

Breaking The Silence: VAW Curriculum and Community-Based System

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Abstract

Violence against women is a global concern, and its control remains challenging, particularly in the context of the Philippines. Despite existing laws aimed at mitigating this issue, many women continue to endure in silence, while dealing with the social stigma and feelings of shame. Addressing this pressing need is crucial to providing support and empowering these women. This study aims to investigate the experiences of women facing violence and the role of education sectors, and local government units, in responding to and preventing violence against women. This study uses a qualitative method employing participatory action research. As a result, many participants highlighted the prevailing culture of silence and the associated stigma that discourages victims from speaking out, often driven by fear of judgment, and societal perceptions, leading to feelings of shame. As to the community, government agencies implement policies and processes effectively, however, there is a lack of established group support that will help victims of violence create safe spaces and dialogue on the issues. Concerning the role of education, participants expressed an integration of Violence Against Women topics into various social studies, gender subjects, and health education to promote awareness and foster an inclusive environment.

Introduction

Violence against women is a universal and complex issue that affects women globally. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological harm imposed upon women by both intimate partners and strangers, many times over, in every corner of the globe. It has serious short- and long-term physical, economic and psychological consequences on women and girls, preventing their full and equal participation in society, whether occurring in public or in private life.”¹ Its dimensions include physical, sexual, psychological/emotional and economic violence occurring in the family and general community or such violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), there are 18% of women

report having ever been a victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse at the hands of their spouse or intimate partner, either in the past or in the present. This type of abuse violates women's human rights and has long-term detrimental effects on the social, emotional, and physical health of the victims and their families. As stated, violence, particularly psychological violence, has profound short-term and long-term impacts on victims' overall well-being. As indicated by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2023, it significantly increases the risk of suicide, instills a sense of fear, diminishes self-esteem, and leads to conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite the efforts made by many countries to address this issue, violence

against women remains prevalent in many societies. According to the World Health Organization (2021), one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. With all the efforts made by many countries to address this issue, many women still suffer in silence due to the shame and stigma associated with being a victim of violence. It is crucial to develop effective and accessible support systems to help women break the silence and receive the assistance they need to overcome the trauma of violence. However, Santos (2009) as cited by Garcia (2020) discovered that there are a number of reasons why Filipino women decide not to speak up, such as feelings of guilt and self-blame, fear of the abuser, a lack of resources to pursue legal action, accessibility issues with reporting, and pressure from others to settle the matter and make amends with their abusive partners. According to UN Women (n.d.), governments and groups from throughout the world have taken a variety of actions to address this problem, including enacting laws and regulations that are designed to stop and address violence against women.

The Philippines is performing well in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, which is focused on gender equality, according to a study by Consignado et al. (2022). David et al. (2018) argue that the country does well on some broad indicators of the well-being of females and girls, based on data from 105 VAW desk officers, key informant interviews with five local officials, and document reviews of policies and reports both locally and nationally. The results showed that insufficient tools and resources are available to adequately handle VAW cases. Furthermore, there isn't a defined local system in place to guide desk officers in their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the authors recommended the following (1) a national or local policy amendment to include the basic qualifications of desk officers; (2) maximize the role of the local group of desk officers in capacity-building and advocacy while partnering with civil society; (3) proper fund allocation of the city to ensure full functionality of VAW desks; and (4) strengthen feedback system and enforcement of rewards and penalties to motivate the proper functioning of the desk offices. The paper contributes to local governance perspectives, specifically on

multi-level coordination, to effectively address VAW and provide gender and development (GAD) support services. In line with this, the Philippines has implemented a range of laws and policies aimed at addressing violence against women, including the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines which recognizes women's rights. Also, the Philippines is a signatory to the major international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and to showcase its commitment to CEDAW, the Philippine government passed Republic Act 9710 (RA 9710) or Magna Carta of Women aims to recognize, protect, fulfill, and promote human rights of Filipino women through the elimination of discrimination. Additionally, Republic Act 9262 (RA 9262), also known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act, the Anti-VAWC Law, Anti-Rape Law or RA 8353, Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act or RA 8505, Anti-Sexual Harassment Act or RA 7877, Anti-Mail Order Bride or RA 6955, and the most recent Safe Spaces Act or RA 11313, are more specific laws that address violence against women. Despite these laws, services are offered, but there is no standard community-based approach to assist and support women experiencing violence in the local government unit (LGU). The LGU, there is the VAW Desk, which is a program established by the Philippine government to assist women and children who experience violence in their homes or communities. The program is implemented at the barangay level, which is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines. The program aims to provide a safe and confidential space for women to report incidents of violence, and receive assistance, including legal, medical, and psychological support. However, there have been criticisms that the program lacks the necessary resources and training to effectively address the problem of violence against women.

