

Dynamics of Abuse: Case Studies of Five Filipino Battered Women

ALICIA F. ESTRELLADO

ROSE MARIE SALAZAR-CLEMEÑA

De La Salle University-Manila

This study was conducted to explore and analyze the dynamics of the abuse women experience at the hands of their partners. Towards this end, case studies of five battered women were done, using in-depth interviews and psychological tests. The results indicated that: (a) battered women experience various forms of abuse; (b) battered women's explanations for their abuse are complex and multifaceted; (c) abuse has effects on the women's perception of self, view of the world, sense of well-being and interpersonal relationships; (d) battered women utilize passive as well as active, cognitive, and behavioral coping strategies; and (e) the battered women's decision to stay with or leave their partners is influenced by several factors.

Keywords: Filipino battered women, forms of abuse, effects of abuse, coping strategies

Wife abuse, battered women, and domestic violence—these are the panoply of terms associated with and afflicting countless marital relationships today. It is heart-wrenching for a woman to realize that she is being abused by her spouse/partner—the very person who had vowed to love and protect her, the person who had promised her a taste of heaven forever but made her experience hell instead. In a violent relationship, the person who knows the woman best and is in the most intimate contact with her seems to value her so little that he batters her.

The violence directed at women by their partners includes physical and sexual abuse, intimidation and threats, emotional insults, isolation, and economic deprivation. These forms of violence and abuse most often occur within the context of the family, an institution that has been defined as a unit of love and harmony.

Around the world, at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that there is an estimate of 31.5% increase in the number of maltreated and abused women, from 2,640 in the first semester of 2002 to 3,471 for 2004 (Palacio, 2004). Analyzing these reports, the women's legal advocacy groups stressed that more than 80% of these reported cases were committed by the women's intimate partner and more than 50% were killed by their current or former husbands (Palacio, 2004).

Review of Related Literature

What are battered women like? Initial explanation of vulnerability of women to intimate violence focused on the psychological factors. Walker's (1984) research showed no specific personality trait that suggests a victim-prone personality for battered women. Results of a study by Browne (1991) indicated that although gender has an impact on the experience of violence in an intimate relationship, no particular pattern leads to a person's becoming a victim. It was suggested that women who are socialized to be submissive may not develop adequate self-protection skills as children, particularly if they come from homes where women are victimized.

Indeed, there are several perspectives to explain the dynamics of women abuse. Models for violence are found within the family, the mass media, and society at large (Bandura, 1977).

Violence against women occurs within a socio-cultural context. An analysis of cultural practices across the globe makes clear why the dilemma of women is still a human rights issue. Some

societies still follow traditions such as selective malnourishment, selective abortion, forced prostitution, dowry death, denial of education and rigid codes of dress and conduct that target women (Heise, 1998). Cases such as these, where women are the targets of male aggression, support patriarchal explanations of women abuse.

Whereas socio-cultural and gender variables may be recognized as factors in women abuse, problem of violence may be couched within the family dynamics.

Battered women's unpleasant experiences in their family such as being exposed and/or being the target of violence have been linked to various problems in adult life, including anxiety, depression, inadequate social competence, and poor self-esteem (Avakame, 1998). They are more likely to come from homes where the father displayed male dominant, controlling qualities, rigid sex role patterns, and harsh punishments (McNeal & Amato, 1998).

Studies also recognize the perpetrator's responsibility in women abuse (O'Neil & Harway, 1997; Kesner & Mckenry, 1998). It appears that a batterer is not only trying to hurt the woman he batters; he also wants to dominate her so as to gain power and control over every facet of her life (Coleman & Straus, 1990).

The intergenerational transmission of violence model suggests that exposure to violence in the family of origin may lead to the development of violent behavior during adulthood. A major issue raised by researchers is whether it is the child's experience of abuse at the hands of one's parents or his observation of parents' violence that is more important in predicting later violence within an intimate relationship. Generally, when male abusers were compared to nonabusers, violence within intimate relationships seems to be related to both direct (parent to child abuse) and indirect (observation of parental abuse) forms of violence within the family of origin (Straus & Smith, 1990).

A study of 200 wives and 200 husbands in rural communities in the Southern Philippines compared the perspectives of husbands and wives regarding wife battering (Sanchez & Sobrevega-Chan, 1997). The women in the focus group discussion said that the husbands' irresponsible behavior, particularly the use of alcohol, was the main cause of battering. Poverty or financial difficulty was also mentioned as a factor that triggered wife beating. They reported being beaten when they refused to have sex. However, some women believed that they were to blame for the husbands' abusive behavior.

The reason given by the wife batterers showed the patriarchal influence. They believed that it is their right to beat their wives when they fail to fulfill their roles. They also cited the following circumstances that triggered wife beating: the wife was jealous, nagging or arrogant; the wife manifested aggressive behavior; and the husband was put to shame (Sanchez & Sobrevega-Chan, 1997).

