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## **FEMALE VICTIM – SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Domestic Violence is a social problem that need immediate attention from all members of the society. There are existing laws for the protection of women, but still, these problems pervade in many cultures nationwide. The aim of the study was to explore and analyse the dynamics among female victim-survivors in the Philippines within the context of their marriage or intimate relationship. It also described the experiences of these women in terms of reaction, consequences and coping mechanisms. A phenomenological study using in-depth interviews and document analysis was used to obtain data from eight female victim survivors. All types of abuse surfaced in the study, such as physical, sexual, psychological and economic. Results indicated the most common themes of self-blame, powerlessness, suicidal thoughts, retaliation, low self-worth and self-pity. As a consequence of the abuse, the victim's children were most affected, which include the themes of dropping out of school, developing hatred; rebellious attitude towards their father and reservations of entering a relationship. The most common mechanism that was used by the female victim-survivors was to focus on their work.

### **Keywords**

Domestic Violence, Phenomenology, Female Victim- Survivors

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### **Introduction**

Violence against women is a worldwide public health and human rights concern with serious consequences for women's health and well-being (Garcia-Moreno &Stockl, 2016). Most of the participants cited the feelings of fear and loneliness during the domestic abuse experience (Ozcarar, Yesiltepe, Karaman, &Ergonen, 2016). On the paper, the feeling of fear for the children was the common concern of the victims. Women are vulnerable to violence and exploitation everywhere. The strong historical foundation of male domination over women is linked to the inequality of the sexes of male superiority and domestic violence (Gosselin, 2003). Battering is deeply rooted in the legal and social traditions of the Roman English law, under which wives were considered possessions of their husbands (Szarzi& Mc Devitt 2003). In the

study, the notions of the victims on considering marriage as a shield to protect the relationship was contributory in holding on with the relationship. Family has been, if not the, major site of oppression of women. Love and care exist in families, so too do domestic violence (Nassbaum,2000). Domestic Violence is seen by experts as a dangerous social problem (Gelles, 2017).

### **Literature Review**

Violence against women is pervasive and endemic globally. Durankiev (2015) cited eleven (11) countries with the highest rates of domestic violence. These are Chad, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Guatemala, Mali, Somalia, India, Pakistan, Iraq and Russia. In the Philippines, the preliminary findings of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), one in four (26%) ever-married women aged 15-49 has ever experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their husband or partner. Among regions, Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), where Baguio City is situated has the highest number of women who sought help to stop violence (Bersales, 2018). In the Center for Women Resources (CWR) report, the culture of silence is contributory to having conservative data since domestic violence is being viewed as personal matter than a crime. In Baguio City, the City social welfare and development disclosed that among the reported cases, physical violence topped the list followed by psychological abuse, and economic abuse (Arranz, 2019).

### **Methods**

A qualitative research method, of which phenomenological approach was used. The phenomenological method aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Ethical approval was secured from the Graduate School of University of Baguio, Philippines. In the collection of data, an interview questionnaire guide was used in getting the necessary information from the female victim survivors of domestic violence. Eight female victim-survivors participated in this study through referrals and snow balling sampling, a technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actor (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Futting Liao 2004). Document analysis was also utilized. These records were analysed with the aim of retrieving key information about the informants' complaints against their perpetrators. The details about the progress of their cases were extracted from the available documents. An in-depth interview was also used in the study; this is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews. The interview responses of participants were grouped in a variety of themes (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The researcher focused on the central theme of the answers of the victims and the answers were described; analysed and interpreted on how the informants answered the questions based it from their experiences. In this manner, emotional attachment and judgment was avoided. The researcher made use of a language that informants were comfortable and familiar with. The interviews took place in the preferred time and place of the informants; except for one, who was interviewed where she was

detained. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of any information. Since the subjects comprised the critical mass, the researcher made use of acronyms such as DVA, DVB, DVC, DVD, DVE, DVF, DVG and DVH. 'DV' means 'domestic violence' the coded alphabets would mean the representations of each victim survivors or informants. With the informant's consent a tape recorder was used to record important details and taped interviews were transcribed and translated. The female victim-survivors who participated were those who had taken the step of going to the court, reporting it to the police or laying charges against their perpetrators. Document analysis was utilized. These records were analysed with the aim of retrieving key information about the informants' complaints against their perpetrators. The details about the progress of their cases were extracted from the available documents.