Moreover, to meet societal needs and fulfill the mandate outlined in CHED Memorandum Order No. 74, series of 2017, which highlights the importance of graduates' ability to act with professional, social, and ethical responsibility, integrating women's challenges and supportive systems into the curriculum is a highly effective approach. This integration serves as a core program

outcome across all educational programs. The inclusion of women's support networks and obstacles in the curriculum demonstrates how important it is for academic institutions to address gender issues and advance equality. It gives colleges a chance to gain a thorough grasp of the challenges encountered by women and the significance of putting in place structures to help and empower them. This curriculum integration not only enhances students' awareness but also equips them with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively engage in societal issues. By exploring topics related to women's challenges, students cultivate empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a sense of social responsibility. They are empowered to challenge existing norms and advocate for gender equality within their communities. This study holds significant promise in addressing the existing gaps by focusing on the integration of the curriculum and the development of community-based support systems for violence against women in the Philippines. Through rigorous research and analysis, it aims to contribute to the creation of effective and culturally appropriate support systems that cater to the unique needs of women facing violence. By shedding light on the experiences and challenges of women impacted by violence, this research has the potential to generate valuable insights and strategies. These insights can inform

the development of comprehensive interventions and initiatives that address the specific cultural context of the Philippines. Ultimately, the objective is to create a society that respects each person's entitlement to human rights, gender-equality, and the rejection of all forms of violence. This research seeks to play a vital role in achieving this vision by contributing to the development of effective support systems and empowering women to live free from violence and fear.

Objectives

- To explore the lived experiences of women facing violence and understand the multifaceted nature of the challenges they encounter.
- To describe the roles and contributions of the stakeholders, including the education sectors, and government, in responding to and preventing violence against women.
- To examine the policies, processes, practices, and suggest potential programs for victims of Violence Against Women (VAW).
- To investigate the potential integration of insights into violence against women into the educational system and curriculum development.
- To identify the types of support services that will be offered, such as crisis intervention, counseling, legal support, or advocacy.

Conceptual Framework

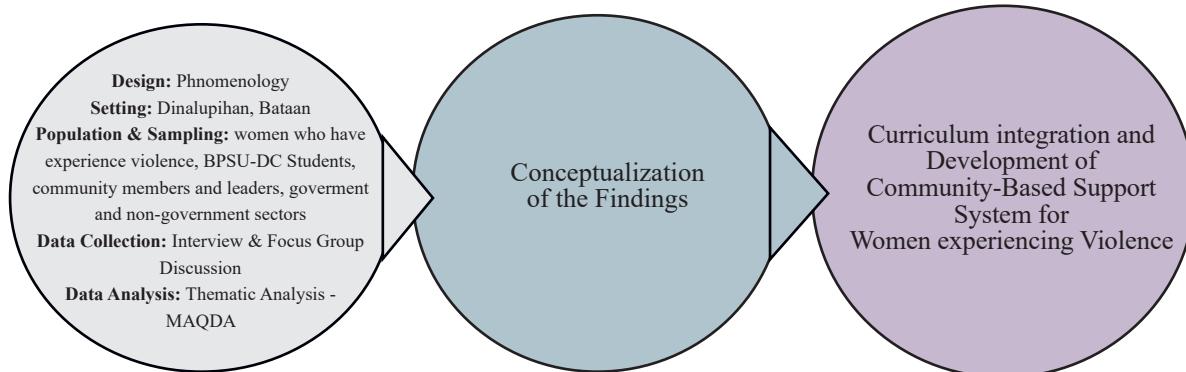


Figure1: A framework for curriculum integration and development of community-based support system.

The research framework employed in this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women facing violence, while also exploring the roles of various stakeholders within the community, including the education sector, government, and non-governmental organizations, in responding to and preventing such violence. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper exploration of the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to violence against women, facilitating the integration of relevant insights into the educational system and informing the development of effective community-based support systems.

Methodology

Study design

A purposeful sampling technique was employed in the selection of participants to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and information, thereby substantiating the data of the study and facilitating the development of a central idea. The participants included four women who had experienced violence, LGU representatives, government agency units (MSWD, Philippine National Police, Barangay Officials) and College students in Dinalupihan, Bataan.

