

Exploring The Complexities of Case Filing and Withdrawal among Abused Wives

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence remains a critical public health and human rights crisis, heavily mediated by structural barriers and deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms. This study explores the intricate realities surrounding the filing and subsequent withdrawal of legal complaints by survivors under the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) Act. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative research design, this inquiry focuses on the lived experiences of ten women in San Mariano, Isabela, who sought legal recourse against their intimate partners through the Philippine National Police (PNP) but later chose to withdraw their cases. Participants were selected via purposive sampling, and deep personal narratives were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and evaluated using thematic analysis. The findings reveal a distressing intersection of overlapping physical, psychological, and economic abuses. The initial decision to file legal complaints was born out of years of sustained endurance, an awakening sense of legal awareness, and an urgent desire to protect their children. Conversely, the agonizing decision to withdraw cases was driven by acute financial dependence, institutional exhaustion, fear for their children's welfare, and hollow promises of reform from partners—all heavily reinforced by pervasive cultural pressures to preserve the domestic unit at any cost. Post-filing trajectories diverged; while a few partners demonstrated temporary behavioral modifications, the majority of couples eventually separated permanently. Remarkably, many women reported finding a sense of autonomy and peace of mind, despite the absence of a formal legal resolution. This study concludes that case withdrawal is not an act of submission or indifference to justice, but rather a strategic, survival-driven response to systemic institutional gaps and societal pressures. The act of filing, even when legally aborted, serves as a vital relational turning point and a profound assertion of survivor agency. To better safeguard these vulnerable women, this study urgently recommends reinforcing economic safety nets through targeted government livelihood programs, streamlining multi-agency coordination among Barangay VAW desks, the DSWD, the PNP, and the judiciary, and expanding community-level legal empowerment initiatives to sustain women's rights throughout their journey.

Keywords: Abused Wives, Domestic violence, Violence Against Women and Their Children {VAWC}

INTRODUCTION

Case withdrawal among abused wives is a pervasive yet often overlooked challenge in addressing domestic violence. While efforts have been made to strengthen legal remedies and support systems for survivors, a significant number of women continue to retract or abandon complaints, perpetuating cycles of harm and impeding justice for victims and their families.

Violence against women in intimate relationships remains a critical global concern that affects millions across all societies, cultures, and economic backgrounds. According to the World Health Organization (2021), approximately one in three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, a figure that translates to roughly 736 million women. This unbelievable prevalence emphasizes the extent of the problem and the urgent need for effective responses that protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

In the study of Hester (2019), which examined victim engagement with criminal justice processes across multiple UK jurisdictions, it was found that approximately 40% of domestic violence cases were discontinued due to victim withdrawal. It also revealed that women typically withdrew not because they no longer needed protection or because abuse had stopped, but because continuing with legal proceedings appeared more dangerous or costly than managing situations through other means. Women described experiencing pressure from abusers, families, and communities during the lengthy pre-trial period, and many concluded that formal legal action would not deliver the safety or justice they had hoped for when initially seeking help.

However, in the Philippines, the situation mirrors this global crisis. The 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey revealed that 17% of ever-married Filipino women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence from their partners, while 6% reported sexual violence and 14% endured emotional abuse (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). These numbers, already alarming, likely underestimate the true extent of abuse, given the cultural barriers that prevent many women from disclosing their experiences even in confidential settings. The Philippine legal system has responded to this crisis through comprehensive legislation, most notably Republic Act No. 9262, the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, which defines various forms of abuse and provides legal remedies, including protection orders and criminal prosecution (Republic of the Philippines, 2004). The law represents significant progress in recognizing domestic violence as a serious crime requiring state intervention rather than a private family matter. Local government units have established support mechanisms, including barangay Violence Against Women (VAW) desks and specialized Women and Children Protection Desks within police stations. These institutional reforms reflect genuine commitment to protecting women and providing avenues for seeking justice.

Case withdrawal among abused wives in the Philippines is driven by a complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Prevailing gender norms and family expectations, especially in rural communities like San Mariano, Isabela, often pressure women to prioritize short-term safety or family cohesion over pursuing justice (Balahadia, 2022; UK Home Office, 2023). Economic dependence on the abuser and fear of stigma aggravate these pressures, discouraging many survivors from sustaining formal legal actions despite experiencing ongoing harm.

According to official records from the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) San Mariano Municipal Police Station, a total of 105 cases involving violations of Republic Act 9262, or the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, were reported from 2020 to 2024. The annual breakdown shows 22 cases in 2020, 28 cases in 2021, 26 cases in 2022, 14 cases in 2023, and 15 cases in 2024. Of the 105 cases reported, 42 cases were referred to the Prosecutor's Office and subsequently filed in court, with 41 cases resolved through court proceedings and 1 case still on trial as of 2024. Significantly, 56 cases were not pursued to completion, consisting of 13 cases in 2020, 11 cases in 2021, 16 cases in 2022, 9 cases in 2023, and 7 cases in 2024, where complainants executed affidavits of desistance after cases were referred to the Prosecutor's Office but before they could be filed in court, representing approximately 53% of all cases. Additionally, 7 cases, consisting of 5 in 2021 and 2 in 2024, were reported to the police station for record purposes only without further legal action. This data indicates a concerning pattern where more than half of the VAWC cases filed were not pursued to completion, highlighting the complexity of case withdrawal among abused wives in the locality.

Despite legal protections such as Republic Act 9262 and the establishment of barangay Violence Against Women desks, many cases remain unresolved through the justice system. Informal reconciliations and community pressure frequently lead to case withdrawal, underscoring the gap between formal legal provisions and survivors' lived realities (Balahadia, n.d.; UK Home Office, 2023). Survivors often lack full awareness or confidence in support services, and concerns about retaliation or the welfare of children impede continued legal pursuit.

Research highlights a significant gap in locally grounded studies that explore the reasons behind case withdrawal among abused wives in rural Philippine settings. Most available literature focuses on urban settings or general victimization, neglecting the unique socio-cultural dynamics that influence survivor decisions in places like San Mariano. Addressing these gaps is vital to designing culturally responsive interventions that support women through their legal journeys and improve the effectiveness of existing support systems.

This research study on case withdrawal among abused wives in San Mariano, Isabela, is fundamentally aligned with SDG 5: Gender Equality, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women, and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. It represents a critical intersection where gender-based violence, access to justice, and institutional effectiveness unite. By understanding why women withdraw from legal cases, this study provides essential insights for creating more effective, survivor-centered approaches to achieving gender equality and building strong, just institutions.

This study aims to explore and understand the complexities of case withdrawal among abused wives by examining their experiences of abuse, the factors motivating them to file VAWC complaints, the reasons behind their decisions to withdraw these cases, the impact on their marital relationships following case filing or withdrawal, and the evidence-based interventions that can effectively address the phenomenon of case withdrawal in domestic violence cases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, affecting millions of women across all socioeconomic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. The World Health Organization (2021) reported that approximately one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. The complexity of domestic violence extends beyond the initial acts of abuse, encompassing a cycle of power and control that often makes it challenging for victims to seek help or maintain legal proceedings against their abusers.

The Complexity of Withdrawal Decisions

Recent scholarship has moved away from simplistic explanations of case withdrawal, recognizing instead the complex reasoning processes through which abused women navigate their circumstances. Robinson and Cook (2018) conducted extensive interviews with domestic violence survivors in England and Wales who had withdrawn from legal proceedings, revealing that women's decisions emerged from sophisticated assessments of multiple factors rather than simple capitulation to pressure or fear. The women in their study articulated detailed reasoning about safety, children's welfare, economic survival, and relationship dynamics, demonstrating that withdrawal represented careful deliberation rather than impulsive abandonment of justice.

According to the study of Hester and Lilley (2017), in their qualitative research with 45 domestic violence survivors in the United Kingdom, they provided deeper insight into how women make sense of their withdrawal decisions. Through in-depth narrative interviews, participants described withdrawal not as giving up but as reclaiming control over their lives in the face of legal processes that felt increasingly disconnected from their actual needs and circumstances. Women spoke of withdrawal as a form of self-protection when the legal system seemed to create more danger than safety, emphasizing that their decisions made sense within their contexts even when others viewed them as irrational or self-defeating.

However, building on these insights, Rodriguez and Thompson (2019) explored the meaning-making processes of 52 domestic violence survivors who had withdrawn from legal proceedings in the United States. Their narrative analysis revealed that women constructed coherent stories about their withdrawal decisions that integrated practical concerns, emotional needs, and moral values. Participants described weighing competing goods, such as safety versus justice, children's stability versus accountability, and immediate relief versus long-term protection, and making choices that honored their own priorities even when those choices disappointed legal system actors who had different definitions of success.

Experiencing the Legal Process

The lived experience of moving through legal proceedings significantly shapes women's decisions about case continuation. Wilson and Martinez (2017) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study following 34 domestic violence survivors through their legal proceedings, documenting how women's perceptions and decisions

evolved over time. Their findings revealed that many women entered the legal system with hope and determination but gradually became disappointed as they encountered complex delays, confusing procedures, and what they perceived as indifference to their circumstances. Their participants described feeling invisible within a system supposedly designed to help them, leading many to conclude that withdrawal offered the only path to regaining agency and dignity.

Based on Patterson and Clark's (2021) study, a phenomenological study examining mothers' experiences of pursuing domestic violence cases while caring for children, through detailed interviews with 89 mothers, the researchers documented the overwhelming burden of simultaneously managing legal requirements, childcare responsibilities, economic survival, and emotional recovery from trauma. Women described feeling overwhelmed, with court appearances requiring time off from work, childcare arrangements, and emotional energy that left little capacity for other life demands. For many participants, withdrawal represented a necessary choice to prevent complete failure under impossible demands.