## **Results and Discussion**

Informants expressed their notions on domestic violence, and their experiences in line with reaction, coping mechanisms and consequences. All of the eight informants finished a degree, except for one who finished a short term course. All declared that they had the sanctity of marriage except for one who declared 'live-in partner'. The perpetrators of violence are the husbands/partners which agree with the literature that forwards the findings that violators are someone close to the victim-survivors and not the stranger. As of their employment status, six were self-employed, and the two were formally employed and unemployed. Most of these women realized that they need to earn an income for their children. In related studies, most of the female victim survivors are self-employed and mostly of the married women are literate and employed in the service sector (Diza, 2008; Reed, 2014). Risk factors for women being victimized included less education, unemployment, and history of child emotional/verbal victimization (Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Smith Slep, & Heyman, 2001). The age range of the informants is from 37 years old to 56 years old. Each of the female victim-survivors had one (1) to seven (7) child. This only shows that regardless of age and number of children, any woman could be a victim. It also surfaced from the study that regardless of the province of origin any woman is susceptible to be abused. This result has a strong link in the study conducted by the University of Michigan (2009) stating that domestic violence occurs among all ethnic groups and all cultures, among all ages, all income levels, all faiths and all education level. Psychological, physical, sexual and economic abuse surfaced in the study. The reactions of the victims were powerlessness/hopelessness/isolation, with suicidal thoughts or attempts, retaliation, self-blame, low self-worth and self-pity, financial dependence.

## **Reactions of the Female Victim- Survivors to their experiences of domestic violence**

### **Psychological Abuse**

#### **Powerlessness/Hopelessness/Isolation**

The family was the utmost concern why women victims remained silent even though they were abused. The loss of power and control was contributory to the holding of the relationship. In the

study, these women were affected with how people treated them. The husbands of these women consciously isolated the victim-survivors from the people who could help them.

The situation and the knowledge that the husband was not fulfilling his primary duties were becoming real to the woman and initially there would be denial of this situation.

DVA: *“Everyday nga ag awidnganabartek,nabarkada pay ken nalakwatsa pay nilakayko”* ( My husband is really alcoholic, he also prioritizes his peers over his family) ‘ *Narigattimakirelate ma’am, haandakmakatungtong, handakmakasao, maditimakitungtonguray relatives mi, ken madikmakiusap*’.( It is so difficult to relate with others. They could not talk to me, not even my relatives. For one, I really didn’t like talking to them).

From the account of ‘DVD’ it is evident that she has the desire for social support which is creating new friends became the initial solution.

DVD: *“Mahirapiyongmgafriends noon since bata pa ako. Naniwalana may lalakiako, naniniwalana may sakitako, taposano pa ba may sakitako may sakitdawako STD or AIDS parangganunangitsimissa akin.* (I felt that I was an outcast. My childhood friends even believed in the rumors that I was an adulterer and I had STD or AIDS too.) *“So iyong mga time na close friends kohindinaakosumasama. Nagkaroonakongbagong set nalang”*. (These people I called close friends abandoned me during those trying times. Eventually, I made a new set of friends.)

Efforts were poured by these women to bridge the gap, by adjusting to the demands of their partners to no avail. Instead, the husbands still have the final say, to the extent that these women were forced to limit their contact to other people. It is possible that men use violence to reassert a dominant position and that women, as a result of violence, may feel unable to assert their rights in those relationships (Filson, Ulloa, Runtola, Holcoda, 2009). The effects of psychological abuse can even be more damaging than the effects of physical abuse (Street & Arias, 2001). Violence is socially constructed and reflects power relationships (Muehlenhard&Kimes, 1999).

