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## **Gender-Based Violence: A Case Study in Samar, Philippines**



**Alfonso Alex Labrague Jr.<sup>1</sup>, Julie Ann Quilatan<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Abigail Cabaguing<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Mae Cañal<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Instructor, Samar State University

<sup>3,4</sup>Assistant Professor, Samar State University

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**ABSTRACT:** Violence against women appear to be one of the country's pervasive problems. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, one in every four Filipino women age 15 to 49 has experienced domestic violence and despite the efforts to put an end to the issue, VAW persist. This study provides an in-depth and intensive account about the experiences of woman victim of domestic violence in Samar. From the interview conducted, results revealed four themes: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, and economic abuse. The welfare of the children is always the mothers' priority. Thus, despite the abuse experienced, women stay in the relationship in the hope that the relationship can be saved for the sake of the children.

**KEYWORDS:** Violence Against Women, Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Economic Abuse, Abusive Relationship, Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Violence

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence is a widespread serious threat to many women, and remains to be one of the pervasive social problems in many parts of the world. It happens to anyone across all race, age, gender, and sexual orientation and occurs within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. It also affects people regardless of economic status and educational background. In the Philippines, results of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that one in every four Filipino women aged 15-49 has experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence by their husband or partner. (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021)

The study conducted by Bhalotra (2020) and Anderberg et. Al. (2013) suggest link between unemployment and domestic violence. Unemployment remains to be one of the crises faced by the world nowadays (Schlein, 2019). Although, global data show that the rate of unemployment substantially decreasing in years, still it contributes to the worsening condition of poverty all over the globe. From 196.63 million unemployed persons worldwide in 2010, it dropped down to 174.1 million in 2017 (Plecher, 2019). This significant decline in statistics proves in part the effectiveness of measures employed by countries in curbing such social problem. However, alongside such waning figures is the projection that it will slightly surge to 174.3 million unemployed individuals in 2020.

In the Philippines, from the results of the April 2019 Labor Force Survey (LFS) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, the unemployment rate is pegged at 5.1%, a slim difference from the 5.5% record of April 2018. A minimal decrease in unemployment has also been noted in the Eastern Visayas Region, from 4.4% in 2017 to 4.2% in 2018. These statistics on unemployment directly correlate with the poverty incidences in areas. In Samar, research and extension thrusts have been anchored on the aim of poverty reduction and such requires that other facets are also taken into account instead of just focusing on the economic impact.

In that light, this particular study looked on unemployment in a different perspective, deviating from what is usually provided in the vast amounts of literatures on unemployment tackling further its greater economic impacts. Western studies demonstrate reinforce such idea showing unemployment brings forth psychological and behavioral impacts to individuals. In particular, they cite unemployment as a strong predictor of domestic violence.

This study provides an in-depth and intensive account about the experiences of woman victim of domestic violence.

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### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

This study utilized the descriptive and exploratory case study design. Young (1996) defines it as the “comprehensive study of a social unit – be that unit a person, a social institution, a group, a district, or community” (as cited in Calderon & Gonzales, 2017). In other words, similar with what Flyvbjerg (2011) puts forth, the choice for case study to be utilized in research is not a selection of method, but of what is to be explored. This means to say that a case can be studied from different perspectives, either quantitative or qualitative or both. The case study approach aims at providing an “in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in real-life settings” (Crowe, et.al, 2011).

#### *Sampling Procedure*

Purposive sampling was used for this research undertaking. The researchers collaborated with the Social Welfare and Development Office in identifying the participant of the study. In identifying the participant, the following inclusion criteria were considered: (1) women who are victims of domestic violence, (2) women victims whose husbands are either employed or unemployed (3) women victims and their male partners are living together, and (4) couples belong to the marginalized sector.

#### *Research Instrument*

This study adapted the Domestic Violence Interview Guide by the Battered Women Justice Project hence. The questionnaire has been validated by three experts: two social workers and one psychologist. Pilot tested was done to ascertain its workability and comprehensibility as used by the researcher to the participants. Data saturation signalled the researchers in ceasing the data collection where no new information is gathered and information collected exhibit redundancy. The instrument allowed the researchers to draw in-depth and intensive account of women who are suffering from domestic violence relative to their husbands’ employment status. It is a semi-structured interview schedule consist of questions which focused on the determination broadly of the factors giving rise to such incidents in the households. The interview schedule has served as a guide and probing questions were used to explore the case during the interview process.

#### *Data Analysis*

In the data analysis phase, audio-taped interview was transcribed verbatim and translated to English. The researchers used Yin’s work on case studies where data were examined categorized, tabulated, tested, or otherwise recombined evidence to draw empirically based conclusions” (Yin, 2009 as cited in Baskarada, 2014).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This portion of the study will present various identified themes as a result of the analysis of our participant’s responses and essentially, will reveal how domestic violence is a result of various factors.