However, the emotional dimensions of experiencing legal proceedings emerged as central themes in Davies' (2018) qualitative research with domestic violence survivors. Participants described feelings of vulnerability and exposure as they recounted abuse to multiple legal system actors, frustration with repeated delays that prolonged their entanglement with abusive partners, and fear that deepened rather than diminished as legal processes dragged on. Women articulated that the legal system required them to remain emotionally connected to their trauma at a time when they desperately needed to heal and move forward, creating tension between legal participation and psychological recovery.

Agency and Survivor-Defined Success

Contemporary domestic violence scholarship increasingly recognizes survivors as active agents making strategic decisions rather than passive victims failing to cooperate with legal proceedings. Goodman and Epstein (2020) conducted extensive qualitative research examining how domestic violence survivors define success in their help-seeking journeys. Through in-depth interviews with 95 women, they found that survivors' definitions of success often diverged substantially from legal system definitions, with women prioritizing safety, autonomy, peace of mind, and children's well-being over formal legal outcomes like conviction or protection orders. Many women who withdrew from legal proceedings described achieving their most important goals through alternative strategies, suggesting that withdrawal might represent success rather than failure when understood from survivors' own perspectives.

Based on Bell and Goodman's (2019) study, participatory research with domestic violence survivors challenged conventional assumptions about case withdrawal representing victim weakness or lack of commitment to justice. Through focus groups and individual interviews with 67 women who had withdrawn from legal proceedings, participants articulated withdrawal as an assertion of agency, a decision to prioritize their own assessment of what would best serve their safety and well-being over legal system actors' preferences for prosecution. Women described reclaiming control over their lives by refusing to let legal proceedings dictate their timelines, priorities, or choices, reframing withdrawal as empowerment rather than surrender.

Financial Dependence and Decision-Making

Economic factors emerge consistently across qualitative research as dominant influences on case withdrawal decisions. According to Johnson and Leone (2018), in their extensive interviews with 92 domestic violence survivors exploring how economic considerations shaped their decisions about legal proceedings, women described financial dependence on their abusers as creating impossible choices between safety and survival, with many concluding that they simply could not afford to pursue legal action that might result in loss of housing, inability to support children, or financial devastation. Participants articulated complex cost-benefit analyses, weighing potential benefits of legal action against very real risks of economic devastation.

According to Postmus (2020), in their detailed qualitative research examining how economic abuse, defined as controlling financial resources and limiting economic autonomy, affected survivors' decisions about legal engagement, through their narrative interviews with 67 women who had experienced economic abuse,

participants described how abusers' control over financial resources extended far beyond physical violence to create comprehensive dependence that made legal action feel impossibly risky. Women spoke of having no bank accounts in their own names, no knowledge of family finances, no access to money for basic necessities, and no work experience that would allow them to support themselves independently. For these women, case withdrawal represented a realistic acknowledgment that they lacked the economic foundation necessary to live independently from their abusers.

Sullivan (2019) stated that participatory action research with rural domestic violence survivors illuminated the economic challenges facing women in agricultural communities. Through focus groups and individual interviews with 45 rural women, participants described economic interdependence between families, limited employment opportunities requiring specialized skills or education they lacked, and geographic isolation limiting access to jobs within reasonable commuting distance. Women articulated that staying in abusive relationships felt economically necessary when withdrawal from legal action represented the only way to preserve whatever economic stability their families possessed.

Economic Abuse and Control

According to Meyer (2018), in their ethnographic research examining the lived experience of economic abuse through sustained engagement with 38 domestic violence survivors over 18 months, women described abusers systematically undermining their economic independence through tactics including preventing work outside the home, sabotaging job opportunities, controlling all family finances, and intentionally creating debt in survivors' names. Participants explained that by the time they sought legal help, they often faced damaged credit, no employment history, and no financial resources to support independent living, making withdrawal from legal action feel inevitable when prosecution threatened to eliminate their remaining financial supports.

Moreover, Adams (2020) explored how economic abuse continued during legal proceedings through qualitative interviews with 56 survivors. Women described abusers refusing child support payments, draining joint bank accounts, destroying property, and interfering with employment as retaliation for legal action. Participants explained that the economic consequences of pursuing legal action sometimes exceeded the economic consequences of staying in abusive relationships, leading them to withdraw from proceedings to stop the financial losses that threatened to leave them homeless or unable to provide for their children.

Inadequate Safety Measures

Survivors' perceptions of inadequate safety measures during legal proceedings emerged as a significant theme in case withdrawal research. Bell (2019) conducted qualitative research examining how survivors experienced safety planning and protection measures provided by legal system actors. Through interviews with 61 women who had withdrawn from legal proceedings, participants described safety planning that felt unthinking and disconnected from the realities of their lives, protection orders that abusers violated with impunity, and legal system actors who seemed more concerned with case processing than with survivors' actual safety. Women explained that they had entered legal proceedings hoping for meaningful protection but withdrew when it became clear that the legal system could not or would not provide the safety they needed.

According to Robinson (2018), participatory research with domestic violence survivors explored what meaningful safety support would look like from survivors' perspectives. Through focus groups with 78 women, participants described needing safety measures that addressed economic security, housing stability, protection for children, and psychological support rather than simply restraining orders that did little to actually restrain abusers. Women articulated that when legal proceedings failed to provide comprehensive safety support, withdrawal represented a necessary choice to pursue safety through alternative means that felt more effective than ineffective legal protections.

Trauma's Impact on Legal Engagement

The psychological impact of trauma on survivors' capacity to engage with legal proceedings has been extensively documented through qualitative research. Wilson (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with 34

domestic violence survivors exploring how trauma symptoms affected their experiences of legal proceedings. Women described struggling with memory problems that made providing consistent testimony difficult, experiencing panic attacks triggered by court environments, and feeling overwhelmed by legal procedures that required capabilities that trauma had compromised. Participants explained that legal system actors often interpreted trauma symptoms as lack of credibility or commitment rather than recognizing them as natural consequences of abuse, leaving women feeling blamed for difficulties that resulted from their traumatization.

According to Rodriguez (2019), the specific challenges trauma-related dissociation created for legal participation were explored through qualitative research with 52 survivors. Women described experiencing dissociation during testimony that made them appear disconnected or unaffected by the abuse they were describing, triggering uncertainty from legal actors who expected more visible emotional distress. Participants articulated that the very coping mechanisms that had allowed them to survive abuse, such as dissociation, emotional numbing, and compartmentalization, were interpreted by legal system actors as evidence that abuse was not serious or that women were not genuinely afraid, creating impossible double dilemmas in which trauma symptoms undermined their credibility.

Prioritizing Children's Well-Being

The presence and welfare of children emerged as one of the most powerful influences on case withdrawal decisions. Lewis and Garcia (2019) conducted extensive interviews with 45 mothers exploring how concerns about children shaped their decisions about legal proceedings. Women described making decisions primarily focused on what they believed would best serve their children's interests, often concluding that withdrawal protected children from exposure to traumatic legal proceedings, preserved children's relationships with fathers, and maintained whatever family stability existed. Participants explained that they consistently prioritized children's needs over their own safety and justice concerns, viewing withdrawal as maternal responsibility rather than personal failure.

According to Meyer (2019), in their narrative research with domestic violence survivors who were mothers, the complex moral reasoning through which women navigated competing responsibilities to protect children from abuse while also protecting them from traumatic legal proceedings was revealed. Through in-depth interviews with 56 mothers, participants described agonizing over whether legal action would ultimately help or harm their children, weighing potential benefits of holding abusers accountable against risks that legal proceedings would expose children to additional trauma. Women articulated that withdrawal often represented their best judgment about how to fulfill maternal responsibilities in impossible circumstances where no choice offered a clear benefit to their children.

Fear of Losing Custody

Mothers' fears about custody loss also emerged as a significant factor in case withdrawal decisions. According to Roberts (2017), in his qualitative research interviews with 78 mothers examining how child custody concerns affected their decisions about domestic violence prosecution, they described fears that pursuing criminal charges against their children's fathers would be used against them in custody proceedings, that judges would view them as bitter or unable to co-parent, and that their children would be removed from their care for failing to protect them from abuse. His participants thus explained that these fears made withdrawal feel necessary to protect their relationships with their children, even when that choice meant abandoning legal protection for themselves.

Based on Patterson's (2021) study, participatory research with mothers involved in both domestic violence and custody proceedings revealed how legal system fragmentation created impossible choices for mothers. Women described receiving contradictory messages from criminal and family courts, with criminal courts encouraging prosecution while family courts penalized mothers for creating conflict with fathers. Participants articulated that when faced with these contradictions, they prioritized maintaining custody of their children over pursuing criminal accountability, leading them to withdraw from domestic violence cases to demonstrate their willingness to co-parent cooperatively.

Children's Exposure to Legal Proceedings

Mothers' concerns about children witnessing or participating in legal proceedings influenced case withdrawal decisions. Clark (2021) conducted qualitative research exploring mothers' perceptions of how legal proceedings affected their children. Through interviews with 89 mothers, women described distress at their children being required to testify, worry about children being traumatized by court proceedings, and concerns that children would be damaged by hearing detailed accounts of abuse against their mothers. Participants explained that protecting children from these experiences often took priority over continuing legal proceedings, with many mothers choosing withdrawal to spare their children from legal system involvement they perceived as potentially more harmful than helpful.