### **Suicidal Thoughts/ Attempt**

Verbal accusations from the victims’ intimate partner led the female victim-survivors to suicidal thoughts/attempt. For these women, the suicidal thought was a product of continuous experience of violation until the time that they already felt that the solution is to end their lives.

DVB: *“ Bumabaang self-esteem kosaakingsarililalona ng sinabi ng asawakonaparehokalangnamansamga hostess, walakayongpinagkaiba”*. (When my husband told me, you are no different from a hostess). *“ Humarapakosasalamin at hawakkoangkutsilyo, sinabikosasariikonamagpapakamataynako, nagdasalakosaDiyos n asana hindiakopupuntasaimperyo. Pero kung magpapakamatayakotatawananlangako ng Lord”* (It kept reverberating in my mind and the worst is that it lowered my self-esteem. I even thought of just committing suicide, but I realized it would not do good to me. If I did perhaps god would even have laughed at me).

DVH: *“Verbally abuse akosakanya, angtinginniyasa akin baliw, siraulo, mumurahinkaniyakapag may hindisiyanagustuhan, tatawaginkaniya, ag uuyong, abnormal,*

*lahat ng ng negative. Dumatingsa point na nag attempt ako mag suicide. Kasi ma'am may depression kakasiwalanawalaka ng pag-asa. Angginamitko kais cord itinalikosabubongtaposnaramdamankonangmasakitinalisko din. (I was verbally abused by him. He considers me an insane or crazy. He chided me whenever he is displeased of me. I once tried to commit suicide because once you have depression, you become hopeless. I used a cord to tie myself in the roof but since it hurt me, I decided to untie myself.)*

In this study, the suicidal thought was a product of continuous experience of violation that was felt by these victims, until the time that they already felt the solution is to end their lives. It is true that not all that have suicidal tendencies are suffering from depression but depression can be worsened during the abuse. This is an emotional burden for those who are suffering of depression which could lead to emotional trauma. Nervous breakdowns, depression or low self-esteem can lead to suicidal ideation. This suicidal ideation for victims for the victims of domestic violence is higher than those who are not (Kaur & Garg, 2008). Suicidal behaviours are one of the most important contributors to Suicidal Thoughts/ Attempt

## **Physical Abuse**

### **Punching & Pulling**

The effects of the victims' experiences affected their mental and emotional states. They felt helpless and just allowed it to happen. They confessed that they were beaten many times.

DVA: *"Dinanogdaktirupadiay first nganariknaktidagsentiimana"* (The first time I felt how strong his hand was the time he punched my face) *"I accept konalnagdiayararamidinnakaniak"* (I just accepted what he was doing to me)

DVC: *"Anglaki ng pasako, at muntik pa niyakalbo-kalbuhaninya"* (I had very big bruise and he almost made me bald) *"Na trauma ako, ayokona"* (I was traumatized and I didn't want it anymore).

DVG: *"Pinapahiganiyaakosahig at pinipilipitniyaangpaakotapossinasabutanniyaako"* ( He laid me on the floor, with my legs twisted against his legs, then he pulled my hair) *"Angginagawako ay aabutinkoang lock ng aming door para mabuksanangpintuan at makita ng mgakapitbahay at hinihilanilaako para makawalaskanya"* (Whenever he did this, I tried to unlock the door so that my neighbours could see me, and they did pull me away from him).

From the narrations, the women's suffering becomes a vicious cycle. The feeling of being traumatized is detrimental with the victims' mental health. Despite of the physical abuse they experienced, these women made remediation for them to get rid of their situation. It indicates that women suffer many physical injuries from domestic violence and it is life threatening (Alejo, 2014). Women were significantly more likely than men to experience physical or sexual and abuse of power and control (Coker et.al., 2002). Physical and mental health, and pain related outcomes are affected by abuse history for men and women (Teicher, Samson, Polcari&McGreenery, 2006).

