

DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN: A TALE TO TELL

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Abstract: This phenomenological study aimed to describe the experiences and discover the truth behind the domestic abuse against women at home. This study involved ten women who experienced violence in General Santos City. This phenomenological study presented evidence about the informant's experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and their insights and realizations as victims of domestic violence. Additionally, this study aimed to go deeper into the heart of the issue and bring to the fore the standpoints, perceptions, insights, and feelings of women who experienced domestic abuse. Based on the gathered data, the participants' description of their experiences as victims of domestic violence has four themes: experiences are varied and triggered by several factors, the abuse started early in the relationship, physical manifestations, and severe violence were experienced. Meanwhile, the themes for the participants' coping mechanisms and challenges were multi-faceted; coping techniques were necessary, authorities were informed, and physical, emotional, and mental aspects were all affected. Lastly, the themes for the insights and realizations of the participants are strength and independence, which are essential for women; a woman should know her true worth, domestic violence is life-changing, and advice for potential victims.

Keywords: Domestic violence, abused women at home, phenomenological study, Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

Global statistics estimate that over 736 million women, which accounts for almost one-third of the female population, have experienced instances of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, non-partner sexual assault, or both at least once in their lives. This equates to around 30 percent of women aged 15 years and above. Women who have suffered violence have highly rates of depression, anxiety disorders, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV, as well as many other health problems that can persist even after the violence has ended (World Health Organization, 2021).

The presence of violence has a detrimental impact on the overall well-being of women and hinders their ability to fully engage in societal activities. The aforementioned phenomenon has significant implications for the well-being of individuals' families, the broader community in which they reside, and the entire nation as a whole. The ramifications of this issue are substantial, encompassing increased burdens on healthcare systems, legal expenditures, and diminished productivity (United Nations WOMEN, 2022). Violence against women (VAW) is a prevalent social issue in the Philippines. Based on the findings of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, it was observed that a quarter of women in the Philippines aged 15 to 49 have experienced instances of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse inflicted upon them by their spouses or intimate partners. It is alarming that despite addressing the concern, VAW persists. If the problem is not solved, it will strike the personhood of women, limit human development, and further drain the country's financial resources.

Violence against women (VAW) is a prevalent social issue the nation. Based on the findings of the national demographic and health survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, it has been determined that a quarter of women in the Philippines, specifically those between the ages of 15 and 49, have experienced instances of physical, emotional or sexual abuse perpetrated by their spouse or partner. The persistence of violence against women (VAW) despite ongoing efforts to address this issue is a cause for concern (Huecker, 2022). The objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive account and uncover the veracity around instances of violence perpetrated against women.

To effectively implement viable remedies and preventive measures, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive understanding of this situation. Domestic violence can present itself in diverse forms, encompassing emotional, sexual and physical mistreatment, as well as the imposition of threats. While it is true that individuals of either gender can be victims of partner abuse, it is often observed that women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence. This sort of abuse can occur in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

In abusive relationships, there is always an unequal distribution of power and control, with the perpetrator utilizing intimidating and harmful words and actions to dominate their partner. Identifying domestic violence may not be immediately apparent, as some relationships may exhibit abusive behavior from the beginning while others gradually escalate over time (Mayo, 2022). Stopping or preventing domestic abuse necessitates a substantial shift in societal attitudes and more investment in service provision. There have been notable advancements observed in the prosecution of domestic abuse cases by the Child Protective Services (C.P.S.). Nevertheless, the prevailing attitudes that perpetuate domestic violence remain profoundly ingrained within society.

Commonly held beliefs, such as the notion that conflict requires the participation of two individuals or the expectation that a woman enduring abuse should simply depart from the situation, can be classified as myths. Regrettably, a considerable number of individuals entrusted with the responsibility of intervening in cases of domestic violence, such as law enforcement officials, are susceptible to the impact of prevailing societal norms. Consequently, there are instances where these individuals may not consistently employ the most optimal strategies to effectively mitigate acts of violence.

This study is anchored on the Feminist theory. During the 1960s and 1970s, the burgeoning women's rights movement in the United States led to an increasing acknowledgment of domestic abuse. As women advocated for parity in professional settings, the matter of equality also encompassed their personal spheres. According to Hanser (2002), over the course of time, these individual issues gradually encompassed the anticipated obligations and responsibilities associated with the marriage (Hanser, 2002). As a result, feminist theory has emerged as a crucial conceptual framework for understanding and addressing the issue of domestic violence. This statement highlights the enduring nature of violence and abuse occurring within domestic settings, taking into account the societal disparities in the treatment of men and women, as well as the contrasting upbringing experienced by boys and girls. These factors have been identified as significant contributors to the prevalence of this problem (Frances, 1995).

The significance of feminist theory in enhancing public awareness regarding the impact of sex role programming cannot be exaggerated. The aforementioned practices underscore their potential to foster belief systems that sustain sexism, male privilege, and conventional gender norms (Healey, Smith, & O'Sullivan 1998). Instances of domestic violence can serve as indicators of the prevailing patriarchal structure within society, in which the male partner employs various means to enforce the subordination of the female partner. These beliefs are consistent with multiple feminist theories, which contend that violence is employed as a means to maintain the subjugation of women within both domestic and societal contexts. Moreover, it is noteworthy that crimes such as sexual assault, stalking, marital rape, and domestic violence exhibit two prevailing characteristics; typically, male individuals are frequently identified as the perpetrators. Simultaneously, it is shown that females exhibit a higher frequency of victimization.

Moreover, the perpetration of these offenses was driven by the intention to exploit and exert dominance over women's sexual and societal autonomy, impeding their ability to experience equitable opportunities both within and outside the confines of their residences. The alignment between the incidence of violence against women by men and feminist philosophy is apparent. As a result, this particular viewpoint has been utilized in therapeutic interventions and programs designed for both female survivors and male perpetrators. The impact of social developments on responses to domestic abuse can be attributed to the women's movement advocating for gender equality within the larger societal context.

The term Domestic Violence (DV) encompasses a range of harmful behaviors shown by individuals inside a family unit, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic forms of aggression. Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, Shah, Oertelt-Prigione, and Van Gelder, N. (2020) classify it as child abuse, relationship abuse, and senior abuse. Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is reported that annually, around 25% of women and 10% of men encounter some type of violence in non-critical circumstances (Peterman et al., 2020).

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also referred to as domestic violence, is a prevalent form of abuse directed towards women on a global scale. This discourse pertains to deleterious behaviors enacted by a present or former intimate partner, which have the potential to inflict bodily, sexual, or psychological harm. The range of behaviors encompassed within this category encompasses physical assault, sexual manipulation, emotional abuse, and attempts at exerting control over another

individual. The definition of violence against women, as established by the United Nations, encompasses any form of violence that is rooted in gender and has the potential to inflict harm or induce suffering against women. This encompasses acts of aggression, coercion, or deprivation of personal liberty, whether occurring in public or private domains. The prevalence rates of violence against women in different regions across the globe have been documented. The prevalence of this global concern appears to be influenced by various factors. Nevertheless, a comprehensive synthesis of research data pertaining to the topic matter is currently lacking (Yonfa, 2021).

Moreover, as indicated by data presented by the United Nations Women (2019), over 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced diverse forms of violence throughout their lifespan. A significant proportion of women globally, approximately one-third, who have been engaged in a romantic relationship at some point, have encountered instances of physical or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. Upon analyzing the various regions of the Americas, it becomes evident that there has been a noticeable rise in the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) against women during the past year. This increase exhibits a gradual pattern, gradually intensifying as one moves from North to South America. The rates can be categorized as follows: The prevalence rates of the respective countries are as follows: 1.1% in Canada, 6.6% in the United States, 7.8% in Costa Rica, and 27.1% in Bolivia. Bolivia exhibits a notable distinction among nations in Central and South America, as it possesses the greatest proportion (52.3%) of women who have experienced physical abuse from an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Nevertheless, the prevalence of women disclosing instances of sexual violence perpetrated by a partner was found to be comparable across different countries.

