

**FILIPINO MEN ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:
THEIR FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, EXPERIENCES, VALUES
AND NEEDS**

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***Abstract:** This study examined men's views on and experiences with domestic violence, their values and needs through FGD and in-depth interviews with married men from various sectors in rural and urban areas in Iloilo City. Findings show that men are the usual perpetrators, while wives and children, the usual victims of domestic violence. Men blamed their violent acts on their wives' nagging and untoward behaviors. For many of them, "it is normal for husbands to hurt their wives sometimes" and they expect wives to understand and be patient with them. Men kick, beat or slap their wives/partners and also verbally abuse them especially when the women nag, gamble or become unfaithful. The men acknowledged however, that violence is not necessary and can/must be avoided. Many of them also feel bad when they hurt their wives/children. They admitted that they want to change, but need help to do so.*

Introduction

Background

The incidence of violence against women and children in many countries, including the Philippines is high and still increasing. An analysis of reported cases in courts in three major cities (Manila, Cebu, and Davao), and in institutions of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in Luzon, Central Visayas and Southern Mindanao, revealed that in 1992 alone, there were 373 cases of domestic violence. In 62 percent of the cases, the victim was a married woman (Feliciano, 1997). In Iloilo Province in Western Visayas, the number of cases of domestic violence filed by

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the police, courts and institutions had increased from 265 in 1992 to 365 in 1996. Most of the victims were also married women and the usual perpetrators were husbands or partners (PNP Records).

The rising incidence of domestic violence in the country and in other parts of the world has triggered a growing interest on the subject. Since women and children have been recognized as the usual victims of domestic violence, it is understandable that most initiatives to curb it have been focused on women and children. Since they are believed to be generally powerless to resist violence, it is assumed that they need to be provided assistance/services and to be protected against further violent attacks.

The men, on the other hand have been identified as the usual source of domestic violence. As perpetrators of violence, they are usually perceived as the "villains" or the "bad guys." The portrayal of men in these images is strikingly accurate and derives sufficient evidence from many studies. The national study of the University of the Philippines Center for Women Studies⁵ reveals that eight in every ten abusers/ perpetrators of domestic violence against women and/or children --are indeed men. Several other studies in the Philippines and abroad revealed the same results (Lui, 1995; David, Chin, and Herradura, 1998, David, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Men's use of their physical strength against women and children does reflect men's power over the latter. But why do men hurt women and children. Male violence definitely does not happen in a vacuum: it is embedded in the complex sociocultural milieu and their past and present familial experiences.⁷ Sobritchea and Israel (1995) in their analysis of various frameworks on family violence confirmed that indeed, men's propensity to commit physical violence has multiple and complex explanations.

The *interactionist theory* serves as a guide in pursuing this research and the analysis of domestic violence (Lee, 2000) This theory

looks beyond perpetuating sociocultural conditions of male dominance. It identifies the combined and interactive influence of social, psychological, and sociopolitical conditions that trigger violent behavior. Specifically, the theory recognizes the contribution of the macrosystem (broad sets of cultural beliefs and values); the exosystem (stressful events, such as job stress, unemployment, or lack of welfare support); microsystem (family structure relating, for instance to power relations and pattern of communication); and ontogenetic (features of the individual's development experience that shapes his/her responses to the microsystem or ecosystem stressors, including learned habits, verbal skills, patterns of emotional response and other acquired behavioral characteristics).

The broad arguments of theories on domestic violence suggest that the antecedents to male violent behavior, while attributed to a certain degree to pathological causes, are more significantly rooted in the sociocultural and familial environment in which men, along with their female partners and children, interact. Because violence is directed and shaped by conditions within the society, it thus implies that it can be reshaped by modifying these conditions. Unfortunately, however, the Filipino society tends to overlook this perspective. Although efforts to curb violence has been getting so much attention, these efforts will still be inadequate, unless the source of violence is also examined, and understood and appropriate actions to change or modify situations to reduce or eliminate the violence is done. In order to understand the problem better and identify the most appropriate interventions to address the problem, it is important that the men's views about violence and their experiences with it be studied.