## **Retaliation**

Retaliation was a self-defence that a female victim-survivor used. The woman's feeling of helplessness derived a thought and behaviour of returning the same experience to the abuser. This shows that this woman needed to adapt an environment suited on her own in addressing the situation where she was in.

DVG: *“Dahilalam kung takotsiyasadugo, so angginawako,naglagayako ng kutsilyosailalim ng unanko para kung sasaktanniyaako ay kukuninkonalang at gagamitinkosakanya. Isanggabinaumuwisiyana lasing at sasaktanniyasanaako, kinuhakoiyongkutsilyo at sinaksakkoisyasa may tyan at patikamayperomababawlang para magdugolang, kaya umalissiya.*

(I also did what he usually used to do to me. I placed a knife under my pillow so that anytime that he would hurt me, I would use it against him. One night, he came home drunk so when he was about to hurt me, I got the knife and stabbed him in his stomach and his hand but not that deep, just to let him see a blood).

This could be related in the findings of (Dugan, Rosenfeld & Nagin, 2003), thus emphasizing that too little exposure reduces severely violent relationships may be worse than none at all. Thus, intimate partner homicides (IPHs) perpetrated by women against women are frequently motivated by self-defence.

## **Self-blame**

Believing that the abuse experienced by one of the female victim-survivor was her fault, she just allowed herself. Although she was hurt, she just kept her silence and accepted her fate.

DVD: *“Nasasaktanniyaako noon, nasasampalmeron pa time nanagka black eye. Hindi nalangakolumalaban at nag re react, nanduniyong thinking nakasalanankokasi( He hurt me before, even slapped me. There was even a time when I even had a black eye. I did not react I just thought of it as my fault)”*

One of the consequences of physical abuse is the damage it can cause to the health of the victims, however in the context of the informant's story, blaming herself was her way of understanding the situation where she was in. This was an effect of the physical abuse she experienced. It has been hypothesized that women who blamed themselves for physical victimization will become depleted allowing the abuser to inflict physical abuse.

In related studies, self-blame is common by the mothers and those who grew up with domestic violence (Moulding, Buchanan &Wendlt, 2015). Furthermore, those with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and sexual assault continue to face stigma and blame victimization (Menaker& Franklin, 2015).

## **Sexual Abuse**

### **Low Self- worth and Self- pity**

Two of the informants felt pity towards themselves when they were sexually abused by their husbands. One was inflicted by sexually transmitted disease and the other one recalled the time when she was sexually abused by her father.

DVB: “ *Kapaggimagamitniyaako ay patiwariik, iyongulokonasaibaba at nakataasangpaako, naka Y shape. Isa pa nahawaanako ng sakitsababae ng akingasawa, angbaho ng aking discharge. In 2007, naospitalako, I am afflicted with syphilis and my reproductive system is removed. Then, I felt self-pity, palagikosinasabinamamataykanasana.* (He would have sex with me while I positioned upside down, in Y shaped position. I was afflicted with women’s illness and I was hospitalized in 2007 due to syphilis, because of this, my reproductive system was removed. I pitied myself. I was looking forward to his death).

DVF: *The last sexual act that happened between us is a clear rape. That time, ibanasiyaparangdemonyo. Hindi narinsiyaiyongtaongminahalko.*( The last sexual act that happened between us was a clear rape. He acted like a demon. He was not the same man I loved way back). This experienced also led the victim remember that she was a victim of incest.

In the study, one of the victims’ admitted that she was not spared with this. Making use of vinegar had helped the victim spared herself from the judgment of the society. Scientifically, the acidic component of the vinegar is supposed to eliminate any harmful microorganisms. The victim survivor admitted that after using the vinegar, her infection was cured. Birgistottir (2015), cited that individuals who have been sexually abused have lower self-esteem than those who have been sexually abused, thus sexual abuse is so powerful and damaging. The study of Zalewski (2018) also cited that sexual violence is an everyday ‘domestic’ occurrence and a seemingly ever present feature of international conflict.