A research sponsored by UNICEF and UP Center for Women's Studies on abusers and abusive relationships in Filipino families supported the multi-factor theory of violence. Patriarchy, poverty, social realities such as stress, alcoholism and drug abuse, childhood experience of violence, and personality problems were the major factors found to explain violence against women (Guerrero & Peñano-Ho, 1999).

Conceptual Framework

The abuse experienced by the women, the underlying perceived contributing factors to abuse, the effects of abuse on women and the coping mechanisms employed are referred to in this paper as the dynamics of abuse. The conceptual framework on the dynamics of abuse is summarized in Figure 1.

Abuse on women has always been associated with and restricted to physical violence. When a battered woman tries to seek help from police or medical professionals, the first piece of evidence sought is the visible body marks as proof of the violence

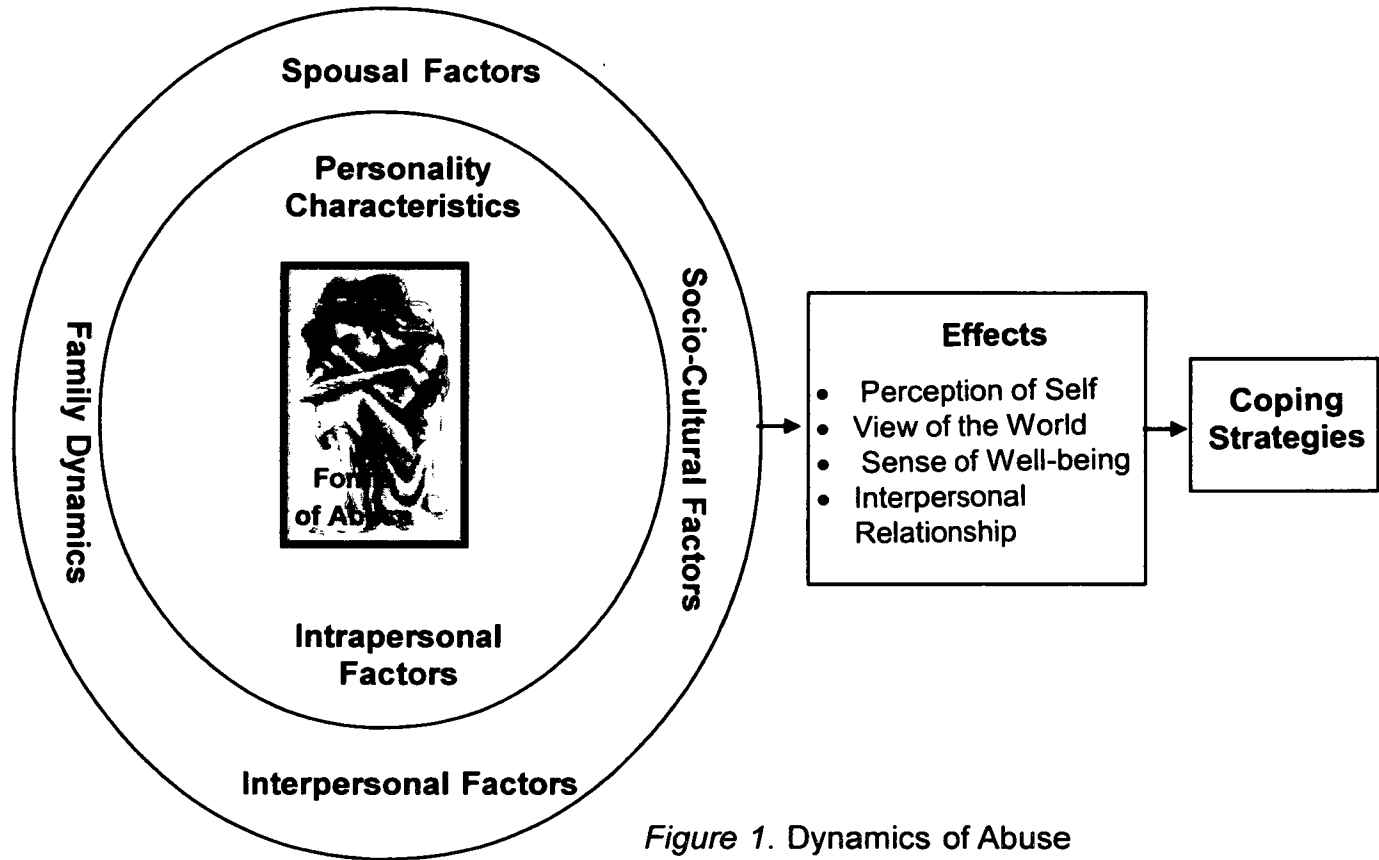


Figure 1. Dynamics of Abuse

inflicted by her partner. They are unable to realize that a woman is not purely skin and bones; she has feelings and emotions, too, that could be damaged as a consequence of abuse.