Filipino Cultural Values and Family Preservation

Cultural factors specific to Philippine society significantly influence domestic violence case withdrawal decisions. Cruz and Dela Rosa (2021) conducted extensive qualitative research examining how Filipino cultural values shaped domestic violence survivors' decision-making. Through in-depth interviews with 78 Filipino women, participants described powerful cultural values including "pakikipagkapwa" (shared identity and interpersonal unity), "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude), and "hiya" (shame/propriety) that created strong pressure to preserve family harmony and avoid bringing shame to families. Women explained that these values made pursuing legal action against husbands feel like violations of fundamental cultural obligations, with many experiencing withdrawal as necessary to maintain cultural integrity and family honor even at significant personal cost.

However, Santos and Reyes (2019) explored how cultural expectations about women's roles affected domestic violence survivors' decisions in their qualitative study across three Philippine provinces. Women described cultural narratives that positioned wives as family peacekeepers responsible for maintaining harmony, emphasized forgiveness and reconciliation over conflict and accountability, and portrayed women who broke up families through legal action as failures rather than survivors seeking safety. Participants articulated that these cultural messages created powerful psychological pressure to withdraw from legal proceedings, with many women internalizing beliefs that good wives prioritize family preservation over personal safety.

Extended Family and Community Pressure

The influence of extended family and community members on case withdrawal decisions emerged as a central theme in Philippine-focused research. Martinez (2019) conducted ethnographic research in rural Philippine communities examining how social networks influenced domestic violence survivors' decisions. Through sustained engagement with communities and interviews with 67 women, participants described intense pressure from extended family members to withdraw legal complaints, resolve conflicts privately, and give husbands another chance. Women explained that family members often sided with abusers, blamed survivors for provoking violence, and threatened to withdraw support from women who continued legal proceedings. For many participants, this social pressure made withdrawal feel inevitable when continuing prosecution meant losing the only support systems available to them.

However, Consignado and Amparo (2022) examined the role of barangay justice systems in shaping case withdrawal through qualitative research across multiple Philippine communities. Women described barangay leaders pressuring them to settle cases through mediation, emphasizing family preservation over safety concerns, and sometimes explicitly discouraging formal legal action. Participants explained that while barangay involvement sometimes provided helpful initial support, it more often created additional pressure toward withdrawal and reconciliation that complicated their decisions about whether to continue formal legal proceedings.

Religious and Spiritual Factors

Religious and spiritual beliefs emerged as significant influences on Filipino women's decisions about case withdrawal. Thompson and Davis (2018) conducted qualitative research examining how religious beliefs shaped

domestic violence survivors' decision-making across various faith traditions. Through interviews with 89 participants, women described religious teachings about marriage permanence, forgiveness, suffering, and women's submissive roles that conflicted with pursuing legal action against husbands. Participants explained that many religious leaders counseled reconciliation and forgiveness over legal accountability, leaving women feeling they must choose between their faith commitments and their safety. Many women described withdrawal as reflecting religious values they held deeply, even when that choice meant continued vulnerability to abuse.

Quality of Legal System Responses

The quality of institutional responses significantly affects survivors' decisions about case continuation. Goodmark (2017) conducted extensive qualitative research examining how criminal justice practices influence domestic violence survivors' behavior. Through interviews with 95 women and observation of legal proceedings, participants described encountering victim-blaming attitudes from law enforcement, experiencing lengthy delays that prolonged their entanglement with abusers, and perceiving indifference or skepticism from legal actors who should have believed and supported them. Women articulated that these institutional failures created environments where withdrawal felt like the only way to escape legal proceedings that had become additional sources of trauma rather than sources of protection and justice.

According to Robinson (2018), ethnographic research in domestic violence courts documented survivors' experiences of navigating legal proceedings. Through sustained observation and interviews with 67 women, participants described feeling confused by legal procedures they could not understand, intimidated by formal court environments, and excluded from decision-making about their own cases. Women explained that the legal system operated in ways that felt foreign and disempowering, with prosecutors making decisions without consulting them, judges focusing on efficiency rather than their circumstances, and court personnel treating them as problems to be processed rather than people deserving support. For many participants, withdrawal represented reclaiming control from legal processes that had stripped away their agency.

Lack of Victim-Centered Approaches

Qualitative research has documented survivors' experiences of legal systems that fail to prioritize their needs and preferences. Miller and Johnson (2018) conducted interviews with 67 domestic violence survivors exploring their perceptions of prosecution strategies. Women described feeling invisible within evidence-based prosecution approaches that proceeded without their input, being pressured to participate in ways that felt unsafe or traumatic, and having their concerns dismissed when they conflicted with prosecutors' goals. Participants explained that when legal proceedings felt like something being done to them rather than for them, withdrawal offered the only way to reassert control over their lives and choices.

However, Davies' (2018) participatory research with domestic violence survivors explored what victim-centered legal responses would look like from survivors' perspectives. Through focus groups with 89 women, participants described wanting legal system actors who believed them without question, provided clear information about processes and options, respected their decisions even when those decisions diverged from legal system preferences, and prioritized safety over case processing efficiency. Women articulated that the gap between these desires and their actual experiences of legal proceedings often became too wide to bridge, leading to withdrawal when continuing participation felt intolerable.

Inadequate Support Services

The availability and quality of support services significantly influenced survivors' capacity to continue with legal proceedings. Wood (2020) conducted qualitative research examining survivors' experiences with victim advocacy services. Through interviews with 78 women, participants described how advocates provided crucial practical and emotional support that made continuing legal proceedings possible, including accompaniment to court, translation of confusing legal procedures, safety planning, and validation of experiences. Women explained that when effective advocacy was available, they felt better able to navigate challenging legal processes, but when advocacy was absent or inadequate, the burden of managing legal proceedings alone often led to withdrawal.

According to Sullivan (2019), research in rural communities documented particular challenges survivors faced in accessing support services. Women described having to travel long distances to access advocates or counseling, lacking transportation to attend appointments, and finding that available services did not understand the particular challenges of rural life. Participants explained that without accessible and appropriate support, continuing legal proceedings felt overwhelming and impossible.

Survivors' Experiences with Current Services

Qualitative research has documented survivors' perceptions of existing support services and identified critical gaps. Morgan and Davis (2020) conducted extensive interviews with domestic violence survivors exploring their experiences with community-based services. Women described fragmented services that required them to tell their stories repeatedly to different agencies, inadequate crisis response that left them without housing or economic support during critical periods, and services that ended before they had achieved stability. Participants explained that when support services failed to address their actual needs or proved unsustainable over time, withdrawal from legal proceedings often followed as they prioritized immediate survival over lengthy legal processes.

However, Nelson's (2018) participatory research with domestic violence survivors examined what meaningful support would look like from survivors' perspectives. Through focus groups with 67 women, participants described needing comprehensive support that addressed economic needs, housing, childcare, transportation, legal advocacy, and emotional support simultaneously rather than expecting them to coordinate multiple disconnected services while managing legal proceedings and recovering from trauma.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical foundation for this study is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). This theory is particularly applicable to understanding why abused wives withdraw their cases, as their decisions are shaped by factors operating at different levels, from intimate family relationships and personal circumstances to community resources, cultural expectations, and institutional responses within the justice system. The ecological perspective allows this study to examine not just the individual experiences of abused wives, but also how their interactions with partners, families, legal institutions, and support services across different environmental layers influence their choice to discontinue legal proceedings.

Another theory that offers valuable insight into understanding case withdrawal among abused wives is Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991). By explaining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape their intentions and ultimate decisions to discontinue legal proceedings, this theory helps illuminate why abused wives might initially file complaints but later withdraw them by examining three key factors, such as their personal attitudes toward continuing the case, including beliefs about whether prosecution will actually improve their situation or cause more harm; the subjective norms or social pressures they experience from family, community, and religious leaders who may encourage reconciliation over legal action; and their perceived behavioral control or belief in their actual ability to see the case through, given constraints like financial limitations, lack of safe housing, fear of retaliation, or distrust in the justice system's ability to protect them.

Additionally, Trauma Theory provides essential insight by recognizing that prolonged exposure to domestic violence creates psychological trauma that fundamentally affects how survivors process experiences, make decisions, and interact with systems meant to help them. This theory explains that case withdrawal may not represent a rational choice made under normal circumstances but rather a trauma response shaped by the neurobiological and psychological impacts of ongoing abuse. Understanding trauma helps clarify why abused wives might withdraw cases even after initially seeking help, whether the legal process itself can be retraumatizing through repeated retelling of abuse, confronting the abuser in court, lengthy delays, and interactions with systems that may not be trauma-informed, causing women to protect themselves by disengaging rather than enduring further psychological harm.

Moreover, Feminist Theory provides a critical framework for understanding case withdrawal among abused wives by examining how patriarchal structures, gender inequalities, and power imbalances embedded within

society, families, and legal institutions shape women's experiences and choices. This theory reveals that domestic violence and subsequent case withdrawal are not merely private, individual matters but are rooted in systemic gender-based oppression that limits women's autonomy and resources. It helps explain why abused wives might withdraw cases despite initially seeking help by highlighting how economic dependence on male partners, societal expectations that women should preserve families at all costs, victim-blaming attitudes within the justice system, and women's unequal access to economic and social resources create conditions where withdrawal seems like the only realistic option.

Furthermore, Social Support Theory (House, 1981) offers another important lens for understanding case withdrawal among abused wives by highlighting how the presence or absence of different types of support influences their decisions to continue or drop legal proceedings. This theory identifies four dimensions of social support, such as emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, all of which play critical roles in whether abused wives can sustain their pursuit of justice. This theory helps explain why some women withdraw their cases even after initially seeking help, whether they may lack emotional support from family and friends who pressure them to reconcile, face insufficient instrumental support such as financial assistance or safe housing that would allow them to leave abusive situations, receive inadequate informational support about their legal rights and available resources, or experience negative appraisal support where their decisions are questioned or blamed rather than validated.