Participants and Inclusion Criteria

For women who have experienced violence:

Three respondents were interviewed as recommended by the VAW desk officer of Municipal Police and met the following requirements, as this study was focused on the purposive sampling technique: they must have experienced violence 5 years ago and be residents of Dinalupihan, Bataan.

For community members:

There are eleven community members who were interviewed with the following requirements, as the study was focused on the purposive sampling technique: key officials handling the VAW cases from the municipality of Dinalupihan who had served for 3-5 years, elected barangay officials who had served for 5 years, Municipal Councilor headed the VAWC office, VAWC officer from Municipal Police Station (MPS), Head of Municipal Local Government Operations Office (MLGOO), Head of Municipal Social Welfare and Development (MSWD), Barangay officials, and students who currently enrolled in Teacher Education.

Data Collection

The qualitative data collection for this study was carefully structured in two distinct phases to ensure thoroughness, validity, and alignment with the study's conceptual framework. The process utilized two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and qualitative survey questionnaires, both validated by experts in education and psychology. There are two phases of the data collection.

Phase I: In the first phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. This phase served as an initial step to establish rapport and a supportive atmosphere, which was especially crucial given the sensitive nature of the study topics. Through open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to share preliminary insights and feelings, creating a foundational understanding that facilitated more open and honest exchanges in later stages.

Phase II: The second phase focused on gathering detailed qualitative data through an in-depth survey questionnaire. This phase built on themes identified during the initial interviews, allowing for a deeper exploration of participants' insights, experiences, and perspectives. The questionnaire format provided structure while still enabling participants to express their views comprehensively.

Language Inclusivity and Accessibility:

For inclusivity, all interview and survey questions were translated into both English and Filipino. This bilingual approach aimed to improve accessibility and comfort for participants, allowing them to communicate their experiences in the language they found most natural and precise.

Ethical Consideration

Bhandari (2023) revealed that ethical considerations in research were a set of principles that guided research designs and practices and had to adhere to a certain code of conduct when collecting data from people. The goals of human research often included understanding real-life phenomena, studying effective treatments, investigating behaviors, and improving lives in other ways. These considerations worked to protect the rights of research participants; enhance research validity, and maintain scientific or academic integrity. Informed Consent and Confidentiality were all indicated and included in the study. The researcher

had gone through Informed consent, which referred to a situation in which all potential participants received and understood all the information they needed to decide whether they wanted to participate. This included information about the study's benefits, risks, funding, and institutional approval; and also, Confidentiality, which meant that all participants had a right to privacy and had to protect their data as well as secure the information. Likewise, they were not coerced by any force and were aware that the study would only be for study purposes. Compensations also were not given to them; these were all explained to them through the informed consent form, which was indicated as a separate page from this paper. Moreover, the researcher provided access to psychological support or a psychologist for the respondents in case of an emergency, which was a great initiative to ensure their well-being during the interview process. It was important to prioritize the safety and mental health of the respondents throughout the study, especially given the topic's sensitive nature. The presence of trained professionals could help alleviate any potential psychological distress that may have arisen during the interview process.

Analysis

Data coding was done using MAXQDA 2018 software, significant statements were identified, and descriptive codes were employed in the initial coding. The initial coding phase generated 60 descriptive codes, which were subsequently organized into clusters based on their respective sectors. Using the thematic analysis, which follows the clustered codes, each cluster was analyzed to identify underlying themes. Key themes emerged based on patterns of shared meanings and repeated ideas, representing the broader concepts within each sector.

Findings and Discussion

Life Behind Violence

As reported experiences, the community has observed cases of violence against women, which include both formally filed in court and those that remain unfiled. Among these cases, participants encountered physical abuse, psychological abuse, intimate partner abuse, and economic abuse.

With this, participants shared on violence:

P1: "...The fighting was always there, which I used

to suppress because I didn't want the kids to hear it. But the time has come to defend myself, because it always shows that I am the bad one. We were in the room, we would fight and he was the one who had the courage to shout, "you broke that" "you knocked it over" but he was the one doing it. Children don't see that; they only hear those words that against in me. When he was going to stab my youngest, one of my children, pulled him away. That's when I was scared that I asked myself "until when?", until he would say "I will kill you all, ..".

P2: *"He hurt me physically and verbally. I'm sticking to the number, and people don't need to know that because I want to protect our family. We are one of the respected family in our barangay, especially my parents."*

The victims in the study not only endured physical abuse but also experienced economic and psychological abuse, highlighting the difficulties they faced.