Woman battering can take various forms which may range from physical, emotional, and verbal, to economic and sexual. Section 3 of Republic Act No. 9262 defines violence against women as "any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty."

Abuse on women is seen as a product of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Intrapersonal factors (depicted in the inner circle in Figure 1) refer to the personality characteristics of women that may have made them vulnerable to abuse. Battered women are reported to exhibit characteristics such as depression, passivity, a feeling of being overwhelmed, self-esteem deficits, and self-blame (Walker, 1979). These distinctive characteristics are known to have developed before the onset of abuse or to have influenced the victim to stay with her abuser (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994).

Interpersonal factors (depicted in the outer circle in Figure 1) include family dynamics, spousal factors, and socio-cultural issues. Family dynamics refers to battered women's unpleasant experiences in the family of origin that made them vulnerable to abuse. The intergenerational perspective explains that it is logical to expect women, who have experienced or witnessed abuse during childhood, to accept violence in their adult relationship as normal (Kalmuss, 1984). A better understanding of the dynamics of abuse against women could also be found by examining factors associated to men who abuse them. Theorists argue that men are violent towards the women they live with because of their violent upbringing, internal aberration, or defective characteristics (Dutton, Ginkel, & Starzomoki, 1995).

Another explanation for women battering goes beyond the psychological causes to an approach that sees the issue as situated in a broader socio-cultural context, focusing on the structure of society within which the violence takes place (Coleman & Strauss, 1990).

Abuse may greatly impact the different areas of the battered woman's life, such as the relationship she develops or avoids developing, how she sees herself, how she views her environment and the challenges she is or is not willing to face. The battered woman's view of the world is shattered by the experience of victimization (Janoff-Bulman, 1985).

In response to the effects of abuse, women focus on what can be done about the troubling event or condition. Social cognition theories describe the appraisal process of stress and coping (Kaplan, 1996; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). This involves an evaluation of coping strategies and resources, and its implications of potential actions which may facilitate decisions about what response options to choose and how to go about them.

Women cope with violence in a variety of ways, which can be classified into two dimensions. The first dimension involves the distinction between *active* and *passive* strategies (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Active coping refers to the individual's attempt to change the situation, such as leaving the abusive relationship. Passive strategies, on the other hand, include avoidant efforts such as enduring the abuse. The second dimension distinguishes between *behavioral* and *cognitive* strategies (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Behavioral coping includes observable action done to reduce stress, whereas cognitive coping is an attempt to change one's way of thinking about a situation.

This study aimed to explore and analyze the dynamics of Filipino battered women, as reflected in the form of abuse they experience, the factors (intrapersonal and interpersonal) contributing to abuse, the effects of abuse on them, and the coping strategies they employ.

METHOD

Design

This investigation employed the case study approach, using the in-depth interview and projective assessment methods. Story telling was encouraged because it inspired the unfolding of personal histories and the unveiling of meaning the participants have given to their experiences.

Participants

Five women between 26 to 36 years of age participated in the study. Three of these women had left their partners while the other two were still staying with their respective partners. The duration of their being with their abusive partners ranged from 2 to 16 years. They were selected upon the recommendation of professionals who have worked with them, on the basis of the following criteria: (a) the participants have been victims of intimate partner abuse for at least one year; and (b) there was no manifestation of significant impaired state at the time of the recruitment for the study.

Measures

Interview Schedule. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for this study. It was divided into four sections. The first section dealt with forms of abuse experienced by battered women (e.g., What forms of abuse did you experience in the hands of your spouse/partner?). The second set of questions focused on the contributing factors of women abuse (e.g., How does your personality make-up contribute to your susceptibility to abuse?). The third set of questions dealt with the effects of abuse on battered women's perception of the self, view of the world, sense of well-being and interpersonal relationship (e.g., How does the abusive relationship affect your view of the world?). The final set of questions focused on the coping strategies

employed by battered women (e.g., How are you coping with difficulties caused by the abuse?).

The questions were translated to Filipino by two language experts.

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The TAT is a projective test consisting of 31 cards with ambiguous pictures on them. The examinee is instructed to make up a story about the stimulus picture. Eight cards (1, 2, 3Bm, 3GF, 4, 13MF, 16, and 17) were chosen based on the surveys that considered some cards as the essential TAT cards (Bellak & Abrams, 1997) and on the recommendation of a clinical psychologist handling battered women.

Procedure

The five participants were recruited from a center for abused women and children managed by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and a barangay community based center, both in Metro Manila.

An appropriate introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the study started off each session. The participant was assured of the confidentiality of the interview data.