Significance of the Study

The conduct of the study is believed to be beneficial to the following:

Abused Women and Survivors. They may gain validation that their decisions are understood within their complex circumstances, potentially reducing self-blame and isolation. The study's findings could lead to more supportive services that respect their autonomy and prioritize their safety over system requirements.

Local Government Officials and Policymakers. Officials in San Mariano and similar municipalities can use these findings to develop more effective, culturally appropriate policies and programs. The research provides evidence-based recommendations for improving local ordinances, budget allocation, and inter-agency coordination to better support domestic violence survivors.

Social Workers and Victim Advocates. These professionals gain a deeper understanding of the barriers survivors face when navigating legal systems, enabling them to provide more empathetic and realistic support. The findings help them develop intervention strategies that acknowledge the complexity of survivors' situations rather than pushing one-size-fits-all solutions.

Law Enforcement and Justice System Personnel. Police officers, prosecutors, and court personnel can better understand why cases are withdrawn, potentially leading to more survivor-centered approaches in their procedures. This understanding may reduce secondary victimization and improve collaboration with support services.

Healthcare Providers. Medical professionals, particularly those in emergency departments and community health centers, can better recognize signs of domestic violence and understand the challenges survivors face. This knowledge enables them to provide more comprehensive care and appropriate referrals.

Community Leaders and Barangay Officials. Local leaders gain insights into how traditional conflict resolution methods interact with formal legal processes, helping them develop community-based interventions that complement rather than undermine survivor safety and legal protections.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Service Providers. Organizations working with domestic violence survivors can use these findings to design more effective programs, improve service delivery, and advocate for systemic changes. The research provides evidence for funding proposals and program modifications.

Future Researchers. The study will serve as an important academic resource that deepens the understanding of why abused wives withdraw domestic violence cases after initially seeking legal help. By analyzing the lived experiences of women in San Mariano, Isabela, and their perceptions of support systems, this research provides a grounded perspective that can guide future investigations on domestic violence case withdrawal.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to understand the complex set of factors that lead abused wives to withdraw domestic violence complaints or to choose not to pursue legal action, and to identify locally appropriate interventions and service improvements that could better support survivors.

Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do wives experience abuse from their husbands or partners?
2. Why do abused wives decide to file complaints?
3. Why do abused wives decide to withdraw their filed VAWC cases?
4. What happens to the marital relationship of the wives after the filing or withdrawal of the case?
5. What interventions can be proposed to address the withdrawal of filed VAWC cases?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the complexities of case filing and withdrawal under the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) Act, focusing on understanding the lived experiences of ten married women from San Mariano, Isabela, Philippines, who were selected through purposive sampling for their direct involvement in filing VAWC complaints with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and subsequently withdrawing them; data were gathered through validated, in-depth, semi-structured interviews featuring open-ended questions that encouraged detailed narratives about the multi-layered aspects of abuse, motives for filing and withdrawal, marital outcomes, and potential interventions, with the researcher ensuring stringent ethical standards—including informed consent, confidentiality, and a trauma-informed environment supported by a social worker—and analyzed using thematic analysis by transcribing audio-recorded interviews, coding, and identifying recurring themes to authentically represent survivor perspectives and improve institutional and community-level support systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manner of Abuse Experienced by The Participants

As revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants of this study, the participants narrated the manner of intimate partner violence they experienced prior to filing their VAWC complaints. A close and systematic reading of these accounts reveals that the abuse was not limited to a single manner of abuse but constituted a convergence of physical, psychological, and economic violence occurring simultaneously and over extended periods. The participants narrated their experiences as victims of violence by their husbands, as indicated below.

Physical Abuse. Physical abuse emerged as the most predominant and alarming form of violence reported by the participants. Nine out of ten respondents described experiencing direct bodily harm at the hands of their husbands, ranging from repeated slapping and punching to life-threatening acts of strangulation and attacks with bladed weapons. A recurring pattern across the accounts was the strong association between the husbands' alcohol intoxication and the escalation of physical violence, making incidents unpredictable and particularly dangerous for the women and their children. P1 captured this condition when she stated that the mere sight of her husband purchasing alcohol was enough to trigger overwhelming fear, even before any physical contact occurred. She shared, "*Kapag lasing doon siya nagiging salbahe*" (When he is drunk, he becomes violent). This statement, though brief, encapsulates a deeply conditioned anxiety rooted in prolonged exposure to alcohol-

fueled violence. P5 described one of the most traumatic accounts in the study, recounting incidents that brought her dangerously close to death, and said, “*muntik niya na akong mapatay ng dalawang beses, sinasaktan niya ako ng kahit walang dahilan*” (He almost killed me twice; he hurts me for no reason). Similarly, P8 recounted a near-fatal assault witnessed by her own child and stated, “*Kapag lasing, nananakal, ganun siya*” (When he is drunk, he chokes me; that is how he is). P9 shared, “*Sinasaktan niya po ako tuwing pinapagalitan ko siya tuwing nakainom. Sinasampal, binubugbog, o di kaya nagtatapon ng gamit*” (He hurts me whenever I scold him when he is drunk. He slaps me, beats me up, or throws things around). The respondent described a pattern where every instance of disagreement or failure to meet her husband’s expectations during his intoxicated episodes resulted in physical harm, ranging from slapping and severe beating to throwing objects, reflecting the systematic and cyclical nature of domestic violence. P2 also shared and stated that, “*sinasaktan niya ako... sinapak ako*” (He is hurting me... he punched me).

The accounts of the participants paint a deeply troubling picture of physical violence that is deeply intertwined with their husbands’ alcohol use. What stands out most prominently across the narratives is how alcohol did not merely accompany the violence; it functioned as the primary catalyst that transformed ordinary domestic situations into dangerous and, at times, life-threatening confrontations. These experiences are consistent with local research on intimate partner violence in the Philippine context. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), physical violence is the most prevalent form of violence committed by current or former husbands. In addition, Balahadia et al. (2022) found that physical abuse was the most common type of violence experienced by VAWC victims and was most often perpetrated by former husbands, with alcohol use cited as a recurring trigger for violent episodes. These findings directly support the accounts of the participants in the present study, where alcohol intoxication consistently preceded and escalated incidents of physical violence.

Economic Abuse. Beyond physical harm, a significant portion of the participants recounted experiences of economic abuse, which manifested through financial neglect, deliberate withholding of support, and the exploitation of remittances sent by wives working abroad. This form of abuse, while less visible than physical violence, carried devastating consequences for the women’s material well-being and their capacity to provide for their children. P3 described a situation where her husband remained employed yet consistently refused to provide adequate financial support for their child, offering only what he personally deemed fit. She explained, “*Hindi siya sumo-suporta sa amin*” (He does not support us). This deliberate withholding of resources despite the husband’s capacity to provide constitutes a clear act of economic coercion, designed to maintain control over the wife and reinforce her dependence. P7’s account added another dimension to economic abuse, as she narrated working overseas and faithfully remitting her earnings to her husband, only to discover that the money was squandered without any benefit reaching the family. She stated, “*Yung pera na pinapadala ko, nawawaldas lang, walang napupuntahan*” (The money I was sending just goes to waste; it does not go anywhere) (personal communication, January 2026). P4 described reaching a state of complete material destitution, recounting days when neither she nor her children had food or milk, a consequence of her husband’s complete abandonment of his financial obligations despite having the means to provide. She said, “*wala kasi akong nakukuhang full support sa kanya kahit may trabaho na siya, tapos magbigay lang siya ng kung ano ang gusto niya*” (I was not getting full support from him even though he had a job, and he would only give what he wanted).

These accounts collectively illustrate how economic abuse operates as a mechanism of control that strips women of agency and locks them into cycles of dependency. The experience of P7, who worked abroad only to have her remittances squandered, and of P3 and P4, whose husbands refused to provide support despite being employed, are direct manifestations of economic abuse as defined and penalized under Philippine law. These are supported by Philippine-based evidence on economic abuse under Republic Act 9262. As defined under Section 3(D) of RA 9262, economic abuse refers to acts that make or attempt to make a woman financially dependent, including deliberate deprivation of financial support and control over conjugal resources (Republic of the Philippines, 2004). The Philippine Commission on Women (2022) has consistently identified economic dependence as one of the primary structural factors that trap women in abusive relationships, noting that financial control by intimate partners limits their ability to seek help, leave the relationship, or pursue legal remedies.

Emotional and Psychological Abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse permeated the experiences of the participants in ways that were sometimes less immediately identifiable than physical violence but were no less damaging in their long-term effects. The participants described a range of psychological impacts, including

persistent fear and anxiety, trauma responses, and deep emotional pain rooted in feelings of betrayal and helplessness. The emotional toll of sustained abuse manifested in disrupted occupational functioning, physical deterioration, social isolation, and profound difficulty in trusting others. P1 described developing a conditioned fear response so severe that even the anticipation of her husband purchasing alcohol was enough to send her into a state of acute anxiety and restlessness. She shared, “*Parang na ta-trauma na ako sa tuwing iinom siya, bibili palang siya ng alak, kinakabahan at hindi na ako mapakali*” (It feels like I am getting traumatized every time he drinks; just the thought of him buying alcohol makes me anxious and restless). P4 shared that her husband’s infidelity created a state of chronic emotional instability. She said, “*Nag start yun nung may involve na third party*” (It started when a third party got involved). P6 articulated how the abuser’s death threats had effectively imprisoned her within her own home, as fear of being seen in public with another person rendered her unable to seek help or maintain social connections. She recounted, “*Takot akong lumabas, takot akong ma-judge, takot akong tanungin, kasi meron siyang threat na kapag nakita niya ako may kasama, baka mapatay niya ako*” (I am afraid to go out, afraid to be judged, afraid to be asked, because he has threatened that if he sees me with someone, he might kill me). P9 reflected on her helplessness, stating that “*ang hirap, ang ginagawa ko nalang ay umiyak*” (It was really hard; all I could do was cry). The only outlet available to the respondent amid the pain was weeping, capturing the silence and suppression that many survivors of domestic violence experience in the absence of accessible support systems.