Furthermore, the prevalence of women who have reported experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) in the form of emotional abuse, including insults, humiliation, intimidation, and threats of damage, appears to be rather consistent across different countries. According to available data from Colombia, it has been observed that a significant proportion of women, namely 31.1%, have reported instances of economic or patrimonial violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. Additionally, 7.6% of women in Colombia have disclosed experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) in the form of sexual abuse, while a substantial majority of 64% have documented instances of psychological violence inflicted upon them by their partners. Comparable figures have been documented in the country of Ecuador.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC 2019), it has been observed that 43% of women in the country had encountered instances of intimate partner violence (IPV). Within this particular cohort, it was found that 40.8% of female participants reported instances of psychological violence, such as humiliation, insults and threats involving weapons. Additionally, 25% of women disclosed being subjected to physical abuse, while 8.3% acknowledged suffering sexual violence.

Moreover, existing research has demonstrated that women who have encountered intimate partner violence (IPV) tend to exhibit heightened levels of mental health symptomatology. In the context of this study, it was observed that women who were involved in a romantic relationship experienced heightened manifestations of despair, anxiety, and traits associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Likewise, women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and have symptoms of depression demonstrate notable increases in body weight. Postpartum women with limited financial resources in Brazil are at an increased risk of experiencing suicidal thoughts. Similarly, impoverished women in Nicaragua who have been subjected to intimate partner violence (IPV) and perceive a lack of social support from their families are more prone to report having made suicide attempts in their lifetime. There is evidence to suggest a reciprocal association between intimate partner violence (IPV) and mental health issues. In a particular study, it was shown that women who were subjected to child maltreatment and subsequently developed mental health disorders, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, symptoms of depression, and engaging in binge drinking, had a higher likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence throughout their adult years (Yonfa, 2021).

In connection with psychological disorders, female individuals who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in its various manifestations have disclosed a high prevalence of physical health concerns and illnesses. The intricate nature of bodily diseases and symptoms poses limitations for research studies that aim to investigate the particular associations between physical health and intimate partner violence (IPV). According to the findings of Onur, Cesur, Donmezler, Aydin, Vural and Guru (2020), it was observed that women who have been diagnosed with Fibromyalgia Syndrome, a condition characterized by persistent musculoskeletal pain, have also reported experiencing various forms of partner violence, including physical, social, economic, and emotional abuse. According to a study conducted by Raya et al. (2004), it was shown that Andalusian women who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) were at a higher risk of developing hypertension and asthma.

In a recent study conducted by Soleimani, Ahmadi and Yosefnezhad (2017), it was shown that Iranian women who had been subjected to intimate partner violence (IPV) in the form of psychological abuse exhibited a higher prevalence of somatic symptoms compared to women who had not encountered any type of abuse. The phenomenon of abuse seems to have a cumulative impact on the human body. Women who have encountered diverse forms of abuse, such as child maltreatment, previous intimate partner violence (IPV), ongoing IPV, and financial difficulties, have indicated elevated levels of somatic complaints compared to women who have solely experienced IPV. A study conducted observed a higher prevalence of type 2 diabetes among women who reported instances of physical intimate relationship violence.

Violence against women (VAW) is a prevalent societal issue in the Philippines. Based on the findings of the National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, over 25% of women in the age group of 15 to 49 in the Philippines had experienced instances of physical, emotional or sexual abuse perpetrated by their spouses or partners. The persistence of violence against women (VAW) is a cause for worry, despite ongoing efforts to address this issue (P.C.W., 2022).

Furthermore, the VAW is intimately related to the uneven power relationship between men and women, often known as "gender-based violence." Societal norms and traditions mandate that men are the leaders, pursuers, and providers; and hence play the dominant societal roles. At the same time, women are nurturers, friends and supporters of men, and they play secondary positions in society. This assumption gives men more influence over women. As a result, VAW becomes a means for men to demonstrate authority over women to maintain power (P.C.W., 2022).

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), gender-based violence encompasses all manifestations of violence that stem from gender-related factors. The act has the potential to inflict bodily, sexual, or psychological injury or distress upon women. This encompasses actions or the expressions of intentions to engage in actions that exert pressure or unreasonably limit the autonomy of women, irrespective of whether they transpire in public or private domains. Gender-based violence, also known as violence against women, encompasses any form of violence that is specifically targeted at women due to their gender.

Moreover, the incidence of Violence against Women (VAW) in the initial six months of 2021 is approaching the statistics recorded in 2020, as indicated by the most recent data released by the provincial government of Iloilo. It is anticipated that the trajectory of case numbers would surpass that of 2020, assuming that all data is accounted for by the end of 2021. During the period from March to August 2021, a total of 213 occurrences of violence against women (VAW) were documented, which represents a decrease compared to the 241 cases reported in 2020. The majority of the reported instances were documented in May (53), with April (49), June (42), March (41), August (17), and July (11) in descending order. According to Marzan (2021), the incidence of Violence against Women (VAW) in Iloilo City accounts for about 10.61 percent of the total 2,007 instances reported in Western Visayas during the corresponding time. These cases encompass various forms of abuse, including Physical Abuse (949 cases), Sexual Abuse (140 cases), Psychological Abuse (710 cases), and Economic Abuse (419 cases).

Furthermore, it has been observed that instances of violence against women have escalated in numerous nations within the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippines does not deviate from this pattern. Community lockdowns have the potential to result in a rise in violence against women, as stringent stay-at-home mandates can confine victims within violent environments. The adoption of a sole family quarantine pass policy, restricted availability of public transit, and strict curfews have substantially restricted mobility, posing challenges for individuals in accessing necessary aid. The evidence of a notable decline of 27.2% in reported cases to the Philippine National Police is apparent. Due to the prioritization of pandemic response by government agencies, women facing abuse have encountered a scarcity of resources. Access to reproductive health care has been significantly limited, resulting in a lack of availability for many women. Additionally, a substantial number of women have experienced unemployment and have been financially reliant on their spouses. Moreover, a lack of trust in authoritative figures results in a decreased likelihood of women reporting cases to these figures. However, it is worth noting that there has been a significant increase of 63% in online searches related to violence against women throughout the pandemic, as reported by Valdez, Arevalo and Robredo (2022).

To enhance comprehension of the paper's contents, an operational definition of the terminology employed in this investigation is presented: the topic of discussion pertains to the issue of domestic abuse specifically targeting women. In the context of this study, the term "it" pertains to the occurrence of violence and abuse directed towards women, leading to many adverse consequences encompassing physical, sexual, psychological and economic dimensions within the domestic

sphere. It also encompasses the occurrence of violent or aggressive conduct inside a domestic setting, typically leading to the abusive mistreatment of a spouse, partner, or someone involved in a domestic relationship.

To get a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Violence against Women, it is imperative to identify and highlight the deficiencies present within the current body of research. One notable deficiency pertains to the dearth of scholarly investigations about the provision of assistance to women who encounter domestic violence and abuse. There exists a necessity to offer an improved resolution for tackling the issue of honor-based violence or forced marriage. This entails developing customized strategies that cater to women encountering varying degrees of risk. Additionally, there is a dearth of rigorous research studies which assess the impact of comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches in preventing domestic violence. Furthermore, the current body of research exhibits a dearth of evidence pertaining to preventative interventions. This inadequacy can be attributed to various methodological challenges, such as limited duration of follow-up periods, absence of comparative analyses between different interventions, insufficient utilization of behavioral measures, and heavy dependence on self-reported data. Furthermore, the majority of studies focused on assessing attitudes, knowledge, or exposure to educational materials and messages, rather than examining behavioral effects.