The TAT was administered first followed by the interview. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 45 to 90 minutes each in venues with sufficient privacy. The participants were informed of their right about not answering questions they felt uncomfortable with and/or terminating the interview whenever they wanted. With the participants' permission, a micro-cassette recorder was used to tape their accounts of their experiences. The interview allowed for flexibility in the direction of the conversation.

The primary researcher, with the help of a research assistant, transcribed the audiotaped interviews verbatim. She and two other raters then independently analyzed the protocols. The raters are professionals who have adequate knowledge of clinical and counseling psychology, have worked with battered women and

have done research in this area. The procedures for the content analysis of the data from each interview consisted of the following: (a) The raters read each transcript several times for the purpose of immersing themselves in the participants' world as articulated in the narratives; (b) The team differentiated parts of the transcription, identifying meaning units that organized data for later analysis; and (c) Lengthy and complex material were organized around themes found in the protocols. When disagreements occurred, the team reached a consensus and finalized categories.

The primary researcher analyzed the TAT stories by initially extracting the prevailing theme per picture and later on looking for echoing themes throughout the stories.

RESULTS

What follows is a write-up of each case which includes background information and dynamics of abuse—forms of abuse, contributing factors, perceived effects, and coping strategies. The names of the participants were modified to safeguard their identities.

Case Study #1: Abel

Background Information

Abel, 27 years old, separated from her husband after four years of a roller-coaster relationship.

She was born in Pampanga but was raised in Manila. She lost her parents when she was only three years old and any information about her parents was only told to her by her aunt who took good care of her after the death of her parents.

Abel was 19 years old when her aunt's family decided to live in Saudi Arabia. Since she was unable to finish college, she experienced rough roads finding a job. She eventually found a contractual job in a telephone company. It was at this time when

she met Aman, a dentistry student who was an overstaying illegal immigrant from Iran. To fast track his aspiration for permanent residency in the Philippines, Aman asked Abel to marry him. His proposal was attractive: they would live in separate houses but he would provide for all her expenses. Initially, she was hesitant but eventually, she gave in. They were married in 2001. Aman stayed in Quezon City while Abel was in Makati. Despite the distance, they were together everyday and found themselves falling for each other.

Dynamics of Abel's Abuse

Forms of abuse. Abel described Aman as being out of his mind when under the influence of drug. He would slap her, punch her, and throw her out of their room sometimes. The most painful abuse she said she experienced was when he kicked her in the stomach when she was three months pregnant with their first baby. She was brought to the hospital and was uncontrollable when she found out that she had lost her baby.

Contributing factors. Abel considered many factors to explain why the abuse happened and why it continued for more than three years. The first factor she cited was Aman's use of drugs. Her husband's culture was another factor given. Prior to their marriage and living together, Aman oriented her to the Do's and Don't's in his culture, one of which was women's subordination to their husband. She also acknowledged being somehow at fault. She said she could have done something the first time Aman hit her; however, she said she is basically a tolerant person. Likewise, she wanted to give him more chances.

Effects of abuse. Abel believes that her self-esteem has been severely damaged. This is supported by her TAT responses, which revealed feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Likewise, she felt very angry inside because of the loss of her first baby. As a consequence, she became ill-tempered. She found it difficult to trust others. Her perception of the world was affected too. She felt not only helpless but hopeless as well.

Coping strategies. At first, Abel pretended that the abuse was non-existent. However, she was not at all passive in coping with the abuse. She talked to him and tried convincing him to change. Instead of being confrontational, she sought to become a better wife. The TAT results revealed her need to escape from her abusive husband but she was held back by societal expectations, that she had to live up to her role as a wife. She attempted to endure the abuse but not for long. When she learned that she was pregnant again, she decided that leaving was the safest thing to do to save herself and her unborn child. And she did just that. Her TAT responses revealed her need to rise above her difficulties and limitations.

Case Study #2: Myla

Background Information

Myla is 27 years old and has been married for nine years. She is a plain housewife who is very much preoccupied with taking care of their four children.

Myla, the fourth of six children, was born in Navotas. Her father worked as a train operator and her mother was a laundry woman. She described her childhood as relatively happy though punctuated by the effects of poverty and of having an alcoholic and abusive father. She was disturbed as an adolescent. She learned how to smoke and drink alcohol. She was a high school dropout at age 14 and decided to work at age 15. She fell in love with Mario when she was 17 and they got married a year later.

The first two years of their married life were fulfilling. They started their small business of repacking detergents. From a small shanty, they moved to a more decent apartment. Things changed when she gave birth to their second child. She found out that Mario was hooked on alcohol, women, and shabu. Worse, they lost their business. Since they did not have money to pay for the rental of their apartment, they were forced to build a small shanty in Smokey Mountain. Mario worked as a scavenger

while Myla accepted laundry jobs. Mario gave up shabu but he got cheaper substitutes, rugby and solvent.