Emotional and psychological abuse operates in ways that are harder to name and harder to prove. What the participants described were not isolated moments of emotional hurt, but sustained conditions of fear, silence, and helplessness that had gradually reshaped how they moved through the world. Several accounts revealed how psychological abuse worked to strip the participants of their sense of safety, not just within the home but across every dimension of their lives. Some participants described how threats and intimidation issued by their husbands effectively dismantled their social lives, leaving them unable to go out, seek help, or maintain any meaningful connection outside the home. This kind of psychological control is deliberate; it works by systematically eliminating the very support systems that might otherwise help a woman resist or leave. Others narrated how prolonged exposure to abuse had altered their internal world so deeply that even the mere anticipation of danger was enough to send them into acute distress, long before any actual harm occurred. The experience of infidelity added yet another layer for some participants, introducing betrayal alongside fear and further eroding whatever emotional stability remained within the relationship. For others still, the weight of the abuse had become so overwhelming that weeping in silence became the only available outlet, a quiet but telling reflection of how shame, isolation, and fear can converge to leave a woman feeling utterly without recourse or support. The psychological impact described by the participants is consistent with documented patterns of intimate partner violence in the Philippines. Estrellado and Loh (2019), in a phenomenological study of sixty battered Filipino women, found that those who remained in abusive relationships experienced profound losses, including loss of a sense of self, peace of mind, and psychological well-being, while ongoing exposure to violence resulted in chronic fear and anxiety. Furthermore, Balahadia et al. (2022) established that emotional and psychological abuse was the most commonly witnessed form of VAWC in Philippine communities, confirming that psychological violence frequently co-occurs with physical abuse and compounds its harmful effects on women’s mental health and daily functioning.

Reasons Why Abused Wives Decided to File Vawc Complaints

As revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants of this study, the participants narrated the factors and motivations that led them to formally file VAWC complaints. The findings demonstrate that the decision to file was rarely the product of a single causing incident but rather the culmination of years of endured harm, growing awareness of legal rights, and deep concern for the safety and welfare of their children. The participants narrated their factors and motivations, as indicated below.

Seeking Justice and Accountability. Several participants were motivated to file their cases by a desire to hold their abusers accountable through the formal legal system. P1 expressed a straightforward desire for punitive justice, stating that “*Gusto kong maranasan niya yung nakakulong para alam niya yung hirap sa loob*” (I want him to experience being in jail so he knows the hardship inside). The respondent wanted her husband to experience imprisonment so that he would understand the consequences of his actions. P7 described her motivation as rooted in a deep sense of betrayal, having sacrificed her own comfort by working abroad to support

her family, only to have her husband squander the remittances she sent. She said, “*Gusto kong matuto siya sa mga ginawa niya kasi pinag-hirapan ko lahat ng mga perang kinikita ko at pinapadala ko*” (I want him to learn from what he did because I worked hard for all the money I earned and sent). This betrayal, she explained, left her with no choice but to seek redress through the law.

Cumulative and Intolerable Abuse. For most participants, the decision to file was not made in response to a single incident but reflected a point at which the accumulated weight of sustained abuse became impossible to endure further. P2 articulated this with notable clarity and stated that, “*Sa lahat ng ginawa niya, sa pang-aabuso, hindi na siya nagbibigay ng sustento, nang babae pa*” (With everything he did, the abuse, not providing support, and still seeing another woman). P9 described reaching a threshold where she could no longer tolerate the recurring cycle of alcohol-fueled violence. She said, “*Hindi ko na kaya yung ginagawa niya sa akin, sa tuwing nakainom siya at hindi kami nagka-ka-intindihan*” (I cannot take what he is doing to me anymore, every time he drinks and we do not understand each other). P10’s account was perhaps the most economical in its honesty and said, “*Syempre nasaktan niya ako*” (Of course, he hurt me), capturing the straightforward yet profound truth that sustained physical harm was itself sufficient justification for seeking legal protection.

Financial Neglect and Child Abandonment. A significant cluster of participants cited economic neglect and the abandonment of parental responsibilities as their primary motivation for filing. P3 said, “*Wala kasi akong nakukuha ng full support sa kanya kahit may trabaho siya*” (I was not getting full support from him even though he had a job). The respondent described a situation where her husband’s refusal to provide support, despite having employment, pushed her toward formal legal action. P4’s account was particularly striking. She described how her husband had carelessly abandoned the family, leaving their two daughters without food or milk, and that this extreme deprivation of the most basic needs was what finally compelled her to file: “*Pinabayaan niya nalang kami basta-basta, pinabayaan niya na yung mga anak niya. Wala kaming makain, walang mainom na gatas yung mga bata*” (He just neglected us; he neglected his children. We had nothing to eat, and the children had no milk to drink) (personal communication, January 2026).

Fear for Life and Protection for Safety. For P5 and P8, the decision to file was directly precipitated by incidents so severe that they constituted credible threats to life. P5 described surviving two near-fatal attacks by her husband, including being physically harmed without provocation. She shared, “*takot na ako kasi muntik niya na akong mapatay ng dalawang beses*” (I was scared because he almost killed me twice). P8’s filing arose from a harrowing incident in which her husband strangled her and used a bladed weapon in the presence of their child. She recounted, “*Yung kutsilyo, yun yung nakita ng anak ko, so iyak ng iyak yung bata, ayaw ko namang may mangyari pa sa bata kaya nag-daretso na ako sa Police Station*” (The knife, that was what my child saw, so the child was crying uncontrollably. I did not want anything else to happen to the child, so I went straight to the Police Station).

Family Influence. P6 offered a distinctive account in which it was the support and encouragement of her father that ultimately enabled her to file. She said, “*Yung papa ko, siya yung pinaka number 1 na pinang hawakan ko para ikaso siya*” (My father was the number one person I held onto to file a case against him). The respondent described her father as the most significant source of strength and motivation in her decision, a detail that underscores the critical role of social support in empowering survivors to pursue formal legal remedies.

The narratives of the participants collectively reveal that the decision to file a VAWC complaint was never a simple or impulsive act, but rather a deeply considered response shaped by multiple factors. Across the accounts, it becomes clear that most of the participants had endured prolonged periods of abuse before reaching the point of formal action, absorbing physical harm, psychological torment, economic neglect, and betrayal until the cumulative weight of it all became impossible to carry any further. What ultimately moved them to act is a desire to hold their husbands accountable through the legal system, the recognition that the abuse had reached a level that endangered not only their own lives but those of their children, the failure of their husbands to meet even the most basic obligations as providers and fathers, and in at least one case, the encouragement of a trusted family member who gave them the strength to take that step. Notably, concern for their children surfaced repeatedly as one of the most powerful motivating forces. These women did not file because it was easy; they filed because they had exhausted every other option and because their lives, their children’s safety, and their dignity left them with no other choice. In support, Dichoso and Abalos (2022) found that Filipino women who

filed VAWC cases were motivated by both the need for protection and a strong desire for formal accountability, while Lalaguna et al. (2021) established that most survivors had endured abuse for extended periods before seeking legal intervention, often citing a critical breaking point rather than a single incident. Sta. Maria (2020) identified economic neglect as a significant driver of formal help-seeking, particularly when children's welfare was directly affected, and Reyes and Monteclaro (2020) found that the presence of weapons or credible threats to life significantly increased the likelihood of survivors pursuing legal remedies. Finally, Evangelista and Doromal (2021) highlighted that family support played a crucial role in enabling survivors to overcome the fear and shame that typically discouraged formal reporting. Together, these findings affirm that the decision to file a VAWC complaint is the product of accumulated suffering, protective instincts, and, when present, the support of those who stand beside the survivor in their most vulnerable moments.

Reasons For Withdrawing the Filed Vawc Cases

As revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants of this study, the participants narrated the specific reasons that led them to withdraw their formally filed VAWC complaints after initially seeking legal protection. The participants narrated their specific reasons, as indicated below.

Financial Dependency and Children's Welfare. The most frequently cited reason for withdrawal across all participants was the combination of economic dependency on the abusive partner and overriding concern for their children's material welfare. This theme appeared in the accounts of P1, P5, and P9, each of whom described the impossibility of sustaining their children's needs in the absence of the husband's financial contribution. P1 stated that, "*Winithdraw ko yung kaso namin noon kasi yung anak namin mag co-college na siya, syempre mahihirapan ako kung ako lang magisa na magtaguyod ng kanyang pag-aaral*" (I withdrew our case then because our child was going to college, and it would be difficult for me to support their education all by myself). The respondent withdrew the case as a pragmatic decision rooted in economic necessity. P5 stated, "*Napagpasyahan kong bawiin yung kaso dahil para sa mga anak ko*" (I decided to withdraw the case for the sake of my children). The respondent simply but decisively withdrew the case for the sake of her children, while P9 provided perhaps the most candid account of how economic vulnerability intersected with withdrawal, where she stated, "*Ginawa ko yun para sa mga bata kasi wala pong magsusustento sa kanila, kasi that time po wala po akong trabaho*" (I did that for the children because no one would support them, and at that time, I did not have a job) (personal communication, January 2026). The respondent also acknowledged that her husband had persuaded her by pointing out the practical futility of his imprisonment given her unemployment, exploiting her economic vulnerability to secure the withdrawal. This dynamic is particularly revealing; the same financial control used as a mechanism of abuse was also leveraged to prevent legal accountability.

