 2024).

Fourth, one reason as to why there is still violence against women in the country despite having clear laws against it is because of the lack of qualified and compassionate officers to enforce the law (Martinez, 2020, Lally, Tully & Samaniego, 2019). In other progressive countries, doctors and nurses who suspect that a woman's injury is due to domestic violence is obligated to notify the proper authorities, however this is not the standard practice in the Philippines, as there is a culture called "minding your own business". Another case, authorities such as case workers and police have the prerogative to visit the houses of people who they suspect are perpetrators or victims of domestic abuse, but instead, the common practice is there should first be a report, before the authorities would take action, regardless of whether a woman is clearly beaten by her husband. Psychosocial services are also mostly unavailable (Lally, Tully & Samaniego, 2019), especially in the far-situated areas like island provinces, those who administer immediate care of this nature sometimes lack the proper credentials to do so.

Fifth and finally, throughout the course of this research, a realization came that the Philippines is still bound to cultural traditions, and social-economic limits, which are some of the reasons as to why violence against women and children still exists. In another perspective, it might take another generation to embody and practice the respect and dignity that a woman deserves in her life.

CONCLUSION

The cases of VAWC, albeit on a decline, is still prevalent in the Philippines. The perspective on mental health and well-being is still a negligible aspect of quality of life on some structures of cultural belief, hence the consequence of violence against women and domestic abuse is perceived only until physical boundaries, and the effects on mental health is less prioritized. A strict adherence to cultural beliefs is one motivator as to why VAWC still exist, while in as much as it is not openly permitted and strictly sanction, in instances that it happens, it is unfortunately tolerated and settled amicably rather than heavily sanctioned and ceased.

An intensive focus is needed not only on psychosocial support, but a more progressive and adaptive social working culture and standards, and equally important, a more robust and attentive police work. VAWC must be dealt in all fronts at the same time. In this regard, continued training for all concerned professionals must be a priority to accurately, safely, and progressively combat the prevalence of violence against women in the country.

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