Dynamics of Myla's Abuse

Forms of abuse. Myla would have a taste of Mario's violence particularly when he was drunk or drugged. He would punch, slap, and kick her. There were times when he slammed her face on the wall, pulled her hair, and dragged her body around the house. She also experienced psychological abuse, which she found to be as hurting as the physical abuse. She had been cursed and blamed for the misfortunes they had been experiencing. In spite of doing her share to meet their financial needs, Mario would still tell her that she knew nothing but eat and sleep. The sexual abuse Myra experienced was sometimes combined with physical violence. He wanted sex almost every night.

Contributing factors. Myla cited some factors that she thought might have contributed to her abuse. She blamed alcohol and shabu. She also pointed to Mario's dysfunctional family of origin. She likewise admitted being responsible for being abused. She expressed her belief that if she had finished her studies, her life could have been better. Likewise, she mentioned her self-sacrificing traits which was evident in her TAT responses. Finally, she felt that the government is unable to help abused women like her.

Effects of abuse. The abuse Myla experienced weakened her self-esteem. The feeling of inadequacy, evident in her TAT stories, made her believe that she deserves to be ill-treated. Depression was evident in her loss of hope that she could still change the course of her life. The TAT results indicated that being in a problematic situation caused by her marital conflicts made her contemplate to end her life.

Coping strategies. Myla mentioned instances when she asked help from the barangay officials but she was disappointed because they merely advised her to settle their marital disputes at home. However, it seems that Myla has more energy to endure the

abuse rather than end it. She loves Mario. Very evident in her TAT responses is her willingness to endure the maltreatment of her husband to keep the relationship intact. At the moment she is holding on to her faith in God that her husband would change for the better and continues to stay with him.

Case Study #3: Ruby

Background Information

Ruby, 36 years old, has been married for more than 16 years. She has six children with her abusive husband.

Ruby is the youngest of 11 children, 5 boys and 6 girls. She described her childhood as happy despite their financial problems. She finished her elementary and high school education in Iloilo City. Although her older sister had promised to finance her college education, she took this offer for granted and ran away with her boyfriend Ramon and lived in Roxas City.

At first, their relationship was smooth sailing. During the first five years of their marriage, they stayed in Roxas City. However, since job opportunities for her husband were limited there, they were forced to go to Manila to try their luck. When Ruby was pregnant with their second child, however, Ramon's circle of friends grew bigger and he was introduced to vices such as alcohol, shabu, and gambling. This changed the course of their lives.

Dynamics of Ruby's Abuse

Forms of abuse. Ruby related that a simple discussion would develop into a heated argument until Ramon becomes violent. In most of these incidents, she sustained facial bruises. She was also choked and pinned to the wall. Many times, the reason behind Ramon's physical and verbal abuse was his suspicion that Ruby was having an affair. His accusation would be reinforced if she refused to have sex with him. Money was also an issue. Ruby rarely received money from him and this forced her to do laundry jobs.

Contributing factors. Ruby was able to identify factors that could explain her vulnerability to abuse. She believed that she was responsible for the mess. She took her studies for granted. Likewise, she preferred to endure the abuse instead of taking some measures to end it. Her being self-sacrificing and submissive were revealed in her TAT stories. Ruby also cited Ramon's use of alcohol and shabu and his exposure to violence as a child as possible contributing factors to abuse. Finally, she blamed society for the abuse of women. She mentioned men being given more privileges compared to women, the indifference of law enforcers to women, and the inadequate police system to fight drug abuse.

Effects of abuse. Ruby believes that the abuse severely damaged her self-worth. She was treated like a slave and this made her feel unworthy of respect and fair treatment from others. Very evident in her TAT stories are feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. She also became nervous particularly when she would see Ramon holding a bottle of beer, with his eyes seemingly afire. She felt sad and helpless. Her interpersonal relationships were also affected. She displaced her anger toward her children. Likewise, she kept her distance from her neighbors whom she perceived to be indifferent to her.

Coping strategies. Ruby is basically passive and self-sacrificing but somehow she tried some active-behavioral coping strategies. She fled to her parents' house in Iloilo. She had also gone to the police station and barangay officials to seek help. Whenever Ramon was sober, she would talk to him and try to convince him to change. However, Ruby is holding on to her belief that she has no choice but to endure the abuse for her children. Considering her six children, leaving would mean having financial difficulties. This passive coping strategy was revealed in her TAT responses which implied her feelings of hopelessness and resigned acceptance of her difficult situations. Based on her stories, she was willing to endure everything for the sake of her children.

Case Study #4: Gemma

Background Information

Gemma is 26 years old, and separated with two children. After four years of living in an abusive relationship, she decided to start a new life.

Gemma is the older of two siblings, her brother being 10 years her junior. She was born and raised in Mindoro, where she had a topsy-turvy childhood life. At a young age, she was exposed to parental discord. She was closer to her father, but his work as a seaman kept him away from the family. She found her mother's presence to be insignificant because she never acted like a parent. At age six, Gemma was sexually abused by her uncle. When she was in third year high school, she experienced another blow in her life. She learned that her father had two more families with five more children.