The sample population consisted of women who were already utilizing refuge or shelter services, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to women who do not access such services. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is a dearth of comprehensive and rigorous research on advocacy, skill development, counseling, and other therapeutic interventions for individuals who have undergone domestic violence or abuse. The bulk of existing studies mostly consist of pre- and post-intervention evaluations or qualitative investigations that rely on narrative accounts. The study exhibited methodological limitations, such as inadequate documentation of data collection procedures, insufficient description of the employed methodology and analysis techniques and a relatively small sample size, particularly in the context of qualitative studies.

The researcher has not encountered a similar study on domestic abuse against women locally. Therefore, in this study, the researcher is interested in knowing the domestic abuse against women as they can raise concerns to the intended beneficiaries and come up with the implications to conduct the study.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences behind the domestic abuse against women at home. This study involved women who experienced violence in General Santos City. This phenomenological study presented evidence about the informant's experiences, hopes and aspirations and their capacity to stand up and face the challenges as victims of domestic violence.

Another purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the truth behind domestic abuse against women. Admittedly, it might trigger somebody to come out to the open and speak on behalf of the women's point of view. However, it only aimed to go deeper into the heart of the issue and bring to the fore the standpoints, perceptions, insights, and feelings of women who experienced domestic abuse. Presently, domestic abuse against women is the national dilemma many women face in our country, particularly in General Santos City.

Further, the research study was guided by the following questions: How do the participants describe their experiences as victims of domestic abuse? What are the challenges that they have experienced, and how do they cope with these experiences? What insights or realizations do the participants have to share with the academic community?

The issue of domestic abuse targeting women is a significant public health concern across various communities and cultural contexts. The detrimental effects of this phenomenon on women's emotional, physical, and social well-being have garnered significant attention among the medical community. This research highlights the importance of promoting justified empowerment for women and urges for a comprehensive approach involving various fields to create public health interventions that can best tackle the issue of domestic violence. It could benefit, foremost, the participants of this study – namely the victims of violence, as it brings to the fore their issues and those surrounding the problem of domestic violence. Second, the CSWD/DSWD could benefit from the study if they use the results to develop social service interventions to prevent violence against women. Third, the researcher's study will serve as inspiration for her to propose a program to help the victims of domestic violence. Finally, this will be the basis for the researchers to widen their knowledge and awareness of violence against women.

The research focused only on the occurrence of domestic violence targeting women within the confines of their homes, with a specific emphasis on General Santos City. The study was constrained in its focus on the subjective experiences shared by

informants who had been subjected to domestic abuse inside their households and are aged 18 years or older. Therefore, individuals who have experienced victimization outside of their household and are under the age of 18 are excluded from the study. The key informant interviews involved ten people. The success of the project hinges on the informants and participants' capacity to articulate their experiences and provide responses to the interview inquiries.

This investigation was based on open-ended questions through one-on-one interviews. Because there are only ten participants, the results of the inquiry need to be more generalizable to other regions of the country. This research is mainly descriptive in its investigation.

2. METHOD

Study Participants

Prior to commencing my research, I engaged in the process of informant identification. The informants selected for this study were female individuals who had firsthand experience with domestic abuse. These participants were chosen by purposive sampling, a method that involves selecting individuals who meet specific criteria established before the study. In this study, the individuals in question were denoted as "targets" and "opponents."

With an initial sample size of ten informants for conducting critical informant interviews, I successfully persuaded a seven of these individuals to partake in the study by reaching out to them and providing a comprehensive explanation of the research's objectives. To ensure a high standard of qualitative research, I made the decision to include a sufficient number of participants in my study. According to the study conducted by Hancock et al. in 2009, the current number of participants is sufficiently large to yield reliable data and meaningful outcomes.

Furthermore, Creswell (2006) proposed that researchers have the option to select a range of 5 to 25 individuals who have encountered the same phenomenon to participate in key informant interviews. According to previous study of Englander (2012), qualitative research involves a deep exploration of the underlying essence of events, rather than focusing on the quantitative aspect of how many individuals have encountered these occurrences. Moreover, prominent figures in the field of Psychology, such as Freud, Piaget, and Skinner, further developed their theories through empirical research, focusing on a limited number of people and not relying on statistical analysis (Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley 2017).

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, a preparatory meeting was conducted with a select group of participants and informants. I engaged in a brief conversation with them to establish a sense of trust and confidence, as well as foster a sense of camaraderie. Additionally, this interaction provided me with the opportunity to elucidate the objective of the study, underscore the significance of participants' involvement in the research study's conclusion and address any inquiries and apprehensions they may have, examine ethical considerations, and complete the requisite consent papers. Additionally, this provided a valuable opportunity to discuss the research inquiries with the participants. By adopting this approach, individuals would be afforded the opportunity to reflect about their experiences prior to engaging in key informant interviews.

The establishment of a strong level of affinity and sympathy holds significant importance in qualitative research. This is particularly crucial in fostering a positive rapport during interviews and subsequently obtaining comprehensive information. This becomes especially relevant when exploring topics that hold personal significance for the participant.

I took measures to guarantee that my informants were carefully selected and appropriately coordinated in their participation. During the initial discussion, it was anticipated that the recollection of distressing and bothersome experiences would likely occur during the forthcoming interview. As a result, the individuals involved made a conscious effort to emotionally fortify themselves to navigate through the negative and emotionally challenging aspects of the conversation. I provided them with reassurance that I comprehended their uncertainties and concerns, emphasizing that I harbored no intention whatsoever to inflict damage upon them. I ensured that they experienced a sense of comfort to foster an atmosphere of openness. I communicated the significance of their presence in my life and demonstrated a cognizance of their emotional state. When commencing a qualitative interview, it is imperative for the researcher to possess an understanding of the contextual factors and cultural nuances at play. Additionally, the researcher should exhibit respect, politeness, and a facilitative demeanor, while refraining from expressing personal biases or critical perspectives. These actions are crucial in establishing a foundation of trust between the researcher and the interviewee.

I also underscored the possibility of encountering obstacles during the course of our endeavor. However, the results of the study would be significant in addressing the problem of obsolescence or determining the benefits of a certain technique.

The study participants were specific to the women who experienced domestic abuse in General Santos City. The women who experienced violence outside the home were not included in the selection of the respondents to consistently align the study. The participation of respondents was voluntary. The non-participation of the respondents did not result in any form of penalty or deprivation of benefits that the respondents would otherwise be eligible for. The participants may withdraw their consent and discontinue participation without liability.

The research was carried out in General Santos City. This city, also known as Dakbayan sa in the Cebuano language, is the focus of this discussion. Heneral Santos, also known as Dakbanwa/Syudad sang Heneral Santos in Hiligaynon, Lungsod ng Heneral Santos in Filipino, and historically referred to as Dadiangás, is the southernmost city in the Philippines. It is sometimes abbreviated as G.S.C. or GenSan. General Santos, a highly urbanized metropolis, is ranked as the fifteenth most populous city in the country, with a population of 594,446 persons as of the 2015 census. General Santos City serves as the primary hub for commerce and industry in the Soccsksargen area, strategically located within the geographical boundaries of South Cotabato region. The selection of General Santos City as the study's setting was based on the prevalence of domestic violence within the city, particularly during periods of epidemic.