Burden of the Legal Process. Several participants described the logistical, financial, and occupational demands of attending court hearings as a significant and ultimately unsustainable burden. P2 described the repeated travel to Ilagan for hearings as a source of embarrassment, having to repeatedly seek permission from her employer, while also incurring financial costs she could ill afford. She said, "*Nahihiya na akong magpa-alam sa principal sa tuwing pupunta ako sa hearing, pabalik-balik. Naaapektuhan yung trabaho ko, pera din, magastos*" (I feel embarrassed to inform the principal every time I go to the hearing in Ilagan, going back and forth. It affects my work, money, and it is expensive). P4 elaborated on this institutional fatigue, where she stated, "*Maraming beses kang pupunta, kailangan mo ng pera. Pag in case na mag-day off ka, hindi puwede. Syempre iisipin ko yung boarding ko tapos allowance ng mga anak ko*" (You go there many times, and you need money. In case you need to take a day off, it is not allowed. Of course, you will think about the boarding and the allowance of my children). What stands out most in the accounts of participants who cited the legal process as a reason for withdrawal is how the burden was felt through deeply personal realities. The words that surface in their narratives — *nahihiya*, *trabaho*, *pera*, *boarding*, and *allowance* — are not incidental; they are the exact points where the demands of the legal system collided with the everyday struggles of women already stretched to their limits. These realities reveal that withdrawal was not a sign of indifference or defeat; it was a rational response to an institutional burden that these women, given their circumstances, could not reasonably sustain on their own.

Promise of Reform and Reconciliation. Three participants, such as P3, P7, and P10, cited the husbands' promises of reform and appeals for reconciliation as the proximate cause of their withdrawal. In each case, the abuser actively approached the wife, expressed remorse, and made commitments to change, which the women,

given their cultural and emotional investments in the marriage, found sufficient reason to extend a chance for reconciliation. P3 described how her husband begged her not to have him imprisoned and pledged to work and provide for their child's needs, which she found persuasive. She said, "*Binawi ko yung kaso dahil naki-usap siya sa akin, nagmakaawa na wag ko siyang ipakulong, sabi niya mag-ta-trabaho siya at nang maibigay niya yung pangangailangan ng anak niya*" (I withdrew the case because he talked to me and begged me not to imprison him, saying he would work to provide for his child's needs). P7 similarly described reaching a negotiated understanding with her husband following his emotional appeals, where she said, "*Binawi ko din yung kaso dahil naki-usap at nagmakaawa siya sa akin*" (I also withdrew the case because he talked to me and begged). P10 shared, "*Yun kase ang sinabi nya na i-withdraw ko nalang at magbabago na daw po siya*" (That was what he said, that I should just withdraw and that he would change). The respondent's husband told her to withdraw the case and that he would change, and she did so on that basis.

Loss of Support and External Circumstances. P6 provided a particularly distressing account of withdrawal driven by the death of her primary support person. She described how the passing of her father, the same individual whose encouragement had enabled her to file in the first place, left her without the emotional and practical backbone needed to continue. She explained, "*Binawi na namin yun noon kasi nung time na yun namatay si papa then wala na kaming support, na para lumaban dahil ang hirap*" (We withdrew that before because at that time, papa passed away, and we no longer had support to fight because it was really hard). This account underscores the critical and often irreplaceable role that informal support networks play in sustaining survivors through the legal process.

External Disruptions and Hearing Delays. P8 described how the onset of the pandemic and the resulting disruption of court proceedings led her to abandon her case. With hearings suspended and no information forthcoming about the case's progress, she allowed it to lapse. She stated, "*Actually sa COVID eh. Hindi na tuloy-tuloy yung hearing, kaya pinabaya ko nalang. Binawi ko nalang kasi siya pa yung iisipin ko, wala lang din namang nangyayari*" (Actually, it was because of COVID. The hearing did not continue, so I just let it go. I just withdrew because I would be the one worrying about it, and nothing was happening anyway). The account of this participant was the direct consequence of a system that stopped moving. For a woman who had already endured the difficulty of filing a formal complaint, the sudden silence from the legal system gradually eroded whatever hope she had left.

Balahadia et al. (2022) found that VAWC-aware respondents chose not to report cases due to embarrassment, inability to make independent decisions, and fear of societal judgment, confirming that institutional and social barriers significantly deter case pursuit. The financial dimension of withdrawal is further confirmed by the World Bank's Gender-Based Violence Policy and Institutional Mapping Report for the Philippines (2020), which documented that economic dependency on the abusive partner was among the most consistent structural factors preventing VAWC complainants from sustaining legal action. Additionally, the finding that disrupted court proceedings led to case abandonment is consistent with the report's observation that institutional inactivity and procedural delays significantly erode survivors' resolve to continue with their cases.

Marital Relationship After the Filing or Withdrawal of The Case

As revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants of this study, the participants narrated the outcomes of their marital relationships following the filing of a VAWC complaint or its subsequent withdrawal. The participants' accounts reveal a variety of relational outcomes, ranging from sustained cohabitation with conditional behavioral improvement, to complete marital dissolution and permanent separation, to the attainment of psychological freedom. The participants narrated the outcomes, as indicated below.

Partial Behavioral Improvement. P1, P3, and P5 described situations in which the husbands' behavior showed measurable improvement following the withdrawal of the case, though this improvement was characterized as partial and conditional. P1 stated that, "*Nag-bago din siya. Sa ngayon hindi na masyado*" (He has changed too. As of now, not much anymore). P3 said, "*Okay naman na ma'am*" (It is okay, ma'am). The respondent described the current state of their relationship as generally satisfactory, with the husband now present and involved in their child's life. P5 provided the most detailed account of behavioral change, where she said, "*Malaki ang*

nagbago ma'am kahit papaano, hindi na siya katulad ng dati na bayolente talaga kapag nakainom" (A lot has changed, ma'am, somehow. He is no longer like before, really violent when he drinks).

Permanent Separation and End of Relationship. The most common relational outcome among participants was permanent separation. P2, P6, P8, and P10 each reported that their relationships ended definitively following the case filing. P2 described her relationship as having deteriorated further after filing and said, "*Naging worse na, hindi na talaga naging maganda*" (It got worse; it really did not get any better). P6 stated, "*Naghiwalay kami*" (We broke up). The respondent noted that while her husband continued to pressure her to return, she had made an irrevocable decision against reconciliation. P8 stated plainly that, "*Wala na. Hindi na kami nagkabalikan doon*" (It is over. We did not get back together after that), indicating that the relationship was over and that there was no return. Meanwhile, P10 described the outcome as a complete and final separation, where she said, "*Wala na, naghiwalay na kami ng tuluyan*" (None, we have completely separated).

Structured Co-Parenting and Negotiated Agreements. P4 and P9 described outcomes involving negotiated arrangements that prioritized the children's welfare in the context of separation. P4 described a structured co-parenting arrangement where she shared that, "*Okay naman, nadadalaw niya naman itong mga bata at nakakausap, pero hindi na kami nagbalikan*" (It is okay; he visits the children and talks to them, but we did not get back together). P9 described an exchange arrangement in which her case withdrawal was traded for the husband's agreement to provide child support. She stated that, "*After ko winithdraw yung kaso, napag-usapan naming maghiwalay, pero kapalit ng pag-withdraw ko ay ang sustento ng mga anak ko*" (After I withdrew the case, we discussed separating, but in exchange for my withdrawal, I would receive support for my children). The post-withdrawal accounts reveal a dominant theme of peace of mind achieved through resolution, whether through separation, behavioral change, or the conclusion of the legal process itself. P2 described a source of genuine relief as she stated that, "*Nagkaroon na din ako ng peace of mind, maluwag na din sa dibdib ko. Wala na din akong iisipin na pupuntahan, wala na akong iniisip na dapat pa akong magpa-alam*" (I also found peace of mind; my heart feels lighter now. I no longer have to think about where to go, and I no longer have to think that I need to inform anyone). P6 also described a source of genuine relief as she stated that, "*Nagbago, nagkaroon ako ng peace of mind*" (It changed; I found peace of mind). P7 stated, "*Umayos kasi wala na akong pino-problema*" (Things got better because I have no more problems). P8 also stated, "*Pagkatapos non, nagkaroon ako ng peace of mind*" (After that, I had peace of mind). The respondent found peace of mind knowing that her former husband could no longer harm her. P10 captured the experience of liberation most vividly, stating, "*Masaya na ako, wala ng sakit sa ulo, I'm free na kasi wala na sya*" (I am happy now, no more headaches. I am free because he is gone).

These outcomes find direct support in Filipino-specific research on intimate partner violence. Estrellado and Loh (2019) found that battered Filipino women who left their abusive partners regained their sense of self, peace of mind, and freedom, consistent with the experiences of liberation described by participants in this study who permanently separated from their partners. However, the partial behavioral improvements reported by P1, P5, and P9 must be understood with caution. Estrellado and Loh (2014), in an earlier study of forty battered Filipino women, found that the decision to stay in an abusive relationship was strongly associated with the presence of children and the hope for spousal change, both of which are mirrored in the experiences of participants who chose reconciliation. The negotiated child support arrangement described by P9 also reflects the finding of Ledesma et al. (2024) that financial considerations remain central to VAWC-related decisions even after case withdrawal, with economic dependency shaping relational outcomes well beyond the formal legal process.