To escape from harsh realities, Gemma went to Manila. She enrolled in a university for a Computer Science course. Before finishing her sophomore year, however, she decided to live with Gino, whom she had met at a party. Like her, Gino had not finished college, so they had to stay with his family so he could continue studying. She knew she would have a difficult life but she was determined to work hard for the relationship. Gino would come home late and drunk. The little time he had after school was spent with his friends.

Dynamics of Gemma's Abuse

Forms of abuse. Gemma has experienced all forms of abuse. She said that Gino would go into rages about almost anything when he was drunk. He would pull her and drag her around the house. The last physical abuse she experienced was when he pinned her head between the corners of the wall and punched her face until she was black and blue. She was rushed to the hospital with her eyes swollen and her mouth filled with blood.

The psychological abuse she experienced was in the form of interrogation. Whenever she left the house, she needed to prepare herself for Gino's questions, which she considered silly. If he was unsatisfied with her answers, she would be humiliated. She was also sexually abused. Whenever Gino came home drunk, he would force her to have sex.

Contributing factors. From Gemma's viewpoint, her childhood experiences could have been contributory to her abuse. Central to this was her dysfunctional family. Likewise, the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her uncle could have made her vulnerable which held back her normal developmental processes. She was secretive of the abuse. She felt worthless as a person and this made her vulnerable to abuse. Her TAT results implied that coming from a broken family was a major factor for her inadequacies. Finally, Gino's own traumatic childhood experiences was seen by Gemma as playing a big role in the abusive relationship.

Effects of abuse. The abuse eroded the core of her sense of self. Losing hope was another effect of the abuse. In one of her depressive moments, she tried to end her life. Gemma's TAT test results revealed a confused and troubled woman who feels that she has had as much as she can take. She thought she had done everything for her husband and yet she could not understand why he treated her unfairly. Evident was her feeling of hopelessness that made her entertain self-destructive thoughts.

Coping strategies. Gemma was passive in her coping strategy. She endured the abuse because she found it difficult to uproot herself from the relationship for two reasons: her emotional investment and her belief that her two children needed a father. However, the abusive relationship ended after four years and Gemma's two trips to the hospital.

Case Study #5: Melinda

Background Information

Melinda, 28 years old, has had two failed relationships.

She was born and grew up in Surigao. She could not find the words to describe the childhood she had. Her parents separated when she was only five years old. She said that it was difficult for her to understand the separation and found it painful when she was asked to choose between her parents. She opted to stay with her mother. However, after only a few days of separation, her mother brought home a man who was introduced as her stepfather. She said that it was like hell when her stepfather came into their lives. He physically and verbally abused Melinda. At age 10, when she could no longer take the beatings, she decided to run away. She stayed with different people whom she trusted but she was also abused by them.

At age 16, Melinda went to Manila to work. She worked as a maid in Parañaque. She gained many friends and one of them introduced her to Nestor. After only a few months of knowing each other, they began to live together. She got pregnant but decided to leave Nestor when she found out that he was already married. She stayed in a shelter home for unwed mothers run by Carmelite sisters. She stayed there until her baby was one year old. She decided to leave her daughter with the nuns, promising to get her back when she becomes financially capable.

She got a job as a *yaya* and promised herself not to get involved with any man. For two years, she saved her salary for her daughter and was able to keep her promise until she met Mando, her textmate. Things went fast, with her "love" for him seeming to outweigh whatever fears she had.

Melinda said she was rather impulsive with her decision to live with Mando in Pangasinan. She had no option then but to live with his two daughters from his first wife while Mando went to work in Manila. Aware of Mando's limited income, she was forced to use her savings for their daily needs.

Dynamics of Melinda's Abuse

Forms of abuse. According to Melinda, Mando would have drastic emotional outbursts without apparent reason. Whenever this happened, she had to be prepared because he would hit her. Every time they had heated arguments, he would point out her incompetence. However, when he was calmer, he would demand to have sex with her.

Contributing factors. From Melinda's perspective, her troubled life with her family of origin contributed greatly to her being battered. The abuse she experienced as a child had damaged her self-esteem. Likewise, the total lack of love and care from her parents could explain her being gullible. Melinda's need for affection was apparent in her TAT stories. She gave stories implying that her sense of self was anchored on others who can provide her with love. She further expressed her belief that women are martyrs and are expected by society to make sacrifices for the family while men are given the right to control women.

Effects of abuse. As a consequence of abuse, her already low self-esteem crashed to dangerous levels. Even her identity was weakened. She felt very weak, hopeless, and suicidal.