P2 response, *"When I was working, all he does is drink, after he finishes work, he goes to hang out with his friends, he never gave us support. So as much as possible I will work and work... even after we separate, he is not giving us support."* Cagara and McLaren (2019) emphasized that the study conducted highlights the legitimization of the discourse on 'Support' in the Family Code of the Philippines since 1987. It defines 'Support' as encompassing everything indispensable for sustenance, dwelling, and education, aligned with the financial capacity of the family (Official Gazette, 1987, p. 47).

P1 stated, *"I was miserable when I found out that he had a child with someone else. He admitted it to me, first he denied it and didn't mean it. I just thought, "I will forgive you because you are not the only man who had a child with someone else and cheated". I also said, "I will forgive you as much as I can". As he wanted to hide what he did, it came out spontaneously. It doesn't come from me because I have a family and children want to protect. It gets to the point that he said I am the bad one. He was making a way of messaging me with different numbers threatening me, and I found out that it was him..."*

Experiences linked to violence, particularly psychological violence, have profound short-term and long-term impacts on victims' overall well

-being. It significantly increases the risk of suicide, instills a sense of fear, diminishes self-esteem, and leads to conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023).

Discrimination Leading to Silence

In relevance to challenges, the victim refrained from filing a case due to the distance between workplace and hometown, as well as lack of time to formally complain. However, facing judgment is an exceptionally difficult experience, especially for a woman who has been always responsible for the welfare of the family. *As expressed, "Even if I want to complain him, I'm far from my work. Presence is necessary because when you file a case you so should be there. Because if you're not there, the case will be dismissed and that's it. So, until then, it's just being blotter. Another is I am being judged by the people around my hometown" (P2)*

Violence Against Women (VAW) in the country remains a concerning issue, with numerous unreported cases due to a prevalent “culture of silence” among women victims, who may feel ashamed or discouraged to share their experiences. Moreover, victims tend to withdraw their cases due to a lack of trust in the justice system, leading to frustrations over the lack of results in filing complaints. According to Santos (2009, as cited in Garcia, 2020) found Filipino women choose to remain silent for various reasons, including the feeling of shame and self-blame, fear of the abuser, insufficient resources to pursue legal action, inaccessible reporting facilities, and pressured from others to resolve the issue and reconcile with abusive partners.

Another challenge faced by the victims is a lack of moral support from the family members or relatives, which can significantly impact their decisions and potentially lead to discontinuing the case. P1 stated, *“Moral Support is a big factor for women who suffer like this and at the same time their guides. that's where they're losing hope...”*. P1 emphasized the critical role of financial challenges during separation, particularly concerning support for children. She stated, *“In separation, the first thing a woman thinks about is financial support for her children. According to what I think the government's answer is to have an income or to provide a simple*

job.” Thus, victims seek help to generate income and offer accessible employment opportunities.

Desire for Support and Anticipate a Brighter Future

As victims, it is essential to consider various aspects, including economic support, professional guidance, spiritual resilience, moral encouragement, and connecting with groups that could share similar experiences. These elements collectively contribute to the holistic healing and empowerment of individuals affected by violence. Along with this, the coded segments emphasized the participants presented below.

P1: *In separation, the first thing a woman thinks about is financial support for her children. According to what I think the government's answer is to have an income or to provide a simple job... In my opinion, an organization that they can turn into a hobby and earn money will help them. Because as long as the hardship is there, they can't help but think about everything that happened*

P2: *when they need someone to talk to, victim like me can go to agencies that can help us such as the MSWD, the Police or Guidance Counselors. Because, they are one of those who help women who encounter abuse. Especially those who do not have someone to talk to, psychiatrist or Psychologist could be a big help. They can approach those agencies to help them and be referred to doctors who will help or assist them.*

P2: *It takes prayer; and being strong*

P1: *First of all, Moral Support is a big factor for women who suffer like this and at the same time can be guided us. That's where they're losing hope. Because I came to the point where I wanted to kill myself, but I was thinking about my children.*

P1: *Looking for an organization that have very positive views and can help us, victims. But now the organization for Solo Parents is spreading. So, this will help me to release my emotions and can easily understand my situation with similar with them.*

Longer periods of incarceration due to violence and subsequent separation, victims yearning for a brighter future. These victims aspire to overcome their obstacles and become strong, independent women in their communities. Looking ahead, these victims seek not only to rebuild their lives but also to contribute positively to their communities. According

to European Institute for Gender Equality (2023). Their journey towards empowerment involves not only healing from the trauma but also finding avenues for personal growth and meaningful connection with others who share similar experiences. By embracing their past, these individuals aim to create a life of fulfillment, peace, and purpose.