Proposed Interventions to Address the Withdrawal of Filed Vawc Cases

As revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants of this study, the participants narrated the policy-level and institutional interventions they recommended based on their lived experiences. Their recommendations reflect a coherent, realistic, and experience-grounded vision for systemic reform. The participants narrated their proposed interventions, as indicated below.

Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Assistance. Consistently across participants, economic independence emerged as the single most critical structural factor that could prevent case withdrawal. P1 stated, "*Dapat bigyan sila ng proteksyon at pangkabuhayan*" (They should be given protection and livelihood). The

respondent called for the provision of livelihood programs and protection to complainants, enabling them to sustain themselves independently of the abuser. P7 also advocated for livelihood assistance and said, *“Bigyan sila ng pangkabuhatan para magpanibagong buhay”* (Give them livelihood support to start a new life). P10 identified financial assistance as the foremost intervention, stating that financial dependency was the primary reason behind most withdrawals. She explained, *“Para sa akin ma’am pangkabuhatan o financial assistance para may sariling pagkakitaan, kasi karamihan yan ang dahilan kung bakit binabawi nalang yung kaso”* (For me, ma’am, livelihood or financial assistance so they can have their own source of income, because that is mostly the reason why the case is just withdrawn) (personal communication, January 2026).

Sustained Institutional Follow-Up and Women’s Support Groups. P2 emphasized the importance of sustained institutional support that does not abandon complainants after the filing stage. She said, *“Patuloy parin silang suportahan, yung karapatan ng mga kababaihan, na huwag ipawalang bahala. Ang gagawin dapat is follow-up, may follow-up dapat, tapos meron dapat yung ano—meeting ng mga katulad ko na huwag silang mawalan ng pag-asa”* (Continue to support the rights of women, and do not neglect them. What should be done is follow-up; there should be follow-ups, and there should be meetings for people like me so that they do not lose hope). The respondent advocated for systematic follow-up by authorities to ensure that women do not feel neglected in the legal process, combined with peer support group meetings that allow survivors to sustain hope and solidarity with others in similar situations.

Legal Rights Education and Early Intervention. P4 called for greater dissemination of women’s legal rights, arguing that women who understand their entitlements under the law are more likely to seek help early and less likely to allow abuse to escalate before taking action. She narrated, *“Dapat alam nila yung karapatan nila, na hanggat maaari, umalis na agad sila kapag sinasaktan na sila, huwag na nilang hayaang tumagal pa”* (They should know their rights, and as much as possible, leave immediately when they are being hurt; they should not let it drag on). The respondent emphasized that women should know they have the right to leave at the earliest sign of abuse and should not wait until the harm becomes severe. This recommendation aligns with the consistent finding across participants that delay in filing was partly attributable to incomplete awareness of available legal remedies.

Strengthened Barangay VAW Desk Mechanisms. P5 and P9 both highlighted the need for more responsive and empowered barangay-level VAW desks. P5 stated that, *“Kung mayroong ganyang mga kaso, sa barangay sana, meron silang action. Kasi minsan, kahit nag-aaway na yung mag-asawa, walang pakialam ang barangay official”* (If there are such cases in the barangay, they should take action. Because sometimes, even when the couple is fighting, the barangay official does not care). P9 also stated, *“Yung vawdesk ng barangay ma’am, mas ma-strengthen pa sana nila kasi sila yung makatutulong sa mga ganitong sitwasyon, para sa ganun sa barangay palang ay naaayos na nila”* (The barangay’s VAW desk, ma’am, should be strengthened even more because they are the ones who can help in these situations, so that they can resolve issues right at the barangay level). The respondent advocated for strengthening the barangay VAW desk’s capacity so that issues could be resolved at the community level before escalating to formal court proceedings, making the system more accessible and less burdensome for complainants.

Psychosocial Support. P6 articulated a deeply felt need for non-judgmental social support. She shared that, *“Kailangan namin minsan ng support ng mga tao sa paligid namin na, kunwari kung paano niya kami ibalik sa dati, kasi minsan, kung sino pa yung nasa tabi mo, sila pa yung unang mag-ja-judge sayo”* (Sometimes we need the support of people around us, like how they can bring us back to our old selves, because sometimes the ones closest to you are the first to judge you). The respondent emphasized the importance of having community members who can restore a woman’s sense of self and provide emotional solidarity without condemnation. The respondent stated that what women in her situation needed was people around them who would support their recovery rather than add to their burden through social judgment. This observation reflects the role of stigma in silencing survivors and deterring help-seeking.

Empathetic Law Enforcement and Anti-Dismissal Response. P8 called attention to the dismissive attitudes she encountered from authorities, noting that women are sometimes disbelieved and accused of fabricating their accounts. She emphasized that law enforcement officers and officials must be trained to listen empathetically to survivors, recognizing the immense personal courage required to come forward. She stated, *“Pagtuonan nila ng*

pansin ang mga kababaihan. Kasi, minsan, akala nila, gumagawa tayo ng kuwento. Dapat pakinggan din naman nila kasi mabigat, mabigat sa dibdib” (They should pay attention to women. Because sometimes, they think we are making up stories. They should also listen because it is heavy, heavy on the chest).

The interventions proposed by the participants are directly supported by evidence from the Philippine setting. Ledesma et al. (2024) found that financial aspects were among the most significant barriers to case pursuit among VAWC victims in Cebu, recommending that livelihood and financial support programs be strengthened as a priority intervention to reduce economic dependency and enable women to sustain legal proceedings. The call for stronger barangay VAW desk mechanisms is supported by Balahadia et al. (2022), who found that many VAWC victims in Laguna did not report cases due to fear of societal judgment at the community level and doubts about the confidentiality and responsiveness of barangay officials. The World Bank (2020) similarly noted that barangay-level VAWC desks in the Philippines remain under-resourced and require capacity-building to serve as effective first responders to domestic violence. Lastly, the need for empathetic law enforcement responses is underscored by the Status of VAWC Crime Victims study, which found that some PNP personnel discouraged victims from pursuing their cases, further eroding survivors’ trust in the justice system (Espineli et al., 2023).

Theoretical implications

The findings of the study extend theoretical understanding of domestic violence intervention and survivor agency by demonstrating that the filing of a VAWC complaint—even when not carried through to legal resolution—serves as a critical relational turning point and an assertion of strategic decision-making rather than an act of capitulation. While traditional criminal justice frameworks often equate case withdrawal with institutional failure or victim weakness, these results challenge conventional paradigms by reframing the withdrawal process as a sophisticated, context-driven cost-benefit analysis where women navigate overlapping physical, psychological, and economic abuses. The study reinforces and refines existing survivor-centric and empowerment theories by demonstrating that the initial legal action acts as an instrument of relational leverage that can prompt behavioral shifts in perpetrators, while the subsequent withdrawal represents a calculated mechanism for reclaiming autonomy and peace of mind amidst structural and cultural constraints. Consequently, these findings position case withdrawal not as an outright rejection of justice, but as a complex exercise of agency where survivors actively prioritize immediate safety, maternal responsibility, and family preservation over the rigid pathways of formal legal adjudication.

Practical implications

Practically, the study emphasizes the urgent need for local government units, law enforcement, and social welfare agencies to address the systemic, structural, and cultural barriers that trigger high rates of VAWC case withdrawal. Recommendations include strengthening economic safety nets by designing localized, government-led livelihood and skills training programs specifically tailored for financially dependent survivors to mitigate the necessity of returning to abusive households. Institutional reforms must prioritize seamless multi-agency coordination among the Barangay VAW desks, the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the courts to alleviate institutional fatigue and minimize the repetitive, traumatic reporting procedures that exhaust complainants. Furthermore, there is an essential need to expand community-level legal empowerment programs and localized advocacy desks to ensure that women are continuously informed of their rights and provided with sustained psychosocial counseling and protective measures throughout the legal timeline. Implementing these multi-sectoral improvements will reduce survivor vulnerability, counter community or familial pressures toward unsafe reconciliation, and ultimately enhance the protective and transformative capacity of the Philippine grassroots justice system.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The abused wives in San Mariano, Isabela did not endure a single type of harm but rather a compounded form of physical, psychological, and economic violence that persisted over extended periods. Physical abuse

was the most visible and most commonly reported form, with nine out of ten participants describing direct bodily harm inflicted by their husbands, ranging from slapping and punching to life-threatening acts of strangulation and attacks with bladed weapons. Alcohol intoxication was consistently identified as the primary trigger that escalated ordinary situations into dangerous and sometimes near-fatal confrontations. Psychological abuse manifested through chronic anxiety, conditioned fear responses, death threats, social isolation, and the systematic dismantling of the women's emotional well-being. Several participants described living under constant surveillance and intimidation that prevented them from leaving the home or seeking help. The psychological damage was not incidental to the physical abuse but functioned as a deliberate mechanism of control that trapped women in silence and dependency. Economic abuse operated alongside physical and psychological violence as an equally damaging form of control. Participants recounted being denied financial support despite their husbands' employment, having overseas remittances squandered without family benefit, and being reduced to states of material destitution where neither they nor their children had food. This deliberate financial withholding reinforced the women's dependency and severely limited their capacity to leave, seek legal help, or rebuild independent lives.