Study Objectives

In general, the study aimed to examine the men's role as sources of household-based violent behavior. Specifically, the study sought:

1. to examine men's domestic violent experiences, particularly, the common types of violence observed or experienced by the men, the sources and the recipients of violence, the duration and frequency of violence, and the circumstance in which violent incidents happen;

2. to determine men's values in terms of their perceptions regarding marriage, family and husband-wife relationship;
3. to determine how men themselves see men and in relation to other men, their female partners, children and the elderly; men's emotional expression, their awareness of the consequences of the violence they commit, and their perceptions regarding the possibility of behavior change among violent men.

Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature and utilized qualitative approaches, particularly focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. FGDs were conducted to gain insight into the participants' familial relationships, values, needs and their views about family conflicts. The in-depth interviews were conducted to examine more closely men's perceptions and experiences regarding family life, conflicts and violence and views on possible behavior change of violent men. In addition, a survey of resources in the communities was done to determine what services are available to for victims as well as sources/perpetrators of violence.

The study was conducted in one urban and one rural communities in Iloilo, Western Visayas, Philippines. Iloilo City, the only chartered city in the Province was purposely chosen as the urban area. Dingle, an agricultural municipality, located approximately 30 kilometers from Iloilo City was identified as the rural area.

The core study participants were men who had been married for at least five years. Eighty purposively identified men participated in the FGDs and 80 men served as key informants for the in-depth interviews. Half of the men were selected from the urban study area and the other half from the rural area. The sample was equally allocated to four sectors; namely the academe, military, professional/office workers and producers/entrepreneurs/ community folks. Half of the sectoral samples were below 40 years old and the other half were 40 years old or older.

Ethical Consideration

The study participants' decision to participate was voluntary. The nature, scope and purpose of the study were explained to them and they were assured that any information they shared will be held confidential. They were given the option to refuse to participate or drop out of the study if they so desired.

Results and Discussions

Men's Experiences With Domestic Violence

The men acknowledged that many simple conflicts can become serious and lead to violence and cause either psychological/emotional or physical harm not only to the wife or husband, but also the children. FGD participants reported having observed and experienced the progress of conflicts from simple verbal quarrels to physical aggression.

Except for one, all of the 80 men interviewed reported having observed conflicts which had led to physical violence. The most common type of conflicts observed by the men were verbal in nature (90 percent). Nearly half of the men reported having seen or observed incidence of physical violence, most of which started in arguments triggered by conflicting opinions/views on certain issues, displeasure or frustration of one over a questionable act/behavior of the other.

Nearly half (48.7 percent) of the men admitted having hurt their wives, verbally most of the time (18 responses), but eleven (13 percent) admitted having physically harmed their spouses. The most common forms of physical violence observed or experienced by the men were slapping, punching, throwing things or hard objects at the victim. Pushing, choking, dragging and whipping a victim were also reported. Most often, the physical abuse is preceded or accompanied by verbal abuse in the form of cursing, swearing and or insulting statements. FGD participants, likewise admitted having committed the same acts of violence.

Recipients and Sources of Violence

Consistent with results of previous studies on domestic violence, the most common victims of home-based violence observed or experienced by the men were wives and/or children and the most common sources/perpetrators were husbands or male partners. The men acknowledged that most violent acts are initiated by men. Only very few men have been physically hurt by their wives/partners.

It is interesting to note that most of the self-confessed wife beaters did not admit the blame for their act. They blamed their partners/wives instead for initiating the verbal confrontations which had lead to their physical encounter. Few of the men claimed that they have also been abused by their wives, but mainly verbally. They quickly added that some men retaliate physically against their partners/wives who verbally or physically hurt them. There are women who physically abuse of their husbands/spouses because of men's irresponsible behaviors and wrong doings that threaten family harmony.