Materials and Instrument

The instrument used in the study is an interview guide. Experts with an external validator validated the tool. The expert summary rating and comments garnered an overall rating of 8-9 with a descriptive rating of good. The interview guide was administered to the identified participants of the study.

An interview guide is a written tool that helps the researcher organize and arrange how they conduct candidate interviews. It allows the researcher to know what to ask and in what order and ensures a candidate experience that is the same for all participants.

Design and Procedure

Prior to conducting the actual interviews, a thorough and accurate ethical deliberation was observed. The researcher incorporated the essential ethical considerations that needed attention in each research work, namely informed consent and ethical alignment. Qualitative research is a methodology that investigates phenomena and is suitable for elucidating the reasons behind observable phenomena, evaluating intricate interventions with several components, and emphasizing the pursuit of progress. The methodologies frequently utilized for the acquisition of data encompass document analysis, (non-) participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The field notes and audio recordings undergo a process of conversion, resulting in the creation of protocols and transcripts. The aforementioned documents are thereafter subjected to processing and organization through the utilization of qualitative data management software, hence facilitating the study of the data.

The enhancement and assessment of research quality can be accomplished by the utilization of several methodologies, such as the implementation of checklists, reflexivity, sample strategies, piloting, co-coding, member-checking, and stakeholder engagement. The researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to get insight into the meaningfulness of individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology aids in comprehending the interpretation of people's firsthand experiences. Phenomenological study investigates the subjective experiences of individuals and places emphasis on their lived encounters with various events.

Establishing rapport is a crucial element in the context of an interview. To ensure this, the researcher had a preliminary discussion with the participants, during which the details of the study were explained in a manner that conveyed the assurance of anonymity throughout the research process. Following the establishment of their expectations, the researcher requested the participants to provide their signature on a written document. The establishment of rapport is achieved by fostering trust and respect towards the participants and the information they provide. Ensuring the provision of a secure and suitable setting for the individual to navigate her experiences holds considerable importance. To comply with this stipulation, the researcher took measures to secure an interview setting that offered seclusion and tranquility, ensuring privacy and minimizing any disruptions. This was achieved by selecting a peaceful and secluded area, such as a private office or the interviewees' chosen location, such as their homes.

One method employed to collect comprehensive information from the research informants was the utilization of a critical informant interview. The purpose of conducting an in-depth discourse is to gather a comprehensive understanding of the participant's perspective on the research issue, as outlined by Mack et al. (2005). Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences entails more than just access; it necessitates a thorough examination of their ideas and behaviors, as well as attentive consideration of their internal perspectives to explore novel concerns. During the course of the interview process, the researcher must attentively listen to the participants and thereafter engage in iterative examination and analysis of the collected data as part of the translation process.

Furthermore, it is imperative to conduct key informant interviews with precision to uphold the principles of reliability and validity, which hold significant importance in qualitative research. To mitigate bias and misconceptions regarding the results, the researcher refrained from drawing definitive conclusions throughout the interview process and instead relied solely on factual data as provided by the participants. The researcher limited the number of informants to ten for the key informant interviews. In the context of qualitative research, particularly in the field of phenomenology, it is commonly advised that researchers conduct key informant interviews with a sample size ranging from 5 to 15 participants who have encountered the same phenomenon. This approach is deemed optimal for achieving the objectives of representativeness and generalizability, as it provides evidence beyond the experiences of a limited number of research participants (Creswell, 2006).

The collection of data was facilitated by utilizing audio recordings of interviews. This choice was made due to the potential benefits of audio or video documentation in enhancing the effectiveness of the information exchanged during key informant interviews. Additionally, conducting these interviews in a controlled environment, such as the participants' homes, private offices, or neutral locations like quiet coffee shops or private rooms, further ensured impartiality and exclusivity. The audio recording of the interview has been transcribed with precision and subsequently reviewed by the participants to ensure the accuracy of the content. During the interview, the social worker assisted the researcher to help in case the participants' breakdown. Also, the researcher conducted a briefing and debriefing of the participants, and the interview guide and the informed consent form were explained/translated into vocabulary they could understand.

Braun and Clarke (2006) presents a technique to depict information that necessitates a certain level of interpretation in identifying codes and deriving themes.

The University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee approved this study with protocol number 2023-085. When conducting the research, all ethical concerns were taken into account. Informed consent was also signed to ensure full permission for data collection. The researcher also told the participants that their involvement would be recorded confidentially and that the information gathered would be solely utilized for research. To ensure their well-being, their responses will be kept confidential. The sources used for this study were cited correctly and paraphrased to provide plagiarism-free content. This is to acknowledge the sources' supporters who were used in this study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is all about the results and discussion of the study. It presents the descriptive tables outlining the answers to the themes of each qualitative question. Further, it offers the narratives for each piece supported by different literature from reliable sources. It specifically discussed the challenges and coping mechanisms and their insights and realizations as victims of domestic violence. This phenomenological study explores the experiences behind domestic violence against women in the household. Ten women from General Santos City who had personal experience with physical or sexual assault participated in this study; they were explicitly coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10 to maintain their confidentiality. This phenomenological study revealed evidence about the informants' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations, as well as their capacity to stand up and face the problems associated with being a victim of domestic abuse.

Moreover, this phenomenological research aims to uncover the mysteries surrounding the violence perpetrated against women in the home. Additionally, its sole purpose was to delve even further into the matter and bring to the fore the perspectives, thoughts, and emotions of women who had been victims of domestic violence.

Furthermore, the researcher made a table that shows the data classified and grouped to create significant themes from the core ideas/ statements. Three main themes were extracted from the abused women concerning their experiences as victims of domestic violence: their descriptions of their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights or realizations.

Table 1: The Participants' Description of their Experiences as Victims of Domestic Violence

Major Themes	Core Ideas/Statements
Experiences Are Varied And Triggered By Several Factors	Abuse is primarily physical, but there is also financial and emotional abuse. Hurting our children in front of me Punching me, and I would endure it for the sake of our child. Violence occurred when there was drug use and other vices
Abuse Started Early In The Relationship	The abuse started a few months or a year into the relationship. The abuse started when I became pregnant. The abuse started after a year of living with him, and I was pregnant. The abuse started when his mistress reached out to me, and I could not sleep because of what she did.
Physical Manifestations	Physical violence Abandonment Lack of financial support Hurting during pregnancy
Serious Violence Was Experienced.	Punching me, I would endure it for the sake of our child. Asking him for money would trigger a physical fight. Hurting me right in front of his mom Having many bruises on my face and chest

Experiences are Varied and Triggered by Several Factors

Physically, I was also financially abused because we were unstable then; we were so young and only relied on our parents. The abuse came to the point where he humiliated and hurt me in public. Physically, he would beat, kick, and even point a knife at me, but I do not think about it now. (P1-Line22-26)

It is tough because I depended on him before. I relied on his income. Although I had a business when we started living together, it failed, so that is why my husband is our provider; I only depend on the money he gives me. The violence started when we were still living together. He was a lazy tricycle driver, and sometimes we would eat dinner past 9 or 10 because he came home late; he deals poker, and if you are a dealer, you also gamble so that he would waste his income on gambling. He did not hurt me physically. It is just that he does not provide financially. (P2-Line260-268)

I experienced economic or financial abuse; when we were still together, we had a college student, and she experienced it also because her father would not give her a school allowance, so she worked independently. I am not the only one who experienced it, but also our eldest daughter. (P2-Line280-283)

I experienced it almost every day; he would only leave me 20 pesos, and I would spend it on half a kilo of rice, and then I would wait for him to be back for our viand. That was the most serious violence I have ever received from him, and he managed to find and make another family. (P2-Line290-294)

The first theme that emerged in the description of participants concerning their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Experiences are Varied and Triggered by Several Factors*, this means that women experienced being abused physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. It is evident from the result that the women were used due to several factors.

