

It is Raining Tears: Voices of Women, Victims of Violence

MARRY JOYCE P. GUDMALIN

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4621-2992>
mjgudmalin@universityofbohol.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Violence against women is a form of men's expressions of controlling women to retain power. These behaviors include physical, emotional, psychological, verbal and economic abuse, threatened or actual use of weapons and destruction of property. The study utilized a qualitative method of research using a phenomenological approach. Four selected informants were individually interviewed in the municipality of Carmen, Bohol, Philippines. The researcher used an interview guide with a voice recorder to safeguard the accuracy of responses of each informant. Moreover, the members of the panel validated the interview guide. Research ethics clearance was secured from the Ethics Review Committee. Eight themes were created. Each subproblem had two themes which were: (1) Wounds from the Hand, Scars on the Mind and Reasons Behind the Scene. (2) Sword Pierced Heart and Scars from Physical and Mental Cruelty. (3) The Living Martyr and Family Over Pain. (4) Caring Ears and Shield from the Defender. Recommendations were the following: strengthening the awareness of women on domestic violence, deepening stakeholders' coordination, further training, and seminars on effective counseling to the PNP and DSWD, and allocation of public funds for temporary shelter and immediate needs of the victims.

Keywords: Criminal Justice, Violence Against Women, Lived Experiences, Qualitative IDI, Phenomenological Approach, Philippines Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women which is known as gender-based violence. It is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men (Watts & Zimmerman 2002).

The Philippine government has taken steps to protect victims of domestic violence through the enactment of Republic Act 9262 known as the Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act of 2014 which provide greater protection to victims. But long before this law was passed, it has been already battling with problems on intimate partner violence cases.

According to the Philippine Commission on Women (2008), violence against women is one of the country's pervasive social problems. A bigger problem is the lack of concrete information that shows the full extent of violence against women (or VAW) in the country as such cases often go unreported due to a culture of silence on the part of the victims. Meanwhile, other victims tend to dismiss their ordeal as a result of their lack of faith in the country's justice system caused by frustrations over the lack of results in filing complaints

It is uncertain when this trend will diminish in the Philippine setting, but as long as current efforts to fight VAW are sustained, hopes could be set high. The ugly reality of violence against women motivated the researcher to conduct such endeavor. This study looks into the lived experiences of victims of violence specifically married women with children. It will outrightly provide a clear picture of how it can be destructive to women, to their families and the growing children as well. The aspect of criminal justice will also serve its function for the protection of the vulnerable individual making them away from harm and danger.

This study is primarily anchored on Lenore Walker's Cycle of Violence supported by Sampson and Wilson's social disorganization theory, and concentric zones theory of Shaw and McKay.

The basic principle behind the cycle of violence is typically associated with violence that occurs in the context of interpersonal relationships. It is a theoretical model used to explain the patterns of behavior on the part of the victim and the aggressor. The entire cycle may happen in one day, or it may take weeks, months, or more. According to Heyman & Slep (2002), the

cycle of violence is sometimes called the intergenerational transmission of violence which posits that the victimized grow up to victimize others.

The cycle of violence is associated with domestic violence and broken down into three stages: (1) the tension-building phase, (2) the acute battering phase, and (3) honeymoon phase. These phases are depicted to center around denial by both parties in the relationship that the problem exists, or is as severe as it is (Keltner, Schweche, & Bostrom, 2007).

The tension building phase is characterized by minor battering incidents and emotional abuse over imagined or real infractions of rules and expectations of the male partner. This is the stage accompanied by rising sense of danger. The gradual escalation of tension displayed by discrete acts causing increased friction such as name calling, other mean intentional behaviors, verbal abuse and physical abuse. Verbal abuse begins as a result of common domestic issues like money, children, or jobs. The victim tries to control the situation by pleasing the abuser, giving in or avoiding the abuse but none of these will stop the violence because this will eventually reach the boiling point and physical abuse begins. Moreover, the abuser may become increasingly jealous, short-tempered or paranoid. As such, this phase occurs when acts of violence are generally preceded by periods of growing unrest within the relationship (Moore & Stuart, 2005).

Second is the acute battering episode. These incidents become inevitable without intervention. When the tension is at its peak, then, the physical violence usually begins. It is usually triggered by the presence of an external event or by the abuser's emotional state but not by the victim's behavior. This means the start of the battering episode is unpredictable and beyond the victim's control. The batterer typically unleashes a barrage of verbal and physical aggression that leaves the woman severely shaken and injured. In fact, when injuries do occur they usually happen during the second phase of the cycle of violence. As the victim senses, this violence coming to her, anxiety and depression may set in. This phase is the usually the briefest lasting from two to 24 hours.