Victims pressed out

“Moving on is the best part, and children are the best medicine to heal everything. And I am on my second chance to live and change my future.” (P2)

With this, victims of violence are not just proposing interventions but actively advocating for a community-based support system. This system would serve as a platform for victims to communicate their concerns, articulate their needs, and express aspirations for a better life. The emphasis here is on creating a supportive environment within the community where victims feel safe and empowered to share their experiences and seek assistance. By establishing effective channels of communication, such as support groups, counseling services, and outreach programs, the community can address the complex needs of victims more comprehensively. Furthermore, this approach recognizes the importance of holistic support, not just addressing immediate concerns but also providing resources and opportunities for long-term healing and empowerment. It highlights the collaborative effort needed to create a community that values empathy, understanding, and solidarity in supporting victims of violence on their journey towards recovery and resilience.

A study conducted in India found that community mobilization and education programs were associated with a reduction in the prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women. Similarly, a study in Cambodia found that community-based interventions led to increased knowledge and awareness of violence against women and improved access to services. In addition, India found that community-based interventions and community mobilization were rated as promising population-based interventions, and included participatory projects and community-driven development engaging multiple stakeholders. Group-based training or workshops for prevention of violence against women and girls empowerment training, work with men and boys

on norms, and community workshops to promote changes in norms and behavior. However, the trial evidence of the programs is limited (Daruwalla et al., 2019).

A Multi-sectoral Approach

To develop effective mechanisms, policies, and interventions within the community regarding Violence Against Women (VAW), a multi-sectoral approach was employed. This approach facilitated the gathering of comprehensive information, drawing on expertise and resources from multiple sectors to address the issue comprehensively and holistically. According to Opportunity International, as cited by Basinillo and Tenero (2018), empowering women requires a responsive collaborative environment involving the active participation of government, international institutions, private sectors, non-government organizations, academe, and professionals to work together cohesively. Their collective efforts aim to uphold women's empowerment, particularly in terms of economic aspects.

Defined Roles

As described by the representative from the Local Government Unit (LGU) who handles the Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), “The role of the Sangguniang Bayan is for Implementation through Executive Order through Mayor Tong. The Sangguniang Bayan is also creating through Health when we do public healing that we can see and beautify what are the Rights that should be given to the community members”

While DILG's role mentioned,

“The DILG's responsibility in VAW at the barangay level is to capacitate the barangay since we are more focused on capacitating. Knowledge of how to handle VAW cases and similar situations. Furthermore, we track the monthly reporting of VAW instances. The barangays report that. It has been reported to the DSWD, the MSWDO, and with us. We keep track of cases filed in each barangay in VAW and VAC. Violence against women has been separated from violence against children. However, we organized or established the VAW desk in each barangay. So, every barangay has a VAW desk and the VAW desk officer should preferably be a woman because it might be a sensitive matter and they might hesitate to open up and talk if the VAW desk officer is a man. So, one of

the things we implemented in the barangays was the appointment of a VAW desk officer by an executive order issued by the barangay head. DILG also conducts a VAW desk evaluation.

Women's Desk on the part of PNP's role, "Prepare monthly reports on WCPT, prepare monthly reports on human rights activities, prepare investigation report involving women and children, prepare cases folder documents involving women and children, coordinate with DSWD on disposition of the CICL cases, and coordinate to other agencies. I'll add this: cooperate with other agencies about potential cases that may arrive in their area."

MSWD's role specified, "As a social worker in the LGU, I used to be from PREDA in Calaclar. Since I started here during the 2020 pandemic, I was assigned as a Child Protective Social Worker most of my clients are child abuse victims and vawc victims. Because our office is flexible in the LGU, I also attended walk-in clients for Medical Assistance under the AICS that was taken down by the DSWD."

Barangay Level's role specified, "Usually, in the barangay when it comes to VAWC case, we just record it here, because that's the protocol. So, just record here and then we will endorse them either to the PNP or to the MSWD, depending on the case. But there are instances that they want to present themselves here, but that really shouldn't be faced in the barangay. But if they want to come here according to their request, we will welcome them."