The outcome aligns with Mayo's (2022) concept, which highlights that domestic violence can manifest in various ways, such as emotional, sexual, and physical mistreatment and threats of harm. Partner abuse can affect anyone, although it is more frequently aimed at women. Both heterosexual and same-sex relationships can experience domestic violence. These abusive relationships consistently involve a power imbalance and manipulative tactics used by the abuser, employing hurtful words and actions to exert control over their partner. Detecting domestic violence may not be simple, as it can begin subtly and escalate gradually over time, even though some relationships exhibit abusive behavior from the start. This notion indeed aligned with the result because when two people who are in an intimate relationship assault one another physically, emotionally, mentally, or financially, this is an example of domestic violence, and it is observed in the study. Abuse in the home can take various forms, including psychological, sexual, and physical assault, as well as the threat of such violence. Abuse by a partner can occur in any relationship, but most instances of domestic violence are aimed toward women, as the victims also experienced.

Moreover, based on the result, abuse occurs in relationships wherever there is a disparity in the distribution of power and control between husbands and wives. A person who abuses their spouse does so by controlling them through the use of behaviors and words that are threatening and painful, or even hurting physically, like being punched or abused by sharp instruments. Although some relationships are abusive from the beginning, most abusive relationships begin more covertly and gradually become more severe, just like the participants experienced in the study.

Abuse Started Early in the Relationship

The violence started during college; we were so young when I got pregnant; we were still in the second year of college and both 17 years old, not fit to create a family of our own, but we still did; we both live under one roof after I gave birth to our eldest child. I remember we stayed together for about 6 to 8 months until the semester ended (P1-Line 9-13).

After our eldest turned eight months old, we separated; later on, we got back together, but we did not live under one roof because my parents disapproved of me returning with him. After a year of graduating from college, I had my work, and we reconciled again for three years; then came our second baby. I experienced being battered every three months for a year, or I really cannot count because it depends on his mood; for example, we have been through a lot recently. Our three-year relationship was smooth, but lately, maybe because he could not handle the pressure and his emotions, every time I got home from work, he would always overthink and think of himself as useless because I was working while he was staying at our house. He needs to give up his work to finish studying, which frustrates him and can lead to anxiety if not mended. It came to the point where he would hurt our child, and I cannot let that happen. The most serious violence I have ever received from him was when he hurt our child physically before me; I cannot imagine he could do that because he loves the kid. Imagine, ma'am, for almost two months, he did not get proper sleep because he was balancing his studies while taking care of our child because I was out there working (P1-Line 34-54).

He would hurt me two times a week. We were together for eight years, and I experienced the violence for four years during those eight years. We were doing fine when we had our first baby, but the time came when he went gambling and flirted with girls, and he would make it look like it was my fault. He would blame me even if he should be the one to be blamed; he even makes scenarios that would make him jealous, but his jealousy is not in place. The worst violence he did was when it seemed like he was choking me by blackmailing me (P3-Line 474-479).

The second theme that emerged in the description of participants concerning their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Abuse Started Early in the Relationship*, participants started being abused from the first few months of the relationship and continued after their marriage. Many victims get abused when pregnant or after their first baby is born. The participants accepted all those hurtful acts because they love their husbands and are blinded by the fact that they are trapped in an abusive relationship.

Intimate partner violence, commonly known as IPV, is the most widespread violence against women globally. This refers to actions carried out by a partner, whether current or former, that result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, encompassing behaviors such as physical attacks, sexual manipulation, emotional abuse and attempts to exert control. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of harm or distress, whether physical, sexual, or psychological, directly related to gender.

This includes acts, threats, or pressure to harm women and unjust restrictions on their freedom, regardless of whether it takes place in public or private settings. The percentage of women experiencing violence in various parts of the world has been recorded. Multiple factors seem to impact the prevalence of this global issue.

However, there are no single studies that summarize the findings on the subject (Yonfa, 2021). Considering all of this, it lends credence to the accounts provided by the participants who participated in the research. According to these accounts, the women of the study were victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), in which their spouses abused them regularly. Consequently, there is physical or verbal abuse or antagonism between the husband and wife. Both the frequency with which it occurs and the severity of it can vary greatly. It can range from a single incident of violence that may have long-lasting effects to severe and recurrent incidents that occur over several years.

Physical Manifestations

The domestic abuse I have experienced was physical; when we started living together, he was a jealous partner; he gets jealous easily just by me having a casual talk with a friend or an acquaintance. I did not know if he was under the influence of drugs or not; I could not specify it because I was so young. he would hurt me and pull my hair out of anger and frustration, especially when he was under the influence of alcohol, as a partner, of course, we would get angry especially when we do not have enough money for food and milk. He would punch me, and for the sake of our child, I would endure it because I do not want my child to lose a father. It started when I was pregnant with our baby, and I gaslighted myself into thinking that maybe he did it because he loved me (P3-Line441-451).

I was physically and emotionally abused. Physically, when I ask him for money from his income to buy food and diapers for our child, he gets angry, which leads to a physical fight; I was so traumatized by him (P3-Line465-468).

Physically, ma'am, but your mental aspect would be affected once you are abused physically. He physically hurt me by beating, slapping, and pulling my hair. (P5-Line856-858)

He would hurt me physically by punching me and even directed a bolo on my neck. Then, our last encounter, I was filled with bruises all over my body (P7-Line1105-1106).

The third theme that emerged from describing participants' experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Physical Manifestations*. This means that violence against women, particularly violence committed by intimate partners, is a significant threat and a violation of women's human rights.

According to the results, intimate partner violence is caused by a combination of factors that may be found at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. These factors interact with one another to either raise or decrease the likelihood of the occurrence of the violent act. Husbands are connected with being violent perpetrators, while wives are associated with being violent victims. In addition, the participants who took part in the study were beaten, slapped, and had their hair pulled out; their husbands also abandoned them, and they suffered significant injuries. Violence against women can result in major short-term and long-term consequences for women's physical, mental, emotional, and financial health. They also impact the physical and psychological well-being of their offspring. Because of this violence, substantial societal and economic costs are incurred by women, their families and society.

In relation to the outcome, the data provided by the United Nations Women (2019) reveals that around 35 percent of women globally have encountered various manifestations of violence during their lives. One-third of women worldwide who have ever been involved in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence inflicted by an intimate partner. When examining the regions of the Americas, there is an observable increase in the incidence of IPV among women over the course of the past year, with a slow progression from North to South America. The rates are as follows: 1.1% in Canada, 6.6% in the United States, 7.8% in Costa Rica, and 27.1% in Bolivia. Among countries in Central and South America, Bolivia stands out with the highest percentage (52.3%) of women who have ever encountered physical violence from an intimate partner. However, the rate of women reporting ever experiencing sexual violence by an intimate partner was similar across nations.

Moreover, the percentage of women who reported ever experiencing IPV in emotional abuse (insults, humiliation, intimidation and threats of harm) also occurred relatively equally across nations, with a few exceptions. Data from Colombia indicates that 31.1% of women in that country reported experiencing economic or patrimonial violence from an intimate

partner, 7.6% experienced IPV in sexual violence, and 64% experienced psychological violence from a partner. Similar numbers have been recorded in Ecuador.