Afterward, there is denial about the severity of the incident or an attempt to minimize or even deny the occurrence altogether. The police are usually called during this phase. Women may also seek medical attention after the battering incident, although they may wait several days before getting such attention. However, experts believe that in some cases, victims may unconsciously provoke the abuse so they can release the tension, and move on to the honeymoon phase.

After these two cycles is the honeymoon phase, which Walker (2009) explains as the abuser being ashamed of his behavior. He may apologize profusely, try to assist the victim, show kindness and shower her with gifts and promises. He also expresses remorse and tries to minimize the abuse and might even blame it on the partner. He may then exhibit loving, kind behavior followed by apologies, generosity, and helpfulness. He will genuinely attempt to convince the partner that the abuse will not happen again. This loving and contrite behavior strengthens the bond between the partners and will probably convince the victim. He might continue other forms of abuse though, such as coercion, economic abuse, or emotional abuse to maintain his sense of control even during this phase. This phase may embody everything she ever wanted and provides the woman with positive reinforcement for remaining in the relationship. He tells her he will change and she then hopes that their relationship will last. This is the time when it is hardest for her to leave. It is also the time when most counselors and other services will become involved. Some will encourage her to stay and keep trying, others will tell her to leave him, but other people will advise her that leaving the relationship is unnecessary.

Thus, intimate partner violence is common (Quinlivan & Evans, 2005) causing the cycle to continue over and over again which may help explain why victims stay in abusive relationships. The abuse may be terrible, but the promises and generosity of the honeymoon phase give the victim the false belief that everything will be all right. Walker (2009) uses this cycle to explain how women become victimized, how they fall into learned helplessness.

Another theory that is related to the study is social disorganization theory. It is one of the most important theories developed by the Chicago School, related to ecological theories. According to Sampson and Wilson (1995), the theory directly links crime rates to neighborhood ecological characteristics: a core principle of social disorganization theory is that place matters. In other words, a person's residential location is a substantial factor in shaping the likelihood that that person will become involved in illegal activities (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). This gives the researcher the idea of what type of communities and neighborhoods factor into domestic offenses.

Social disorganization theory and policing are linked to such concepts as legitimacy and procedural justice. Data from past social disorganization studies has shown that communities characterized by concentrated disadvantages such as poverty, public assistance, high percentage of female heads of household, unemployment, percentage of youth among

others; influence the formation of individual perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the police and the extent of criminal activity within the area (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

On the other hand, Judy Van Wyk, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, at the University of Rhode Island uses the social disorganization theory to reason that intimate violence is connected to disadvantaged neighborhoods because residents lack social bonds with their neighbors. It has been theorized that residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are unwilling to get involved or call the police in domestic disputes because they have weak ties to their neighbors. Women who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be socially isolated and are at greater risk of domestic violence (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Wyk, 2003).

On the other hand, the concentric zone theory of Shaw and McKay (1942) takes into account the positive correlation between economic status and distance from downtown. They identified four specific assumptions as explanations of delinquency illustrating social problems. Shaw and McKay stated that disorganized communities plagued by poverty, physical dilapidation, and a higher level of ethnic and culture mixing lacked strong social strength. They have concluded that the nature of the individual within the neighborhood control involvement in crime.

Two explanations were made by Shaw and McKay that shifted criminological theory from the micro – perspective which finds how groups of people demonstrate similar patterns of crime. These two explanations were summarized as neighborhood organization and transmission of criminal values (Faller, 2012).

Neighborhood organization is the first explanation. This explicates that abundant families can provide their children with structure and opportunities while the transitional neighborhoods lack the financial means to support their children to a well-established network of churches, schools, and community recreational activities. Due to poverty and pressures of rapid migration, children with social disorganization engage in delinquency.

Relating to domestic violence, husbands became deviant because of their financial incapacity to provide for the family while their wives act as the provider or because their wives may nag constantly. Shaw and McKay claimed that delinquency was not caused at the individual level but is a normal response by normal individuals to abnormal conditions.

Second is the transmission of criminal values. They developed this perspective through the life stories of lawbreakers. This describes that children learn negative values from older peers. Even as the racial and ethnic demographics gradually changes in the community, a life on the streets maintains a set of important concerns that may transmit methods of coping with poverty, lack of legitimate opportunity, and danger that youths must confront.