As written job description, their roles and responsibilities mainly focused on the effective implementation of cases, capacity-building for barangay-level personnel in charge, preparation and filing of cases, provision of psychological or counseling support as needed, and endorsement of cases to the appropriate authorities.

Challenging Role in Facing VAW Cases

While the job is expected to be completed, the challenges encountered are not always as anticipated. One such this is the frequent turnover of responsibilities every time there is an election at the barangay level.

As expressed, "We are also studying what is related to Mental Health on how to pinpoint that she was raped. Especially now that the law is so difficult...we don't know how to treat the harassed because we haven't

experienced it. So what we are training now is how to speak to them in the way they are approached..." Similar thoughts shared by PNP, "We always gathered training symposium, but from now, because of the BSKE 2023, the police are also struggling, because of the newly appointed committee on VAWC of the respective barangay. It's not that easy to initiate an activity because of the volume." We have 46 barangays in the town of Dinalupihan, so we gathered only, small talk, dialogue. But the overall, the do's and don'ts that should be done, we have not yet relayed to the committee on VAWC of 46 barangays because of lack of facilities. Like I said, we initiate a dialogue only, but not a symposium or training. But, this coming February, we suggest to have a symposium, training for the committee on VAWC so that we can help the constituents of the town of Dinalupihan".

Furthermore, the barangay has limited resources to handle VAW cases. As imparted, "...barangay does not have a huge fund to help, so they refer them. Then, it is up to the victim to seek the necessary help." So that is why, DILG is the responsible unit on barangay capacity building on VAW, as shared, "the DILG's responsibility in VAW at the barangay level is to capacitate the barangay since we are more focused on capacitating. Knowledge on how to handle VAW cases and similar situations".

Findings revealed that being in handling VAWC cases at the barangay level is present, however, the frequent turnover of personnel in charge poses a challenge. As newly designated to the position, there is a pressing need for comprehensive and proper training to ensure effective handling of VAWC cases. Moreover, the large volume of participants requiring capacity-building adds complexity, making it challenging to immediately impart information effectively. According to Consigado et al. (2022) in the study of the 105 VAW desk officers and key informant interviews of five local officials, with document reviews on policies and reports locally and nationally. Findings revealed that there is a lack of equipment and resources to address VAW cases properly. Additionally, there is no clear local system for the orientation of roles and responsibilities of the desk officers. Municipal Social Welfare and Development (MSWD) plays a crucial role in providing psychological assistance to victims

of violence. However, their capacity to address psychological matters is limited by the scope of their services. Having a psychologist available within the municipality, who possesses specialized training in mental health issues. This shared thoughts by the social worker, "We are suggesting that the town of Dinalupihan have its psychologist. With how many RHUs we have, I hope they can put something there too. Because our referral to Mariveles takes 3 to 6 months, sometimes up to one year when there is no court order, they do not prioritize it. What they will do then is to be interviewed and returned to their set schedule. So according to our need for the other victims to speed up their cases". According to Quing (2021) exposure to violence can lead to serious physical, psychological, and social difficulties, or worse mental health disturbances might also develop in the victims. According to the World Health Organization (2021), victims of sexual violence are significantly susceptible to developing depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, there is a pressing concern regarding the timely provision of medicolegal services for victims, primarily due to the constrained schedule at the Bataan General Hospital (BGH). Delays in medico-legal assessments can impact the quality of evidence collected and may hinder the legal process. RA 9262 otherwise known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children. It is stated in the IRR that medical services must be immediately provided to the victim, including physical, medical, mental, psychological, and psychiatric examination and treatment. As to the challenges faced by the different sectors, the barangay accepted the fact that they need training in handling VAW cases.

They expressed, "*Yes, it is difficult for us more often due to limited training and proper endorsement from the previous administration. Especially now that there is a case of physical abuse, the barangay level only extended to giving Barangay Protection Order*" (Barangay)

Sectoral Groups: Processes and Practices

As to the policies and processes, the groups have not only presented but also implemented certain protocols for addressing incidents involving VAW, as stated by participants from various government agencies.

The person in charge plays a crucial role in the first meeting involving Violence Against Women (VAW) at the barangay level. It is often the barangay officials

who are the focal person to assist victims reporting such cases, they assist, and ensure the case is properly documented to "record the case" and endorsed "...them either to the PNP or to the MSWD, depending on the case" to the appropriate authorities or agencies for further action and investigation.