## **Economic Abuse**

### **Financial Dependence**

Three of the female victims- survivors were left by their husbands and they were not supported. The need to survive was the reason why these victims stayed in the relationship. This is stated in the narratives of the victims.

DVB: “ *Mulanoong 2008 wala ng ibinibigay. Pinipitasnalang naming ng mganakkoanglahat ng talbos ng sayotesabakurannamin.*” (Since 2008, he has not been supporting us. It is good that we have ‘sayote tops’ that we could cook for food)

DVD: “*Wala ibangtutulongsayokundisarili mo. Taposangpinaka initial pala acceptance aqy battered wife, actually single parent ako, patipalaiyongipinanganakkoangnaangpanganayko, single parent nap ala ako. Paranganunang realization ko.* (No one will help you except yourself. And I had just accepted that I am battered wife. Actually, I have been a single parent ever since I had my eldest. My reaction, is the acceptance of what you become or the situation where you are in. Everything starts from acceptance of the reality).

DVE: “ *Kasinasa business ka, kapagwalakang capital. Angparangpinakaanonila ay nangungutangsiyempre di ba.*( I need to put up my own business. Without a capital, I had to borrow/ loan, but I failed to pay this financial obligation).

These women realized that they need to help themselves to be financially independent. In related studies, it was revealed that an increase in female employment increases domestic abuse

(Anderberg, Rainer, Wadsworth & Wilson, 2016). Economic abuse is frequently hidden or invisible form of abuse perpetrated within intimate partner relationship (Postmus, Hoge, Breckenridge, Sharp-Jeffs & Chung, 2018).

## Consequences of the Abuse

### Children are affected

Most of the survivors' children were much affected; some of these children developed the feeling of hatred towards their father, dropped from school, forced to work in an early age, had poor sleeping pattern, thinking of not getting married, was impatient, became rebellious and were adopted by their relatives. The impact of the abusers' actions had an immediate effect not only at present but also in the future of their children.

DVA: “ *Diay first child ko ma'am ketnatulala nu kasasaokkethaangsumumbatmasapolngaulitintimaibagbagakeniana. Nag drop pay ididdiayanakkongaimuna. Patidiay third child ko ma'am, agkarasakitmanin ado nga ag convulsion, maninadokngaisublidiay hospital, grade 6 ken ma'am kethan pay amuagbasa*”. (Our first child was so affected and shocked that we couldn't talk to her then. Eventually she dropped from school despite my advice. As to our child, he became very sickly. He is always hospitalized. He is now in grade 6, yet he can't read yet).

DVB: “*Sa akingpanganay, nakitakonabugnatin, hawakpalagiangaso, takotmagpakasal. Iyongpangalawanaman ma'am nagbreakdownsiyalalonanoongnalamanmaghihiwalayna kami.* (My eldest child became impatient and became fond of dogs. He is even afraid of getting married. My second child had a break down when he learned of the break up).

DVC: “ *Iyongkinahinatnan ma'am, nasiraiyongrelasyon naming bilangmagulangsaanak. Nagkaroon ng kasonaganito. Nahihyaakonaganawaako ng ganito. Lagi kung naramdaman, parangna recall koiyongpangitnanangyarisabuhayko. “ Rebeldeanganakko, sa may Lotto natulogsiyadoonmagdamag.* (Because of our situation, our relationship with our children was strained. I still remember those bitter experiences I had. My daughter became rebellious. She slept outside the lotto establishment).

DVD: “ *Sangayoniyongnakikitako hatred angnakikitako, walangakongtatayhindikotatayyaniyongmgaganoonagad. Naka mindsetsilanawalasilangtatay*”. ( I see in him so much hatred. He denies having a father and he has set his mind into this).