Coping strategies. At first there was denial. Melinda tried to cling to the belief that she was not abused. She endured everything for the sake of the relationship. She loved him despite the bruises. However, when she thought that the situation was hopeless, she became suicidal. This was the time when Mando dragged her out of their house.

When she almost took her life, she felt a gut response for self-preservation. She thought of her child. She was certain of what she wanted to do: she wanted to completely remove herself from the abusive relationship. Her TAT stories revealed her longing to escape from her abusive husband so as to find whatever was lost in her—respect and dignity. She believes that leaving does not imply weakness but it was the best way to save herself. Her inner strength may crumble but she is aware that nobody can fight for her except herself.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to explore and analyze the dynamics of five battered women. It tried to look deeply into the forms of abuse experienced, the contributing factors, the effects of abuse, and the coping strategies of these abused women.

Forms of Abuse

All the women in the case studies experienced physical and psychological abuse at the hands of their partner. Most of the incidents of physical abuse happened when the abusive partners were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Although there were no visible signs of psychological abuse, all the women said that it was just as painful and crippling as physical abuse because the insulting and humiliating words undermined their self-confidence and shattered their identity.

Four of the women were not free from economic abuse. Since all of them were housewives, they were financially dependent on their partners. This dependency gave their abusive partners another way within which to misuse their power and to humiliate and control them (Strube & Barbour, 1983).

Sexual abuse was also experienced by four of the women in the study. The usual case of sexual abuse was that of non-consensual sex; however, two of them were unable to recognize this as a form of abuse. Two of the women believed it was their duty to satisfy their husband's sexual needs in spite of their (women) unwillingness to do it. Traditionally, Filipino women accept that part of their role in marriage is to satisfy the sexual needs of their partners. This could explain why it is difficult for them to understand the concept of rape in marriage (Arugaan sa Kalakasan, 1994).

Contributing Factors

The most commonly mentioned factor that contributed to the women's being battered involved their abusive partners. All of

the women blamed their partners' use of alcohol and/or drugs since most of the abuse happened when their partners were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This is consistent with findings of studies showing substance use as a condition that co-exists with violence against women (Leonard & Blane, 1992; Kantor & Straus, 1989). However, alcohol intoxication or drug use could in fact be an excuse for abusive behavior rather than the precipitating factor that triggers violent behavior (Leonard & Blane, 1992).

The characteristics of the women could also explain the abuse. All of the women described themselves as being self-sacrificing and tolerant. *Pagtitiis* (to tolerate/endure) and *pagtitimpi* (to suppress) are highly valued Filipino traditions used to make oneself loved—a strong Filipino need (Lapuz, 1978). Likewise, a large part of a Filipina's self-worth becomes dependent on her ability to take on responsibilities for others or being a *tagasalo* (Carandang, 1987). Being enduring, yielding, and responsible are still given importance in the concept of femininity in Philippine culture.

Low self-esteem was another characteristic that could have made the women vulnerable to abuse. They might have felt they do not deserve to be treated well. Likewise, their loss of self-worth may have made them attracted to men who gave them the impression of being strong and macho.

One participant admitted that she was gullible. Having been abused or neglected, she was hungry for love. Having found somebody whom she thought would love her was something to be happy about. Although she may have recognized her partners' inappropriate behavior, she may have felt that she would not be able to find anyone better.

Socio-cultural factors may also explain abuse on women. All of the participants cited traditional sex role expectations involving subordination of women and unequal gender relations. These are manifested clearly in the familial setup and gender socialization (Felix & Ingente, 2003).

Indifference of government authorities regarding abuse on women was also mentioned by the participants. Acts of violence in the home were largely ignored by law enforcers who are expected to help. Two of the women who tried to seek help were deprived of assistance because domestic violence is viewed by these officials as a "private matter."

Finally, the family of origin of both the perpetrators and the battered women was also cited as contributing factors in explaining abuse on women. Four of the women believed that their partners were neglected, abandoned, had witnessed or experienced abuse in their family of origin. In their families, it seemed that male dominance was never questioned. It was difficult for them to unlearn male dominance and violence as a way of relating to one another. Hence, it appeared that they repeated the pattern of using violence in their own families.

Likewise, three of the women came from dysfunctional families. They were abused, neglected, and abandoned. Their painful childhood experiences could have made them assume that there was something wrong with them and that nobody would accept and love them for who they are. The consequences of abuse on children are pervasive. They may become extremely dependent, emotionally unstable, or develop negative opinions of themselves (Straus & Smith, 1990). In addition, as suggested by Cascardi, O'Leary, Lawrence, and Schlee's (1995) study, for women who were raised in abusive home environments, there might be a higher probability that their marital relationships would be marked by overall distress and conflict.

The TAT results revealed some personality characteristics that could have contributed to being abused. Evident in the TAT stories of three women were their being self-sacrificing, submissiveness, feelings of inadequacies, and low self-esteem. One mentioned that coming from a dysfunctional family was a major factor for her inadequacies which made her vulnerable to abuse. Another participant's TAT stories indicated that her sense of self was anchored on others who can provide her with love, which could explain her being gullible.