Causes and Precipitators of Violence

The perpetrators justified that they become violent only because of the nagging, irrational accusations, and other irritating behaviors of their wives/partners. They said that these acts "demean them and insult, or challenge their manhood or authority." They added that, they do these "to stop their mouth," "to correct their behavior," or to "give them a lesson," often "a painful one for them to remember." Apparently the men could not tolerate direct verbal confrontation by their wives about their "acts of omissions" (irresponsibility, thoughtlessness, indifference, etc) or about their vices and other misbehaviors (drinking, gambling, philandering). . Men's descriptions of nagging in the local dialect imply negative meanings "wara-wara," "wirik-wirik," "yaw-yaw," etc.

Drunkenness predisposes men to be violent. Most of the physical violence of men occurred when they were under the influence of liquor. They said that at the state they are easily provoked and the effect of alcohol makes it difficult to control their anger. Some men attribute their violent behavior on their family background. Three self- confessed wife beaters recounted how their father constantly beat their mother in their

presence. They recalled that their father also beat them when they tried to protect their mother. They related that the beatings were so frequent that they got so used to it and admitted that now they are easily provoked and for them it seem so natural to beat their wives.

Men's Reactions/Feeling After Hurting Women or Children

Ironically, many of the violent men admitted that they also feel bad and hurt when they see the person they hurt crying or suffering from pain. Many of them expressed regret for hurting their wives/partners. They said that they also feel guilty and remorseful after a violent incident because most often, they do not intend to really hurt their partners/wives. Even frequent wife beaters admitted experiencing remorse and guilt. After realizing what they did, they usually ask for forgiveness and try to do something to please the person they have hurt.

There were some perpetrators, however, who said that they do not feel any guilt or remorse after beating their wives/partners. They felt that "it is the right thing to do" because their wives'/partners' "deserve what they get." This reaction is usually triggered by infidelity. The men also expressed that when women fight back either verbally or physically, they often get more hurt because this reaction makes men more angry and further drive them to be more violent. According to them this challenges their manhood and threatens their authority or control at home.

Men's Values and Needs

For the men, marriage is an important event in a life of a couple. Their reasons for marrying fall under three general categories: 1) for companionship and security in old age, 2) to have children (procreation) and 3) for sexual fulfillment (biological reasons). Other reasons given were: "to fulfill one's responsibility to their family," and "for economic reasons."

Most of FGD participants expressed a desire to have a peace and harmonious marriage. They acknowledged that in a good marriage the husband and the wife are the most important ingredients. They blamed failed marriages on: a) infidelity of a spouse, b) interference of in-laws, poverty, c) unemployment of husband/wife, d) financial

problems, e) vices of either or both husband and wife (drinking, gambling) and f) poor communication between husband and wife and the children. Abusive behavior of the husband/wife, lack of faith in God, incompatibility, and sexual dissatisfaction were also mentioned.

The men agreed that if they remain faithful to their wives, provide adequate support to their family, spend time with his family, love his wife and children, and prepare for the future of the family, domestic conflicts can be avoided. They stressed, however, that wives should efficiently perform her nurturing role and "wifely" obligations to make her family happy. This means "taking care of the needs of their children and those of their husband," "loving their children and husband," "taking care of their house such as doing chores, making sure that the house is clean," and "informing the husband about the things needed in the house." They added that wives should also take care of themselves, be patient with their husbands and be supportive and faithful to them.

The men apparently value their children very much. They shared the belief that well provided and healthy children make a happy home. Children who are diligent in their studies and are healthy make them happy fathers. For Filipinos, family life truly centers on the children. Parents work hard to support their children. Many parents are even willing to sacrifice even their own needs for their children's sake.

The value Filipinos attach to children has not changed. Children are valued by their fathers the same way their grand fathers valued their own children. This has been reported by several studies on family which had touched on value of children.