DVE: “ *SaSariliko at samgabata. Anghirapnilangdisiplinahin Kasikailangan may tataynatumatayosakanila.* (It affected me and our children. My problem was how to discipline our five children. It's different when there is a father figure in the family.

DVH: “ *Iyongpanganaykonasakapatid ng asawako. Iyongpangalawakoangasawakoangnagbibigaysakanya.* ( My eldest is with my husband's sibling. The second one gets allowances from his father but I take care of his school needs).

It can be gleaned from the study that children responded to violence differently. The children's attitude was affected to the extent of showing an attitude of becoming more aggressive and disobedient. This type of attitude might be the impact of witnessing domestic violence can



have a lifetime effects on their emotional, mental; and social development. The effects of domestic violence on the behaviour problems of children vary by socioeconomic categories, such as poverty and marital status, and therefore those children's and their mothers' needs in violent families may vary widely as well (Yoo & Huang, 2012).

Witnessing domestic violence had a greater negative effect on some measures (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, McGreenery, 2006). Many young people who witness domestic violence react to this violence exposure by developing behavioural, emotional, or learning problems (Moffitt, TE & The Klaus 2013).

The informants would like to gain financial self-sufficiency, this could be a way for them to be empowered and be able to start their lives together with their children. The economic opportunities that would be extended to these women had over-all positive reflections regarding their self-esteem, stability, strength, freedom and confidence. This was especially seen in the story of one of the victims who was awarded 'Istorya ng Pag-asa' (Story of Hope) a project of Vice-President of the Philippines Ms Leni Robredo. This only confirms that women who had experienced abuse can also be empowered. Empowering these victims would mean creating a new environment for them to be transformed.

Women empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women: in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development (Duflo, 2012). There is no positive linear relationship between education and the economic, social and political empowerment of women, as a consequence of the interface of gender ideologies and social and economic structural constraints (Jayaweera, 1997).

## **Coping Mechanism**

### **Focused on Work/ Sharing Stories with Others**

In the study, these women equipped themselves with work and find new meanings and purpose of their lives. Work change the women's perspective and they felt financially empowered.

DVA: "*Agwan wan nakittrabahok*" (I just engrossed myself in my work to forget my problem)

DVB: "*Dinadaldalkolang para gumaanangakingpakiramdam*". (To release the pain, I just keep on sharing it with others).

DVC: "*Dinadaankonalangiyongpaglilinis ng bahay , pagluluto*". (Cleaning the house and cooking became my outlet".

DVD: "*Noongna hire akosapinagaralan kung school. Nagkaroonako ng trabaho ng sarili kung peraiyong fixed income talaga*". (When I was hired by my alma mater. I started earning my own money)

DVE: "*Ay naku, travel siyempre, gusting gusto kongnagratravel. Gusto ko ring mag deal syempre para may pera*". (I like to travel that's what I like to do and of course to do 'deals with my business in order to have money)

DVF: "*Artist kasiako , I compose songs through my soul. It was always done out of inspiration*" (I am an artist and I compose songs through my soul).

DVG: “ Nagtitindaako mam, nakikiusapakosamgataonanakakasalimuhako. (I sell ma’am and I talked with people I dealt with).

DVH: “ *Lumalabasnalangako, nagbebentanalangako* ”.( I would rather go out of the house to sell).

These female victim survivors would like to see work as life -giving in which they could live meaningful and peacefully. In a related study, it is mentioned that domestic violence coping self- efficacy appeared to be protective against symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder PTSD (Decou, Lynch, Cole & Kaplan, 2015).

## Conclusion

The power and control of the perpetrators over the victims led to the repetitive physical, psychological, sexual and economic assault to the female victim-survivors. These experienced affected the quality of the victims’ lives which resulted to permanent emotional trauma to the victim and their children. To regain back their individual identity, different coping strategies were used; one of the most important strategies was the courage to report the abuse to the authorities which paved way for them to restructure and rebuild their lives.

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