On the other hand, "Barangay Protection Order...", BPO is a temporary measure provided to the victim who has filed a complaint, lasting for "only 15 days." and "...is non-renewable". As suggested, one of the recommended actions that barangay VAW personnel articulated is "...it's like you have self-defense so you can fight back..."

Under the RA 9262, victims have the legal right to file Barangay Protection Order (BPO) at the barangay level. The order is ordered by the perpetrator to desist from committing acts under section 5(a) and (b). Moreover, the PNP endorses victims for the Barangay Protection order for 30 days initially, with an option of renewal after a month. Subsequently, the complaint escalates to a higher authority to handle the case wherein it is filed directly at the municipal police station, the personnel who are in charge of VAW cases facilitate "investigation among women and children", "prepare the reports and case folder documents", stated under Section 4-1 of the Philippine National Police (2016) Manual in Handling Cases of Children at Risk and Children with the Law, and coordinate cases to other agency for other services needed by the victims "...women who involve violence for psychological assessment". This endorsement refers to Municipal Social Welfare and Development (MSWD) to cater counseling and refer those victims with trauma and physical assault to undergo medicolegal service and psychological services.

During the case investigation, personnel at the women's desk clarified the rights of victims, stating "*I explain. Actually, when there are people who file like that, I explain what might happen, if they withdraw the case, and file again*". Furthermore, once a case is filed to the Office of Provincial Prosecutor, monitoring becomes imperative, as imparted "...and it was documented by the, investigation sheet, the IS number, that's what they can use to follow up the case. But as their Women's Children's Protection desk officer, we always follow up their cases."

The PNP personnel cleared that they do not engage in mediating any cases, as shared “*victims in this situation, as in-charge, are prohibited from mediating, that is a special order*”. Conversely, if the victims of violence opt to withdraw their complaints, PNP in-charge personnel are prohibited from intervening in the victims’ decisions.

The Best Practices and Program Suggested

Among the numerous processes and policies implemented, there are commendable practices that should be acknowledged by the community. For instance, conducting trainings or seminars is crucial, as highlighted by the participants who mentioned, “*One of the best practices that I can think of is intervention of rape incidents within AOR. Because of the volume involving women violated by perpetrators, we need to have an intervention. Like for example, symposium, training, and other activities wherein we involve the women's and children's and even the perpetrator.*” (PNP). Furthermore, referral assistance and coordination of different agencies are also cited as the best practice. As expressed, “*to those who are victims of anti-violence activities, against women and their children, we also give an assistance from them, referral assistance from the DSWD so that the violence that is happening to them can stop...*” (DSWD).

To improve, nonetheless, it is advised to establish a medicolegal unit and hire psychologists to make the services more easily accessible. This initiative aims to provide direct access to necessary documents required for filing complaints relevant to Violence Against Women (VAW). Additionally, based on the input from the PNP, establishing shelters for VAW victims is a necessity to provide essential services while the case is ongoing, as stated, “*Yes, it is a shelter that could cater to the victims of women and children. In which, I suggested to them to have a caretaker there in the facilities that assists the victim. Not just take care of them. I also suggest to make work of the victim because they feel alone. So, it is better that with the help of the government and police, they will be given value for themselves and for the community.*” The only given to the victims is a “*...temporary shelter.*” That being said, there is a lack of established community support system. As stated, “*There are organizations exist in the community, however, there*

is no regular program to touch the psychological, emotional, and social aspects among the victims. Hmm... economic help slightly there but not all victims give the opportunity to have. (PNP)

To reduce violence against women, studies have also emphasized the importance of community-based interventions in addressing violence against women. A study conducted in India found that community-based interventions and community mobilization were rated as promising population-based interventions, and included participatory projects and community-driven development engaging multiple stakeholders. Group-based training or workshops for prevention of violence against women and girls empowerment training, work with men and boys on norms, and community workshops to promote changes in norms and behavior. However, the trial evidence of the programs is limited (Daruwalla et al., 2019).

Input to Curriculum Enhancement

To meet societal needs and fulfill the mandate outlined in CHED Memorandum Order No. 74, series of 2017, which highlights the importance of graduates' ability to act with professional, social, and ethical responsibility, integrating women's challenges and supportive systems into the curriculum is a highly effective approach. This integration serves as a core program outcome across all educational programs. With this study, participants (students) revealed that there is a need for integration of VAW into the curriculum as mandated by the CMO 17, s. 2017.