#### *Sexual Abuse*

With reference to the World Health Organization (2021), sexual violence is any sexual act directed towards a person against his/her will regardless of their relationship, in any setting. The same has also been considered as a serious public health and human rights problem. During the course of the interview, the respondent opened up how they, as a couple, were ideal compared to any other couples, according to their circle of friends. But there came a point in time when relationships pass through the bumpy road of a married life and theirs was no different. The victim opened up further, saying “*I am sexually abused. We had marital rape but the incident has already been reported. I was raped many times...in the comfort room...then there was instance that I was dragged...dragged from...our room was upstairs and he dragged me down...it was then the attempt happened...*”

Contrary to how they described the husband, he became violent and was even described as “possessed”. The description also came from his son’s mouth, as per the respondent. She noticed a huge change in her husband’s behaviour and later on decided not to stay anymore in that abusive relationship. From what she shared, the victim clarified that the marital rape did not only happen once but many times, for more than a year. At the time, they already three children. The bruises, beating, came out as a result of the victim’s resistance to having sex with his partner.

Additionally, such behaviour change was also attributed by the respondent to the substance abuse of his husband sharing, “*I did not catch him on act but I saw rolls of foil and then...then the shabu, I let him watch me drain it in the faucet then he said...don’t...as if begging not to...because of the quantity*”. There was at the time, according to her, no signs of violence yet but through her narrative, things worsened through time. The incident caused trauma to the victim and gave her thoughts of being afraid that her two kids, both toddlers and girls, would suffer the same.

The claim is supported by studies saying that while there is no direct link between drug use and committing sexual abuse, the former stands as a major contributory factor to violent sexual offenses including the latter (Langevin and Lang, 1990, p.421).

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### *Physical Abuse*

To recall, the participant acknowledged that the physical abuse towards her came as a result of her husband's coercion to engage her into sex. At the time when everything was going rough for them, someone told her that his husband was having an affair with another girl. She, at first, did not believe it knowing his husband until some messages were missent to her supposedly intended for the other woman. She shared saying, *"Someone told me but I did not believe him/her though you can feel there is something going on...not that you are paranoid but because he mistakenly sends messages supposedly intended for her other woman. I told him how idiotic he is."*

Following the suspicion and eventually, confirmation of the third party presence through the missent message/s, the respondent shared that there was no violence shown yet. However, through time, the husband has exemplified violent acts and tendencies. Further, she revealed, *"The moment there was already violence, I said this is already different. I've had bruises but I failed to take photos of which. However, his sibling was able to see it."*

From the narrative, the victim clearly shared how she was physically abused by his husband. This violence did not only victimize her but also their eldest which, at the time was only 17 years old. She narrated, *"One more thing I noticed about him that at the time he was using [shabu], he was not yet violent to me. It only appeared after and that my eldest was about to be beaten. It was his first time being treated that way by his father."* She also added, *"There was one time when my husband was about to punch our eldest...attempt... but he did not pursue it...just try...so instead of punching his son, he, I guess, just slapped him...yes, slapped...once because he really does not hurt his children."*

The instances cited above are alarming in the sense that the violence of the father is no longer just towards his wife but also towards his child who, according to her testimony, is well-cared of by his father. Literatures suggest that violence towards children can cause lifelong impacts on their health and well-being but not limited to death, impairment of brain and nervous system development, and negative coping and health risk behaviors, among others (WHO, 2020). This can manifest in children who experienced firsthand the said abuse. Although, children who witness, observe, or are exposed to violence in the homes tend to be more aggressive and show behavioural problems including depression, anxiety, fears, phobias, etc. (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999).

In the experience of the participant, she shared how children witness the violence that her husband does to her, saying *"They [children] really see firsthand...they cry...especially that one time when I was dragged down the stairs...the house was noisy we were conscious a lot of people hear us from outside."*

Such exposure of the children to domestic violence in their home caused a decline in their eldest son's academic performance, distress, and trauma. Such effects manifest into the physical appearance of the children. The child was greatly affected that he found his outlet where he can eventually heal. As the participant shared, *"It was a hard time helping my son heal...there was...a time that my son...he changed religion...it was then he was totally healed."*

### *Emotional and Psychological Abuse*

The testimony of the participant also revealed emotional and psychological abuse in their marriage. Multiple times, for years, she suffered from various acts which attacked her emotions, and worth as a person. All the more, the physical and sexual abuses she experienced has caused her trauma and distress up to the point of becoming paranoid that the same thing may be done by her husband to her children. Her biggest worry was this, *"At that time, I felt that my kids might also be abused...like that I do not know if I was just being paranoid or something...you know I just the thought that it might happen...right, sexual...they might be abused also sexually."*

The fear of the participant for her children was justified as she can no longer distinguish when they will be safe. Additionally, she cannot anymore trust also her children to his husband for she was afraid that they might not be given the care and protection they needed. Of which, she shared, *"Their security, everything, I was worried they will be forsaken or brought just anywhere."*