Husbands became abusive because they were living in an abusive family during their childhood. It simply explains that they were able to inherit negative values from their family and older peers. Shaw and McKay also found a great role of the government as field workers who will act as the catalyst to persuade the people. They created the Chicago Area Project (CAP). The objective of the said project is to discourage community disorganization and encourage social stability through community service, advocacy, and involvement. Some strategies developed are being used today like curbstone counseling or street work, individual participation, inclusive involvement, relationships with law enforcement (Faller, 2012).

On domestic violence, the strategies explain the value of the community. Strong relationships with the individual, law enforcers, and social workers play a significant role in crime reduction especially in the areas that have impoverished conditions were houses lie dilapidated and abandoned, educational standards, and facilities are low and crime including domestic violence is abundant.

OBJECTIVES

This study delved into the lived experiences of victims of violence against women in Carmen, Bohol, Philippines.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following objectives:

1. To describe the experiences of the informants as victims of violence;
2. To explore acts of violence perpetrated on the informants;
3. To determine how the informants cope with their experiences;
4. To determine how the support from family, government and society impact on the lives of the informants.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the qualitative method of research using a phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of women victims of violence employing interviews as a key process in data gathering. The study brings to the forefront the experiences and insights of the informants based on their own perspective. This study was conducted in Carmen, a municipality of the Province of Bohol. It is located in the third congressional district of the province, and it is a second class municipality in terms of income. There were four selected informants who were reported as victims of violence. The informants were interviewed individually. The researcher used the purposive – convenience sampling method in choosing the informants who were: women who were legally married and had children or child. The researcher selected the research informants based on the pre-specified criteria, and upon proper communication with the informants, the researcher visited the house of the informants and took a pre-assessment through an informal interview.

The researcher made an interview guide containing an open-ended question aided with a voice recorder to protect the accuracy of responses of each informant. The interview guide looked into the following aspects: personal circumstances of the informants, experiences of the informants as victims of violence; acts of violence perpetrated on the informants; how informants cope with the experiences; how the support from family, government, and society impacts the lives of the informants. Before the conduct of the study, coordination from the municipality of Carmen was made through a transmittal letter sent by the researcher informing the offices involved in the study such as the DSWD and PNP. Upon approval, a record from the office was procured to gain records of reported victims of violence. The researcher then looked for possible victims of abuse who were willing to be part of the study.

To establish a connection in the conduct of the interview, the researcher asked the assistance of the barangay captain to accompany the researcher to the houses of the informants.

The researcher utilized Colaizzi's method which is a phenomenological analysis procedure used to analyze transcripts during the conduct of the interview. The researcher transcribed the statement of the participants, read and re-read the transcripts closely to obtain the whole sense of the content and highlighted significant statements. The researcher extracted the significant statements, encoded them on a separate paper according to their transcripts, page, and line number then created formulated meanings out from the highlighted significant statements and phrases extracted.

The researcher grouped all formulated meanings into organized clusters themes. Then, made all cluster themes into emergent themes out from the formulated meanings to understand the phenomenon of the lived experiences of the victims of violence. The researcher rechecked the relationship between the created cluster of themes and the emergent themes to strengthen the descriptions of the formulated meanings. Lastly, the researcher ensured the validity of the findings by utilizing the member checking technique, contacting the participants via phone to discuss the result of the findings

The researcher observed considerable courtesy and rapport in dealing with the involved offices and the informants by providing all the necessary documents for their references. It included scheduled meetings and thorough discussions predominantly on the rationale of this study. Considering that during the conduct of the study, the informants were working and came from different barangays, the limited time they extended was respectfully considered. The researcher explained in a language understood by the informants during the whole interview process and ensured the confidentiality of their identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was presented in an empirical method through phenomenological transcripts of each informant and was read and re-read to obtain the general sense about the whole content. The significant statements from the transcripts pertaining directly to the research phenomena were extracted then recorded, noting the line numbers and informant code.

For a clear context of the study, each informant was taken in the local dialect, thus allowing them to freely express their part. These were translated for general readability and understanding. Likewise, all the statements from the informants were selected from the transcribed interview. Out from each

significant statement extracted, formulated meanings were created and coded as it reflected an exhaustive description of the informant's experience. The formulated core meanings which appeared to a common grouped and reflecting unique structures were organized into cluster themes. Lastly, cluster themes were then re-grouped to come up with the emergent themes.