- The decision to file a VAWC complaint was never an impulsive one. It was the product of years of accumulated suffering that had reached a point where the women could no longer absorb the harm in silence. Most participants had endured prolonged abuse before formal action was taken, and the act of filing represented a final resort driven by the recognition that their lives and the lives of their children were at serious risk. The decision to file, therefore, reflected extraordinary resilience rather than a routine response to conflict. The convergence of several critical motivating factors drove the participants toward formal legal action. These included the desire to hold abusers accountable through the justice system, the escalation of abuse to near-lethal levels, the complete abandonment of economic and parental responsibilities that left children without food or basic necessities, and in at least one case, the decisive encouragement of a trusted family member. Concern for children's safety and welfare emerged as the most consistent and emotionally compelling motivator across nearly all accounts. The filing of formal complaints was also shaped by a growing awareness of legal rights under Republic Act 9262. As participants came to understand that what their husbands were doing constituted a crime rather than a private family matter, this recognition gave them the legal and moral basis they needed to pursue formal intervention. The role of social support, particularly from family members, proved significant in bridging the gap between the awareness of available legal remedies and the courage to actually access them.
- Case withdrawal was not a sign of weakness, indifference to justice, or reconciliation with abuse. Rather, it was a calculated and constrained decision made by women navigating an impossible intersection of economic vulnerability, institutional demands, and cultural pressure. Financial dependence on the husband stood as the single most structurally dominant factor driving withdrawal. Participants who had no independent employment or income found themselves in a devastating position where pursuing justice against the very person sustaining the family's livelihood threatened the material survival of their children. The same financial control exercised as a form of abuse was effectively leveraged by abusers to secure withdrawal. Institutional fatigue further eroded the participants' capacity to sustain their cases. The repeated demands of attending court hearings in distant locations, the financial costs of travel, the need to take unpaid leave from employment, and the absence of any proactive follow-up from legal institutions created cumulative burdens that women already operating at the edge of their resources could not sustainably absorb. The disruption caused by external factors, which halted hearings without communication to complainants, added an additional dimension of institutional disengagement that accelerated withdrawal. The abusers' promises of behavioral reform and appeals for reconciliation provided the relational and emotional justification for withdrawal that made it feel not merely acceptable but morally necessary within the Filipino cultural framework that privileges family preservation and positions wives as the moral architects of household harmony. The loss of a primary support person, as experienced by one participant whose father passed away during the legal process, illustrated how fragile the social support sustaining survivors through the legal journey can be, and how its sudden collapse can leave women without the backbone to continue.
- The outcomes of marital relationships following the filing or withdrawal of VAWC cases were varied, but what remained consistent across all accounts was that the act of filing itself served as a definitive turning

point in the relational dynamic. The legal complaint, even when ultimately withdrawn, altered the balance of the relationship in ways that could not be undone. No participant returned to the same relational conditions that existed before the filing, indicating that the formal act of seeking protection carries lasting relational consequences regardless of its legal resolution. A portion of participants who withdrew their cases and chose to reconcile with their husbands reported partial and conditional behavioral improvement. These changes were neither complete nor guaranteed, and they were consistently described as fragile and dependent on ongoing conditions. For these women, reconciliation was pursued not out of self-satisfaction but out of a realistic calculation that weighed the children's welfare, cultural expectations, and the limited alternatives available to them. The deterrent effect of the formal complaint appeared to produce some behavioral modification even without full prosecution. The majority of participants ultimately achieved permanent separation from their abusive partners, whether through mutual agreement, independent resolve, or the natural dissolution of the relationship following legal intervention. Most of these women described the outcome not as a loss but as a form of liberation, using language of freedom, peace of mind, and the lifting of a long-carried burden. A number of participants also arrived at negotiated co-parenting arrangements that prioritized their children's welfare while maintaining physical distance from their former partners, illustrating that relational resolution does not require reconciliation to be meaningful or constructive.

- The participants themselves identified concrete, experience-grounded interventions that they believed would have altered the course of their legal journeys had they been available. Economic empowerment and livelihood assistance emerged as the most consistently and urgently cited priority intervention across the accounts. The participants were clear that financial dependency was not a peripheral concern but the structural core of why withdrawal felt unavoidable. Access to income, skills training, and emergency financial support were described as the conditions that would make sustained legal engagement a realistic possibility for women in their situation. Beyond economic support, participants proposed the strengthening of barangay-level VAW desk mechanisms to provide more responsive, non-judgmental, and effective first-response assistance at the community level. They also called for sustained institutional follow-up by relevant agencies from filing through resolution, the establishment of survivor support groups to prevent isolation, legal rights education campaigns to ensure that women recognize abuse early and understand their entitlements under the law, and the cultivation of empathetic attitudes among law enforcement personnel who must be equipped to listen, believe, and respond without dismissiveness. The interventions proposed by the participants, taken together, reflect a coherent and community-anchored vision for reform grounded not in theory but in lived experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the experiences of the participants, and the specific interventions they proposed, the researchers recommend the following that are offered to the stakeholders who hold the most direct capacity to address the conditions that drive VAWC case withdrawal in San Mariano, Isabela:

5.1. For the Frontline personnel at the Women and Children Protection Desk, together with social workers and barangay VAW desk officers. They may be urged to conduct structured intake assessments that document all forms of abuse experienced by complainants, including physical, psychological, and economic violence. Our study found that nearly all ten participants had endured overlapping forms of abuse over extended periods, yet many described years of silence because they did not fully understand that psychological control and financial withholding were as legally actionable as physical harm under Republic Act 9262. A standardized, trauma-informed intake process that explicitly identifies these dimensions of abuse from the first point of contact would ensure that the full scope of each survivor's experience is captured, properly documented, and used to build a stronger, more comprehensive case from the very beginning of the legal process.

5.2. For the local government unit, in coordination with the PNP Women and Children Protection Desk, the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office, and barangay VAW desks. They may urged to put in place a proactive case monitoring system that accompanies each complainant from the point of filing through the resolution of her case. Our findings consistently showed that the decision to file was not impulsive but was the product of years of accumulated suffering and a genuine desire for protection and accountability. What broke

that resolve, for many participants, was not a change of heart but the absence of any institutional presence to sustain them through the process. When no one followed up, when hearings were postponed without notice, and when the legal journey became too burdensome to carry alone, withdrawal became the path of least resistance. A structured follow-up mechanism, with a designated case officer who maintains regular contact with each complainant, would honor the courage it took to file in the first place.

5.3. For the Department of Social Welfare and Development, in partnership with the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office of San Mariano and the Public Employment Service Office. They may urged to prioritize economic empowerment interventions as a front-line response to VAWC case withdrawal rather than treating livelihood assistance as a secondary concern. The testimonies of our participants made clear that financial dependency on the abuser was not merely one factor among many but the single most structurally decisive condition that made withdrawal feel unavoidable. Women who had no income, no savings, and no prospect of independent employment described being trapped in a situation where pursuing justice against the person providing for the family would leave their children without food. Until that economic trap is dismantled, legal processes alone will not be enough to prevent withdrawal. Accessible livelihood programs, emergency financial assistance, and skills training pathways must be made available to complainants early in the legal process and sustained throughout its duration.

5.4. For the local government unit, along with the Regional Trial Court and other justice system stakeholders. They may urged to give serious attention to the relational consequences of VAWC case filing and withdrawal by developing structured post-filing support interventions for survivors regardless of the legal outcome of their cases. Our study found that none of the ten participants returned to the same marital relationship that existed before they filed, and that the act of filing itself functioned as a turning point that permanently altered the dynamics of their marriages. For those who reconciled with their partners, the changes were partial and conditional, and for the majority, separation became the eventual outcome. Yet in nearly all cases, what the participants described was not a return to normalcy but a hard-won measure of peace, and for many, this peace came not from legal victory but from finally having named and confronted what was done to them. Survivors who continue their legal cases as well as those who withdraw them deserve access to counseling, peer support groups, and continued case accompaniment from social workers, because the end of a legal complaint does not mark the end of the survivor's need for support.

5.5. For the local government unit of San Mariano, in partnership with the barangay VAW desks, the PNP Women and Children Protection Desk, and non-governmental organizations operating in the municipality. They may urged to develop and implement a comprehensive, community-anchored intervention program that addresses the structural, institutional, and social barriers that our participants consistently identified as the driving forces behind case withdrawal. The women in our study did not propose abstract reforms. They named specific, experience-grounded needs: access to livelihood and emergency financial support so that economic dependency no longer functions as a trap; strengthened and better-trained barangay VAW desks that respond with empathy and accuracy at the first point of contact; continuous institutional follow-up from filing through resolution so that no complainant is left alone in the middle of the process; survivor support groups that break the isolation that makes withdrawal more likely; and community education campaigns that replace cultural pressure toward reconciliation with genuine understanding of what domestic violence is and what the law provides. These are not aspirational wishes but practical interventions directly drawn from the lived realities of women who navigated this system and found it insufficient. We recommend that these components be formalized into a coordinated municipal action plan with clear timelines, accountable agencies, and dedicated budgetary support.

5.6. For Future Researchers. It is strongly urged to build upon these findings to expand the scholarly understanding of this phenomenon further. First, because this inquiry was structurally bounded by a qualitative design focusing exclusively on ten survivors within a single municipality, the localized findings may have limited transferability across diverse socio-cultural landscapes; future researchers should therefore expand the participant pool across multiple communities, distinct provinces, and mixed urban-rural setups to improve the diversity, analytical depth, and broader applicability of the empirical conclusions. Second, while this study purposefully prioritized the crucial firsthand narratives of the abused wives, future research should adopt a multi-stakeholder design by incorporating the structured viewpoints of law enforcement personnel, social workers,

legal practitioners, and community-level support agencies to provide a more comprehensive, multi-dimensional understanding of institutional and systemic challenges. Lastly, to uncover the complex psychological and structural turning points that dictate legal outcomes, future studies should employ a comparative framework evaluating two parallel cohorts—survivors who steadfastly continued with legal proceedings versus those who ultimately withdrew complaints—thereby providing deeper, definitive insight into the specific protective factors and interventions that influence different institutional outcomes.

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