She also shared how she was verbally abused so often making her look like worthless or some kind of crazy person. She said she was being laughed at by her husband and their children are made to believe that she is crazy, *"He will tell the kids to look at me and say things like that...look at your mother...like he was mocking me saying look at her, she looks like crazy."*

The participant also mentioned how his husband was so controlling about the way she dresses and obsessively jealous towards her male friends and workmates, *"When we were together, I was not easily able to go out with my friends who he had suspicions with...then once, like that we attend alumni homecomings, he goes there by surprise. He will follow me and the next thing that happens is, we go awkward and part ways eventually. And during that time, our relationship was already shaky."* She added, *"He was so controlling in almost everything including the way I dress. I was told not to wear sexy clothes which reveal my cleavage...even if at home, he will always tell me look at those men outside, they frequent passing through our house because of your look."*

In this situation, the participant appears to have been reduced to a mere pawn which is almost totally controlled by her husband. This is contrary to when the husband hangs out with friends or anyone, anytime. However, the respondent emphasized that in terms of family planning matters, she is the one who decides and has full control. She shared that there was one time when her husband suggested having control because in his words, being pregnant is so hard.

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The participant also highlighted the fact that in response to her husband having an affair, she was no longer confident or comfortable being open to him. Those things cost him her trust. She does not anymore trust her husband although she decided to stay for some time in the abusive relationship for the sake of their children.

On top of all that, the participant opened that he attempted to take her own life because of the what she suffered from the hands of her husband.

### *Economic Abuse*

Apart from the sexual, physical, and emotional abuses, the respondent also shared how she was abused by her husband economically. Recall that they had three children and his husband had third party. The respondent said that there came a point in time when her husband no longer opens up about the money he receives at work or whatsoever. She furthered, *“He does not anymore provide...but he gives to her other woman...and at the time, I badly need the money for our children then that time...another thing that worsened the situation was when I lost my job and became just a housewife.”*

This situation made the victim pity herself and according to her, pulled down her self-worth. The situation was, although bad already or even worse, made her dependent to her husband to provide for the needs of her children. So separation is not an easy option. She all the more emphasized that their relationship was good when she had work and the husband was unemployed. But at the time when her husband had a good yield from his work and she became unemployed, things became entirely different. Abuses followed and then come their seemingly hopeless situation.

The testimony of the respondent has been heavy to take and warrants a legal action. Stringent as it may be, the process of filing lawsuit against her husband was very taxing which made her decide to just let it go quit. She said, *“In all honesty, the situation has already been blotted. In fact, a temporary restraining order was served and he was about to be charged with VAWC...VAWC since there is...physically, emotionally abused now...and financially abused...so the incident fits VAWC call...but what happened is, because I was hassled with the process. However, that time it was hard for me to do everything since I was at a thought that I was already bombarded by my situation then here...I’ll just leave it to God, to himself...and just like that, I quit because I had to get a psychiatrist or what, psychologist.”*

From the narrative, it was evident the process of going after the offender was aside from financially draining, it will also cost her time and energy which can supposedly be intended for her children. All the more, the hopes are not yet up for the victim and for now, her topmost priority is the welfare of her children.

## CONCLUSION

Domestic violence takes many forms: physical violence, emotional/psychological, economic and sexual abuse. The physical abuse involves hurting, slapping, punching, attacking and threatening to kill the victim. The emotional/psychological abuse involves controlling the emotional being of the victim thru yelling in the face, putting the victim down in front of the family and even to the children. Being unemployed and finally dependent to her partner, the victim’s experience on economic violence were manifested in the victim’s being forbidden to attend gatherings, withholding money or not giving her allowance, and even hiding their family assets from her. Sexual abuse also has been evident in the relationship with the victim experiencing marital rape based on what she narrated. The physical abuse also comes every time the victim would be raped.

From the results of the study, VAW affects the women’s physical, mental, and emotional state. It also caused women to lose their self-esteem and threatens their personal security. The severity and frequency also escalate as the abusive relationship continues. The welfare of the children is always the mothers’ priority. Thus, despite the abuse experienced, women stay in the relationship in the hope that the relationship can be saved for the sake of the children.

Domestic violence affects not just the women but also the children. In the study conducted, the children also experienced physical abuse from the father. Witnessing the abusive relationship of the parents has also caused trauma to the children. It has led to their declining academic performance and children experiencing distress. The trauma manifested to their physical appearance of the children.

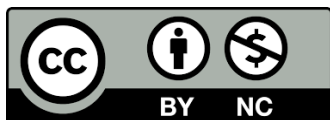
The justice system in the country prevents the victims from pursuing a legal case against the perpetrator. This was evident from the victim not pushing thru with the case due as according to her, the process was exhausting. This there implies that there is a need to develop effective mechanisms that would eliminate if not eradicate VAW in the homes, communities, and the country in general.

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