After the thorough and exhaustive description of the formulated meanings using Colaizzi's data analysis method (1978), 25 cluster themes were identified and re-grouped to form eight emergent themes. They are the following:

I. Experiences of the Informants as Victims of Violence. Reflecting the experiences of the informants, the researcher formulated the following themes:

1. Wounds from the Hand, Scars in the Mind. This theme tackled the different forms of abuse experienced by the informants. All of them were very emotional stating their past experiences. Most of them cried a lot reminiscing about the experiences they had. Although they were observed as shy and emotional, still they were able to answer the question and narrated the abusive action of their partners. Based on the findings of the study, most of the informants' experiences emphasized countless physical violence like beatings, kicking, slapping and choking, emotional abuse such as belittling the victims' abilities and competencies, name-calling, insulting and infidelity. The presence of psychological violence was also encountered by the informants such as the threat of physical harm to the victim, mind games, unfounded accusations, destruction of properties and blackmail. There were also informants who shared that their husband accused them of infidelity. One informant also shared that she experienced marital rape. With regards to economic abuse, there were informants who stated that their husbands were maintaining control over financial resources despite the wife being the provider of the family.

Based on their statements, the researcher sensed that the physical abuse was the final result of other abuses committed by their husbands. According to the informants, the experiences they had with their husband will never be forgotten until their last breath which gave the researcher the idea of the theme describing the victims' wounded hearts from the hand of their husbands and how these became scars on the mind that will always be remembered.

2. Reasons Behind the Scene. Another theme under the sub-problem is Reasons behind the scene. This theme presented the different

rationale of why and how such violence happened. Most of the answers of the informants were due to the influence of alcoholic drinks, nagging wife and insecurities of the husband usually arising from lower education and lower income of husbands compared to their working wives. These are some of the troublesome issues arising from the lives of a married couple. Abuse often escalates from emotional abuse to physical abuse. In the study, informants were trying to prevent the violence from happening but because of the causes above, the informants came to be victims of violence. It is believed that when there is an effect, there is always an underlying cause. From the informant's statement in individual interviews and focus group discussions, most of them have common issues such as their husband not earning enough to support the family, and they were only working to support the needs of the children and the family, and another is their husband getting intoxicated from alcohol and prohibited drugs. Thus, it can be said that alcohol and drugs contributed to violence against all women.

II. Acts of violence perpetrated on the informants. Based on the informants' response during the interview, the researcher created the following themes:

1. *Sword Pierced Heart.* This theme answered how those acts of violence affected the victims. During the conduct of the study, informants were very emotional in narrating their experiences impact on women's physical, emotional and psychological aspect. In the individual and group interviews, most of them stated that they were physically and emotionally abused by their husband. They were kicked, slapped, punched or even strangled by their partners. They were beaten up, and their partners even attempted to stab or shoot them. Aside from physical abuse, psychological or mental violence was also experienced by the respondents. This included repeated verbal abuse, harassment, confinement and deprivation of physical, financial, and personal resources. Informants shared that ceaseless insults and cruelties which constitute emotional abuse as more painful than the physical attacks they encountered because they weaken self-confidence and cause insecurity. Thus, a single occurrence of physical violence may greatly intensify the meaning and impact of emotional abuse. Informants reported as saying that the worst aspect of the battery was not the violence itself but the "mental torture" and "living in fear and terror."

2. *Scars from Physical and Mental Cruelty.* Witnessing and experiencing the perpetrated abuse by the person we love the most gives us fears and worries. Such caused big impact in our lives. Some may

forgive and forget, but others will not. Most of my informants stated that they could accept the physical abuse by their husband but not the mental cruelty. They also shared that their children were afraid and traumatized because of their husband's action especially if their partner begins repeating the violence. This kind of violence affected their relationship with their children as the children were not spared from the emotional scars.

Based on the interviews conducted for both individual and focus group discussion, the researcher saw in their eyes and observed in their body language the agony brought about by the violence they had experienced and how they held on to their partner for the family especially for the children's sake.

III. How do the Informants Cope with their Experiences. Reflecting the experiences of the informants, the following two themes were made:

1. *The Living Martyr.* This theme was crafted to understand how the informants cope with the violence encountered. Listening to women with lived experiences of violence, the researcher learned how they coped with the violence. This was by getting support from their family, getting advice and taking counseling from the authorities. They were also comforted by their friends and authorities like the PNP who acted to stop the violence. These helped them to survive the most challenging part of their lives. Most of the participants adopted the learned helplessness, they accepted their fate with their husbands, instead of leaving. Although such incidents continue, still they remained and cohabited with their abusive husbands.

2. *Family Over Pain.* During the interview, most of them stated they wanted to leave their husbands, but their child or children kept them from doing so. The creation of the theme was also triggered by the responses of the informants relating why they were able to conquer the violent experience and what kept them in the abusive relationship instead of separating from their husbands.