Men on Men

The men's descriptions of men's character reflect a general view that men symbolize strength and power. The words/phrases they commonly used to describe men include: 'poderoso' (powerful), 'haligi sang pamilya' (post of the family), manug-apin (defender), provider, risk-taker, and other words which connote power and strength. Even their descriptions of men in relation to women highlight men's power and control over women. The use of words like protector, supporter, defender of the wife and his children, to describe men attest to this.

The men's views about men have apparently been influenced and molded by the societal norms, tradition, parents, the church, their school, and books they read. They mentioned parents, grandparents, tradition, observation and experiences as bases for their views and perceptions. There were some professionals who mentioned the law and the Family Code as bases.

Men's Emotional Expression

The men expressed that it is still a general perception in the Philippines that "crying among men is a sign of weakness." It is for this reason they said, that many men still try to control their emotions even when they are in great sorrow. Even if they hurt, they tend to hold back their tears or just cry in silence or in private. Most of the men, confessed, however, that they had cried before, and did not feel embarrassed about it. For them "it is all right for men to cry," when necessary. According to them, crying releases tension and strong emotions, such as happiness, sorrow, repentance, or loneliness. They acknowledged feeling good and relieved after crying. Among the instances or situations which had made them cry were: death in the family, anger, homesickness, and extreme joy.

On Causes and Consequences of Family Conflicts

The men perceived that domestic conflicts are common and normal (natural) occurrences in every family. "*Natural lang na sa mag-asawa nga away away,*" said the participants. Another said that, "*Indi gid ya malikawan and paginaway sang mag-asawa*" (This cannot be avoided). They stressed, however that quarrels/conflicts are not necessary and should be avoided. The men admitted that minor conflicts can lead to violence when no one gives in, or admits a wrongdoing.

They recognize the fact that they play a greater role than their wives in conflict resolution. This is the reason why most of the time the husbands initiate reconciliation. After asking for forgiveness, they try to win back their wives by doing something to please or appease them, cooking a nice meal.

The men admitted that most husbands and wives resolve their own conflicts because they have no where or no one to go to. Even when serious conflicts occur, they still prefer to settle the problem themselves because they are not sure how others would react to their problems. Some expressed apprehension that others might interfere and make matters worse. A few have tried to approach a relative to mediate.

Men's Needs and Plans for Behavior Change

The men believed that even men can change and many in fact wish to change, even self-confessed wife-beaters. The desire to change was more pronounced among those emotionally affected by their violent acts. They believe that if someone can listen to them, analyze their problem and provide help, change can be achieved. This shows that even violent individuals have feelings and have tendencies to be good.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study indicate that men's actions and behavior as well as the women's reactions to violence are influenced by their beliefs, cultural orientation, experiences and environment. Men exposed to violent home atmospheres early in their lives have greater chances to be violent than those who had more wholesome environments.

Even though violent men tend to justify their violent acts, many of them are also sensitive to the consequences of their actions, especially to their children and spouses. They get hurt when they see them suffer. This fact implies that they can change. In response, agencies and/or institutions responsible for the welfare of the family can design and implement potential viable remedies to assist them to change and consequently reduce the occurrence of domestic violence.

The domestic violence phenomenon cuts across different cultures, ages, and socioeconomic groups. It is observed and experienced by the young and the old, those in the rural and those in the urban areas, by both the working and the non-working individuals. Even the form and extent of violence are common to different cultures or societies. Reactions toward the victims or perpetrators, and to domestic

violence in general, however, vary depending on the victims' and perpetrators' background and experiences.

The most effective means of protecting victims of domestic violence is by preventing the occurrence of violence. Preventive rather than corrective measures against violence must be given attention. Since facilities and services for the protection of women and children from violence are already in place, efforts to address the needs of the perpetrators should be initiated.

Men's acceptance of a power sharing arrangement can only be instilled through an effective training or educational intervention. Advocacy efforts may be initiated by NGOs to promote men's involvement in intervention efforts to directly or indirectly curb domestic violence and promote the health and welfare of the family, women men and children.

The establishment of a social support system that will cater not only to the needs of victims of domestic violence, but also of perpetrators who want to change will be beneficial to families.

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