S2 imparted, “*School systems have much to gain by incorporating lessons on violence against women. Teaching about this important issue and making it more widely known will help students learn empathy, respect, and gender equality at a young age.*”

S3 articulated, “*Students can benefit from learning about the VAW issue and increasing public awareness of it. This will promote gender awareness to encourage a general understanding of issues relating to gender, such as the gender wage gap and violence against women.*” This integration fosters a positive outlook towards women contributes to reducing Violence Against Women (VAW) cases.

As revealed, “*I think the topics or content that they can include in the curriculum is all about the laws and the consequences in abusing women. In my*

own opinion, this kind of topic will help the students especially the men in preventing to hurt or abuse the women physically and emotionally. In addition, it will lessen the cases or stop the violence against women in our country.” (S3)

Not only does this initiative lead to a reduction in cases, but it also fosters a deeper understanding among participants of the related various forms of violence, including harassment, human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual aggression.

As shared, “*The curriculum should include a variety of topics on violence against women so that students can fully understand the issue. This could include discussion of different types of violence, such as sexual aggression, domestic violence, harassment, and human trafficking.* (S2) Furthermore, related topics on Violence Against Women (VAW) must be included in the curriculum to increase awareness among participants. The courses mentioned are Social Studies, Gender Subject, and Health Education.

Participants stated

“Teaching violence against women in schools requires a variety of approaches. This means adding relevant issues to subjects such as health education, gender studies, and social studies.” (S2)

“I believe that the topics or content should be included in the curriculum are social studies and history, legal studies, and health education about violence against women.” (S1)

Integrating VAW awareness into the curriculum, will foster an inclusive environment. As the P1 insightful remarks, “*...the institution will become more inclusive, encouraging and cultivating camaraderie and harmonious relationships among its members.*” This integration not only benefits women, but also enriches the knowledge of men, as stated, “*I envision it to be beneficial, especially with enlightening the minds of men that women should be respected, loved, and cared as the way they care for themselves.*”

The findings, as supported by the report published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023), emphasize that the organization’s goal is to reduce inequalities and promotes learning and creative societies in the digital age through quality education for all by strengthening education systems

to be gender-transformative and empowering girls and women, boys and men, to chart a better life and a better future through education. In a similar vein, documents on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women have been gathered, as mentioned by Sundaram and Stenson (2022) during the Istanbul Convention. These programs use educational strategies to address the root causes of violence. Creating national action plans with a focus on addressing gender-based violence against women is one of the main tactics used. These programs provide detailed methods and tactics for stopping and opposing acts of violence within a nation. Many states include comprehensive sexuality and relationships education in school curricula to ensure a balanced approach. The incorporation of this subject equips students with essential information and abilities to comprehend and tackle challenges associated with gender-based violence.

Conclusion

The silence of victims is deeply rooted in discrimination and judgment from within the community. To effectively address this, collaboration amongst all parties concerned is essential, with a focus on prevention, protection, empowerment, and education. This comprehensive approach acknowledges the complexity of violence against women (VAW) and stresses the need to take proactive measures to reduce incidences, provide effective victim protection, empower women to assert their rights and autonomy and educate communities about the effects of VAW. In addition, including VAW in the curriculum promotes a good view of women and helps lower the number of VAW cases.

Recommendation

- Create structured support groups specifically designed for victims of Violence Against Women (VAW). These groups provide safe spaces where victims can share their experiences, receive emotional support, and access resources to address their needs. By breaking the silence and fostering a sense of community among survivors,

- these support groups empower victims to heal and seek assistance.
- Set up shelters or safe houses for individuals affected by VAW. These shelters offer a secure environment where victims can stay temporarily or long-term, depending on their situation. They provide not only physical safety but also access to counseling, legal assistance, healthcare services, and vocational training to help victims rebuild their lives.
- Employ a psychologist to provide comprehensive psychological services to VAW victims. These professionals offer trauma-informed care, counseling sessions, mental health assessments, and therapeutic interventions tailored to the unique needs of survivors. Their expertise helps victims cope with trauma, manage stress, and develop resilience.
- The establishment of a medicolegal unit involves creating a specialized department or team within a healthcare that deals specifically with medical and legal aspects.
- Incorporate discussions and coursework on Violence Against Women across different academic programs and specializations. This integration promotes a deeper understanding of the dynamics of VAW, challenges societal norms and biases, and equips future professionals with the knowledge and skills to address and prevent violence. It also contributes to reducing the stigma, raising awareness, and fostering a culture of respect and gender equality.

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