Effects of Abuse

The effects of abuse are alarming. All of the women remarked that their self-esteem was severely damaged. The bruises, insults, humiliation, and accusations slowly ate away their self-esteem. They demonstrated their lowered self-esteem by believing that they do not deserve or are not worthy of better treatment by their intimate partners. The abuse diminished their value as human beings. One participant felt that she also lost her identity. As she became disturbed by the beatings and put downs, she felt she no longer was able to identify who she is. As a consequence, she lost more power in the relationship.

Pessimism, depression, and anxiety were also cited by all of the women. They felt very much burdened by their problematic situation that resulted in self-destructive thoughts. The abuse also brought about uncertainty and fear of the future.

Depression was one of the foremost emotional responses of the participants. The daily impact of living in a context of fear is directly related to depression (Cascardi & O'leary, 1992). For those who felt that their circumstances were intense, the depression precipitated thoughts or acts of suicide. Depression rendered them unable to reflect and find ways of changing the situation.

The abuse had its repercussion on the women's interpersonal relationships. They felt that their ability to trust or form new relationships had been damaged. The abuse also affected parenting. One participant in the study disclosed that she became irritable and displaced her anger on her children. This is consistent with the finding of Holden and Ritchie (1991) that the experience of domestic violence affects women's parenting behavior.

Coping Strategies

Initially, all women in the study used passive strategies in coping with the abuse. Being passive may be viewed as maladaptive but it can also be reconsidered as an adaptive response to a maladaptive situation (Carlson, 1997). They tried to endure the abuse as much as they could. They cried to

unburden themselves or prayed hard for divine intervention. For them there was denial, which could be seen as a defense mechanism to maintain internal stability and coherence and to prevent the collapse of their worldview and emotional functioning (Carlson, 1997).

The women tried to employ some active, behavioral, and cognitive coping strategies. They consoled themselves with the hope that their husbands would still change, and they strived to become better wives or tried to seek help. However, when the change that they were hoping for did not happen, three of them left their abusive partners.

The study found certain predictors that made the women stay with or leave their abusive partners. The three women who ended their abusive relationship were the ones who experienced the most severe and frequent abuse. The shift to using active behavioral strategies seemed to happen when they realized the intense repercussions and potential fatality of the abuse. The length of the relationship was also found to be associated with staying or leaving the abusive relationship. Resbult and Martz (1995) found that a longer relationship was predictive of a higher commitment level. The two participants who opted to stay, Ruby and Myla, had been married longer than the three who left. Finally, economic resource is one of the most likely predictors. Battered women clearly face great economic impediments when attempting to leave her abusive partner. The decision often hinges on the mother's assessment of what will be the best interest of her children (Hilton, 1992).

Implications

The information presented on the different types of abuse points to the need for varying interventions. Because more severe and injurious physical abuse is likely to be associated with numerous psychological problems, these women need greater assistance in understanding and processing their experience so that they can be more productive with their lives.

The results regarding the causes of abuse in the relationship is another concern. The women participants have identified their characteristics that made them vulnerable to abuse. This may have two possible implications. First, this may affect how people would respond to women who report that they have been abused. Likewise, it may somehow influence the women's decision to seek help. The women may also be concerned that others will perceive them as at least partially responsible for the abuse, hence, they may be less likely to reach out for assistance. This suggests the need for education about intimate partner violence not only for the battered women but also for people who may be asked to offer support and encouragement to women affected by violence.

Another issue is the women's tolerance of abuse. All women in the study tried to maximize their frustration tolerance in their abusive relationships. Although three of them eventually left their abusive partners, their leaving was due to life-threatening circumstances. For the two women who have decided to stay with their abusive partners, their lives and those of their children are still in danger. It seems that they have not realized the full impact of abuse, hence, the need for education about the devastating consequences of abuse.

Finally, the study highlights the fact that the toll that abuse takes on the lives of the women in the study is alarming. Whether they have decided to stay with or leave their abusive partners, they are struggling with the effects of abuse. This implies the need to develop an empowerment intervention program that can assist the women in the healing process and getting on with their lives.

Conclusions

The case studies of five battered women reveal that they experienced different forms of abuse characterized by various combinations of physical abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and sexual abuse. Explanations for women abuse are

complex and multifaceted. These factors included women's personality characteristics, family dynamics, spousal factors, and socio-cultural issues. Likewise, abuse has effects on the women's perception of self, view of the world, sense of well-being, and interpersonal relationships. Battered women utilize passive as well as active, cognitive, and behavioral coping strategies. Finally, the severity and frequency of the abuse, the length of the relationship, and availability of resources are factors that can influence the women's decision to stay with or leave their abusive partners.

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