Serious Violence Was Experienced

We were not living with each other from the start, but I eventually decided to live with him when I ran away from my mother. The first month of living together was good, not until he started beating me; after two months of living together, he slapped me, and it came to the point that I fought back. The most serious violence I have received from him was when he hurt me right before his mom. I had a lot of bruises on my face and chest, and my mom was not aware; I could still feel some bruises near my breast. It came to the point where he threatened to kill me if I left him, which made me traumatized and paranoid (P5-Line864-873).

I was abused emotionally; we do not have any problem when it comes to finances because he sometimes provides. I was abused emotionally because of his mistress; it came to the point where the girl would send messages to me and my child, and from then on, I could not sleep and do things properly (P6-Line993-995).

I was abused for almost six months or more. The most painful thing that he ever did was when he chose to protect and defend his mistress over us, his family (P6-Line1002-1003).

My first experience was when we were in Tupi. We lived in a tree house; our baby was just three months old. Then, he started to hurt me and punched me. I was so afraid that I left our baby to ask for help from our neighbors, but I was already filled with bruises that I had experienced that kind of violence for 15 long years, every week. The most serious violence we ever received from him was when he touched our kids (P7-Line1111-1116).

The last theme that emerged in the description of participants about their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Serious Violence Was Experienced*. This means that women were being abused for many long years; many women shared that they had a lot of bruises all over their bodies, they were being hurt right in front of their families, and they also struggled financially because their husbands did not give them any money which led them to starve.

The Philippine Statistics Authority survey showed that one out of every four Filipino women between the ages of 15 and 49 had encountered physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by their spouses or partners. It is alarming that VAW persists despite efforts to address the concern (P.C.W., 2022). With this being said, the societal consequences of intimate partners are incredibly high, and they have repercussions that can be felt across society. Isolation, inability to work, loss of money, lack of engagement in everyday activities, and limited ability to care for oneself and one's children are all potential outcomes for women who are victims of domestic violence.

Table 2: Participants' Challenges and Coping Mechanisms on their Experiences as Victims of Domestic Violence

Major Themes	Core Ideas/Statements
Challenges Were Multi-Faceted	Fears for one's safety Worrying for the children made leaving hard. Leaving him was difficult because of the children. The decision to leave and become a single mother
Coping Techniques Are Necessary	First, I prayed; I talked to God. Thinking about my kids helped me to combat my problems. I drink with friends to cope because it heals me. I burst out my problems to my family
Authorities Were Informed	I went to our Barangay Social Worker to seek their advice. I reported him first to our Barangay Chairman , then to the Police Office and tanods I reported him to the nearest police station in our place, and because of it, he stopped pursuing me.

	Yes, I reported him to VAWC, and I asked for child support
Physical, Emotional, And Mental Aspects Are All Affected	Physical, because every time he would leave me some bruises My mental aspect reached the point where I wanted to end my life. Spiritually, I became more prayerful. Emotionally, I questioned my worth; why must I experience all these?

Challenges Were Multi-Faceted

Challenges, maybe for me it is in the mindset of the person then God has a plan for everything because I do not like my course in the first place, but this is His way of preparing me for me to overcome my future situation because who in their right minds that would want to experience this kind of situation? So this is it; I did overcome it. I was traumatized to the point that I would cry myself to sleep, and my way of coping was to comfort myself. I tell myself that maybe this is just now, and it will be okay (P1-Line79-85).

The challenge that I have encountered was when there are times when we only have nothing to eat from breakfast until lunch because he gets home at 3 in the afternoon, so that will be our first meal for the entire day. As for my eldest child, she does not have any problem with her food because she is living with her grandmother, only with her allowance (P2-Line304-307).

I did not consider leaving him initially because I believed our problem was more minor. You can still resolve it if you help and talk to each other. We were not born rich in this world but remained steadfast against hardships. I just lost it when I found out that he had an affair with another woman; I told him, "I can surpass it all, but not you having an affair with other women, I cannot take it, I surrender" (P2-Line334-348).

The first theme that emerged for the challenges and coping mechanism of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Challenges were Multi-faceted*, this means that abused women experienced different kinds of challenges; to name a few, these women lack physical nourishment because they are being hurt by their partners almost every day, they have bruises all over their bodies, they are also lack of emotional attachment because they keep on being hurt by their husbands and their families are even affected and involved due to the circumstances. The abused women cannot sleep tight at night because they fear for their safety; they are traumatized by being punched any time of the day, whenever their husbands want it, and they cannot even leave them because of their children.

Research has shown that women who experience violence report increased levels of mental health symptomatology. For example, women who had avident intimate partner reported increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive characteristics. Similarly, women exposed to violence and exhibiting depressive symptoms exhibit significant weight gain. Postpartum women in Brazil who have low income face an elevated likelihood of exhibiting suicidal ideation and women living in poverty in Nicaragua who were victims of violence and perceived they did not receive social support from their families were more likely to indicate they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

There appears to be a bi-directional relationship between violence and mental health problems. More specifically, at least one study has shown that women who had experienced child abuse and subsequently developed mental health illnesses (i.e., Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, symptoms of depression, binge drinking) were more likely to experience violence during adulthood (Yonfa, 2021). This notion supports the results as it also shows that women from other countries, like Brazil, also experience domestic violence, the same as the experiences of some women here in the Philippines; they were abused, too, which leads to higher levels of mental health symptoms.

For instance, women who had experienced abuse by an intimate partner were more likely to report heightened symptoms of sadness, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive behavior. Similarly, women who have been subjected to violence and exhibit symptoms of depression tend to be more stressed and frustrated.

Coping Techniques are Necessary

First, I prayed, talked to God, and told him that I leave everything to him, and it is for him to decide whether he would continue to carry and save me from harmful things. Moreover, aside from that, I also thought of my work (P1-Line110-112).

Spiritually, my faith in the Lord tightened. Maybe it is because I had already experienced the worst things, but he continuously saved me from the hardest situations. Among the three, the badly affected aspect was the physical aspect because every time he would leave me some bruises, I mended them myself and hid them. Still, there were those times when I could not hide them from people because it takes time to heal, so I usually just stayed at home and was absent from my work to hide it. To reason out, my child was sick because I needed a few days to heal the bruises (P1-Line118-126).

The moral support from my family and also the support that I have received from my friend contributed to the fact that she gave me work because I cannot ask for financial help from my parents. After all, they are already old. My sibling also helped me, but I realized it was different if I stood alone because my husband did not support me (P2-Line373-377).

I do online selling. I do not have a cellphone, but my mother had an internet business before, so I log in using it, and I get thrilled when someone orders from me because that means I have something to buy for our everyday needs (P2-Line318-320).

The second theme that emerged for the challenges and coping mechanism of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Coping Techniques are Necessary*, this means that women who experienced domestic violence did their best to cope with the challenges they encountered, they tried different ways to ease the pain they feel inside and outside their body, these victims prayed hard and wanted their situation to become better. Meanwhile, other women choose to comfort themselves alone and cry to sleep; some lucky women bring their problems to their families and share their situation with their friends.

The theory of this study can support the said result; feminist theory offers a valuable framework to comprehend and tackle domestic violence. It includes insights into the factors leading to the unequal status of men and women in society and the differential upbringing of males and females, which have contributed to the continuation of violence and abuse within households (Frances, 1995). The theory of feminism has significantly impacted public consciousness regarding the societal consequences of sex role conditioning. It highlights how such activity can foster the development of belief systems that rationalize sexism, male privilege, and the shaping of gender norms (Healey et al., 1998).