IV. Impact on the Lives of the Informants on the Support from Family, Government, and Society. Two themes were created in this sub-problem, and these are the following:

1. *Caring Whisper.* This theme speaks to how the support from family and other people impacts the informant knowing that being a victim of violence is not easy. Most of the informants listened to the advice of friends, family, and relatives especially on not leaving the husband for the sake of the children. Others helped them by letting them stay in the house

of a friend or relatives to keep them away from their abusive husband. It was found in this study that their common answers indicated how people close to them affected their emotional and psychological decisions. Some informants also shared that their decision not to leave their husband was due to the advice of their parents, members of the family, and friends. Accordingly, it would take time to heal such pain and agony, but due to the help of people close to them, they felt at ease. The support from family was considered precious, no amount of money can buy the support extended to a member of the family who is in pain. Most of the women trusted blood relatives more than others. That is why most of them preferred to share and ask help from the members of the family as opposed to trained professionals.

2. *Shield from the Defender.* It is believed that the victim is suffering from depression and trauma caused by their intimate partners. The last theme, shield from the defender was made to acknowledge and describe the different support systems extended by the government and non-governmental organization on the violence experience. In particular, social workers and police officers often performed post-traumatic counseling that is in line with their job during the investigations of such crimes. Thus, they became the shield of the victim against the painful experiences they had with their partner. The informants from both individual and focused group discussion during the conduct of the interview manifested that somehow the advice from the social workers and legal proceedings conducted by the police officers helped the victims. It also served as a wake-up call for the victims to fight for their rights and at the same time, serve as a warning for their abusive husband.

The informants stated that police and social workers played a vital role in their situations. They stated that despite the obstacles and conflict they encountered with their husband, they chose to have amicable settlements in the presence of the authorities. Also, after such reported incidents, the informants observed that they were less prone to experience physical pain or abuse from their partners again. They also compared their situation now and before the incident was reported. They concluded that there was a big difference in how they were treated before and the present behavior of their husbands. As perceived by the informants, the authorities greatly helped them cope with their situation. The support they extended gave victims hope that the abuse they experienced will be ended.

CONCLUSION

After thorough reflection and discussions, the researcher offers the following impressions:

There is a pattern that emerges from the experiences of victims of domestic violence. First, there is a sense of denial that their partners can be violent because such behavior was not manifested during the courtship. Secondly, there was resistance as they tried to fight the abuse. However, they were aware of the futility of fighting because their husbands were intoxicated. The husbands might have insecurities and the sense of powerlessness because they had lower education, and lower income compared to their wives. Their state of drunkenness might have led to them to hurt their wives. Moreover, the sense of learned helplessness might have led the wives to accept violence as a way of life, hence, the tolerance of the violent ways. To keep the status quo in their marriage, women would rather be tolerant with their husbands despite the violence they experienced. This occurrence is supported by the need of wives to keep their social reputation intact in the eyes of others. Lastly, the victims derived meaning and purpose in their lives amid the violence they received from their partners. Their jobs, social involvement, and children gave them purpose.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the possible recommendations for practical application:

The researcher recommends that the Women and Children's Protection Desk in the Philippine National Police should strengthen the awareness of their campaign on violence against women. The victims must be made aware of their rights. First, for the victims to gain knowledge on Republic Act No. 9262 known as the Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act of 2014. Further, strong dissemination on the said laws should include profound discussions on the following: How good relationship with the intimate partner works, the different types of abuse against women, assistance given to victims; and identification and discussion of the different affiliated agencies and organizations for the protection of women.

Also, information dissemination must be given not only to those who are victims of abuse but also to the perpetrators, single women and children.

Stakeholders (DSWD, PNP, local and provincial government) should deepen their coordination. They must conduct rigorous consultative meetings on the prevalence of domestic violence in the province and the municipalities, especially in Carmen. They must also think of programmatic measures such as visiting couples in their residences, giving them advice and short lectures to wake them up to the harsh reality of domestic violence.

There is a need for further training and seminars on effective counseling for the Philippine National Police personnel handling cases against women and social workers, so they can better handle traumatic cases of domestic violence. Through adequate knowledge in counseling, they will better understand the vulnerability of the victims and provide immediate assistance.

The local government should allocate a budget for the construction of a temporary shelter and separate facility intended for the victims of domestic violence because allowing them to stay with the perpetrator may give an opportunity for repetition of the crime. This might hasten their complete healing from such painful episodes.

A barangay ordinance should be enacted and implemented to provide immediate protection of the victims experiencing violence from their partners. A temporary protection order should be issued once domestic violence arises.

The government should have a trust fund for immediate needs of the victims of violence. There should be a monetary allocation for immediate assistance and complete healing of the victim. This may cover the expenses of the victim such as medical requirements up to the legal proceedings of the case.

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