The transmission of these belief systems can result in acts of domestic violence that mirror the patriarchal structure of society, where the male partner imposes submissive behavior on the female partner against her will. This theoretical viewpoint has been utilized in therapeutic approaches aimed at women, offering them a framework and justification for empowering abuse survivors as well as programs designed for perpetrators (providing psychoeducation on women's rights and enforcing accountability in recognizing those rights). Thus, social changes impacting the responses to domestic violence have come from the women's movement for equality in the broader society.

Authorities Were Informed

Yes, I reported him because I could not take the pain anymore; I reported him first to our Barangay Chairman and then to the Police Office afterward. Our Purok Chairman also tried to settle things between us, gave us some advice, and even checked our home situation; they checked whether we could cause public disturbance whenever we fought. We settled it because he said he would change it and get back to me, so we signed some papers and got back together (P1-Line95-101).

I reported him to the nearest police station in our place, and because of it, he stopped pursuing me; once he steps his feet in our house, the police arrested him; worst was when he went to our house, climbed on our wall, and he attempted to rape me, that is when I lost it, my family rescued me (P3-Line501-505).

Yes, I reported him to VAWC and asked for child support. I also opened our problem to the Barangay, and they even asked me how I let that happen. Because of it, he was reached out because he hid for months. Also, the Barangay and its social workers helped and gave me financial support (P4-Line734-738).

I reported him to the Barangay, DSWD, and Police Station and filed a case. The DSWD personnel catered to me and told me to contact Papa One until I went to VAWC. Then I showed the evidence, which was the girl's messages, and it was charged as cybercrime (P6-Line1017-1019).

The third theme that emerged for the challenges and coping mechanism of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Authorities were informed*. This means that participants reported their abusive husbands and went

to their Barangay Social Worker to seek advice regarding their situation; these social workers offered to counsel and referred the victims to a psychologist. Some women also experienced being rescued by their parents and were secured by barangay tanods and brought to the chairman of the barangay, wherein they were counseled by the chairman and tried to settle things between them; the barangay officials also checked the situation of their home and investigated the reason behind the abusive action of the husbands, other women also reported to the police stations and filed complaints against their husbands.

Additionally, many women reported to the Violence against Women and Children office and asked for child support. This act is helpful because women need protection from higher authorities. A considerable number of women in the nation, precisely 43 out of every 100, have experienced incidents of violence. Of this group, 40.8% of women reported experiencing psychological violence (e.g., humiliation, insults, being threatened with a weapon), 25% said they were victims of physical violence, and 8.3% were victims of sexual violence (INEC 2019). This literature can be reflected in the result of the study as it also shows that many women experienced violence. Thus, this kind of issue must be addressed.

Physical, Emotional, and Mental Aspects Are All Affected

We do not have any issues about cheating; he is not a cheater, and you will know whether he hides something from you if you love the person. We did not develop any trust issues for each other; it is just that we cannot handle the problems anymore because they continuously grow. My support system is my friends; they helped me, and others even scolded me, but I know it is because they are concerned with me (P1-Line178-183).

I thought of leaving him many times; I ran away once; I bought my things with me, and then he chased me wherever I went. I did that because I could not bear the pain anymore. I tried my best to understand, but I do not know why I continue to understand him (P1-Line138-140).

It affected me, especially my mental aspect, because it got to the point where I only wanted to end my life. After all, I could not provide for the needs of my child. Although I only cared for my 3-year-old kid, he stopped supporting us when I finally decided to leave him. We have been separated since 2018, and last year, I asked him for financial support because when we separated, my friend saved me; she gave me work, which is why I did not go after him. I still survived when my friend's business sank because I sold online (P2-Line327-334).

My love for him remained, but I decided to stand by my decision; I chose to leave him and be a single mother because it is better to strive and live independently than have a partner who abuses me (P3-Line492-495).

The last theme that emerged for the challenges and coping mechanisms of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence are *Physical, Emotional, and Mental Aspects are All Affected*. This means that victims are affected by physical, emotional, and mental aspects. Their physical part is concerned as they experience physical abuse; they are being hit or punched, leading to many bruises. Meanwhile, their emotional part is also affected since they feel very hurt almost every day because having an abusive husband leads them to have a miserable life; aside from being abusive, they are also cheaters and have mistresses, which adds pain to the victims of this study. Meanwhile, mentally, they get frustrated, and the abusive husbands do not provide for the family. Sometimes, the said women and their children eat only once a day, this situation adds burden to the participants.

Furthermore, violence against women is thought to be directly related to the uneven power relationship between men and women, sometimes known as "gender-based violence." According to traditional conventions and traditions, men are expected to be the leaders, pursuers, and providers in society. At the same time, women are nurturers, friends, and supporters of men, and they play secondary positions in society. This assumption gives men more influence over women. As a result, VAW becomes a means for men to demonstrate authority over women to maintain power (P.C.W., 2022).

Table 3: The Participants’ Insights and Realizations as Victims of Domestic Violence

Major Themes	Core Ideas/Statements
Strength and independence are essential for women.	It is your choice if you still want to be in that situation again. Your biggest enemy is yourself, not the person beside you Do not entirely rely on the income of your partner A woman should be independent.

A woman should know her true worth.	<p>Once he lays a finger on you, leave the relationship.</p> <p>If he can hurt you even once, he will do it repeatedly.</p> <p>Have a strong foundation of moral support to help combat the pain of the situation</p> <p>As women, we should know our value</p>
Domestic violence is life-changing	<p>I will love myself more because I did not do so before</p> <p>Trials are given by God; you just need to handle it properly.</p> <p>My children were suffering; that changed my perspective.</p> <p>Do not hold on just because you love him</p>
Advice for potential victims	<p>Keep lines of communication open</p> <p>Remain strong; do not ever forget to pray to God.</p> <p>Earn money so you can stand alone if you leave the relationship.</p> <p>Do not be scared to leave your abusive partner and report him to authorities.</p>

Strength and Independence Are Essential For Women

It all depends on what is in my mind; it is how you deal with the problem, it is on you if you fix yourself or not, it is your decision if you want a change with yourself, it is your choice if you still want to be in that same situation over again, it is a matter of dealing with yourself. First, your biggest enemy is yourself, not the person beside you; knowing you love that person so much, you forget your family because you chose him (P1-Line196-202).

To the other victims of domestic violence, remain strong and never forget to pray to God because nothing is impossible with him. Sometimes, we will be so down and lose ourselves that we make bad decisions; we need to pray because God will show us the way. He is so good because he will answer all our prayers; we must trust Him (P2-Line405-409).

My perspective changed because I became braver and stronger; I am more open to making decisions for myself and my children without prioritizing my partner (P4-Line802-804).

I became braver and stronger. He can easily bully and abuse me, but now, I would not let that happen again. (P5-Line946-947)

We should not decide recklessly, especially if we are angry; if we are frustrated, it is not okay to seek comfort from other people (P7-Line1187-1189).

The first theme that emerged from the insights and realizations of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Strength and Independence Are Important for Women*. This means that as a victim of domestic abuse, being strong and independent is essential; their experiences became a way for them to be strong and deal with the problems in life. For them, it is time to fix themselves and defeat their circumstances.

According to the latest data from the Iloilo provincial government, the Violence against Women (VAW) cases in the first half of 2021 are nearing the 2020 figures. The case trend is expected to exceed that of 2020 if all figures are accounted for by the end of 2021. Between March and August 2021 alone, 213 VAW cases were recorded, against 241 points in 2020. Most of the cases were reported in May (53), followed by April (49), June (42), March (41), August (17), and July (11). Iloilo City's VAW figures constitute only 10.61 percent of the 2,007 cases in Western Visayas for the same period – Physical Abuse (949), Sexual Abuse (140), Psychological Abuse (710), and Economic Abuse (419) (Marzan, 2021).

This literature shows that many women experience violence in the Philippines. Thus, it is evident that it is time for those women to fight for themselves and be courageous enough to go out with their situation. Just like the realizations of the participants, the number of victims of domestic abuse will lessen in the years to come.

A Woman Should Know Her True Worth

Now, I realize that my life is okay this way. Maybe I would stay in this situation for now, but we will never know God's plan. Knowing he arranged his plans for me, he may have better plans. I cannot say that I would not get back with the same person, and I cannot say that I want to go back to him, but one thing is for sure for now: I would give more love to myself because I failed to give it before if ever I decide for myself, I will make sure that it is worth it (P1-Line210-216).

Others are weak because they do not have someone to hold on to; I advise them to work in silence and save money for themselves because once you decide to leave the relationship, you can stand alone. Do not be scared to leave your abusive partners and report them to the authorities. Do not ever be scared to lose the father of your children because what can you do with their father if they are the one who inflicted pain on them? (P3-Line597-602)

From my 11 years of experience, I have learned that if your partner starts to lay a hand on you, please object because being too kind, hoping for a change from him, and enduring the pain that he caused you will not do any help (P4-Line795-797).

Based on my experience, my advice to them is to love their selves because if you only love your partner, his family, and your children and you do not give a single love to yourself, you will abuse yourself, give yourself some respect, if you notice that your partner does not respect you, tell him about it, open up to him by saying "you must respect me because I do respect you." You open yourself to new opportunities, think of what is right for you, do not set aside yourself for others, and give yourself a chance (P4-Line809-815).

The second theme that emerged from the insights and realizations of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *A Woman Should Know Her True Worth*. This means that women should know how to value their self. The participants who took part in the study realized that if their spouse ever laid a finger on them, they ought to consider ending the relationship seriously. First, a guy should never hurt his lady; instead, he should protect her and ensure her safety and security in their relationship. Abused women came to a conclusion, based on the findings, that if their partners hurt them once, they will hurt them again in the future and that this behavior should be avoided at all costs. Men who abuse their power should be held accountable for their inappropriate behavior. In the meantime, the ladies who participated in the study should be aware of their value and have a solid foundation of support to help them cope with the anguish caused by the circumstance. Domestic Violence (DV) refers to the threatening, aggressive behavior of other family members, which can be physical, sexual, psychological, or economic. It can be categorized as child abuse, partner abuse, and elderly abuse (Peterman et al., 2020).

According to the C.D.C., every year, in non-critical conditions, about 1 out of every four women experience a form of violence (Peterman et al., 2020). With this literature, it can be gleaned that women should consider it violent if they experience threats or aggressive behavior from their partners. Thus, they should not let it happen; they must find ways to report to the authorities, no matter what, to lessen or eradicate this issue.

Domestic Violence Is Life-Changing

We should not fully rely on the income of our partners; we need to have income of our own because we cannot assure what tomorrow will bring. A time will come when you will experience problems that can lead to separation; at least we have our own money as support, but if you both can still fix the problem, then fix it; do not wait for the problem to become worse (P2-Line388-392).

I saw how traumatized my children were; I realized that the relationship was not good anymore because my children were already suffering. That changed my perspective in a way that I realized that not because I love him, you will still hold on to that relationship; I want to change my life and practices, and that is why I convinced myself that I could do it, just like how the saying goes "If there is a will there is a way" (P3-Line584-589).

My experience in the hands of my partner has taught me a lot; I can finally say that I do not want to be with him anymore. I will stand by my decision and not find another man again; I will focus more on my children (P6-Line1060-1062).

The third theme that emerged from the insights and realizations of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Domestic Violence Is Life-Changing*. This means that victims deal with changes that are long-lasting and difficult. It may take some time for a victim to adjust to living in a safe setting, particularly in cases where the offender was extraordinarily violent and or carried out the abusive behavior over a protracted period. Even though confronting this suffering might feel overwhelming, the healing process can assist participants of this study in developing their inner strengths and reducing their anxiety about being unable to provide a safe environment for themselves and their families.

On the road to recovery, individuals who support survivors and the survivors themselves should remember that the healing process takes time. The potential effects of this traumatic encounter may exhibit substantial variation among individuals, contingent upon characteristics including how a person reacts to stress, their age, the frequency and severity of abuse and how often it occurs. Moreover, participants also learned to love themselves more and handle their situation properly; their experiences also led them to change their perspectives in life.

Moreover, violence against women has intensified in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippines is no exception. Community lockdowns may lead to increased violence directed towards women, with strict stay-at-home orders trapping victims in abusive situations. The implementation of a singular household quarantine pass policy, limited public transportation options and stringent curfews have significantly curtailed mobility, making it difficult for victims to seek assistance. This is evident from the significant decrease of 27.2% in reported cases to the Philippine National Police. With government institutions prioritizing the pandemic response, resources have been scarce for women experiencing violence. Reproductive health services have been largely inaccessible; many women have been unemployed and economically dependent on their partners. Additionally, low trust in authorities means that many women are less likely to report cases to authorities. Still, internet queries associated with violence against women have risen by 63% during the pandemic (Valdez et al., 2022).

Advice For Potential Victims

To the victims of domestic abuse, it is better to seek the help of the authorities than wait for that person to take their life away because once you seek help from the authorities, you will be protected (P5-Line951-953).

If you are ever in this situation, please report it to the authorities and seek legal advice (P6-Line1072-1073).

My advice to them is if your partner starts to lay a hand on you, do not think of continuing the relationship because I assure you if you give him another chance, he will do it repeatedly (P7-Line1197-1199).

I advise them to accept everything that would happen and think of their children's future; if you and your partner can still talk and fix the problem, why not? But at the end of the day, it is still your decision because no one can help you but yourself (P10-Line1586-1589).

The last theme that emerged for the insights and realizations of the participants on their experiences as victims of domestic violence is *Advice for Potential Victims*. This means that the risk of being a victim of domestic abuse is quite natural for the women who participate in the study. For the participants, learning how to get out of a potentially harmful scenario and the warning signs of an abusive relationship is essential.

When two people who are or have been in an intimate relationship violently harm one another, this is known as domestic violence or intimate partner violence; thus, they need to get out of these circumstances. Abuse in the home can take various forms, including psychological, sexual and physical assault, as well as the threat of such violence, and those who experience these should not be tolerated. Additionally, abuse by a partner can occur in any relationship, but most instances of domestic violence are aimed at women.

Moreover, abuse occurs in relationships wherever there is a disparity in the distribution of power and control. A person who abuses his/her spouse does so by controlling them through the use of behaviors and words that are threatening and painful, just like the experience of the women in the study. Thus, the participants advised others that recognizing the signs of domestic abuse would not come naturally at first. Although some relationships are abusive from the beginning, most of the time, abuse begins more covertly and gradually becomes more severe over time, and other women must be vigilant of this; they should guard themselves against this kind of scenario.

There are various forms of domestic violence, such as emotional, sexual and physical abuse and threats of abuse. A partner can inflict this abuse on anyone, but it predominantly targets women. Domestic violence can occur within both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. In an abusive relationship, there is always an unequal distribution of power and control. The abuser employs intimidating and harmful words and actions to assert dominance over their partner. Detecting domestic

violence may not always be easy as it may initially manifest subtly and progressively worsen over time, even though certain relationships exhibit abusive tendencies right from the start (Mayo, 2022).

Implication for Practice

Abuse of women inside intimate relationships poses a significant risk to the public's health in every society and culture because it damages the emotional, physical, and social health of females. Thus, it is recommended that the victims of domestic violence in this study seek help and counseling from the personnel of the Department of Social Welfare and Development; also, abused women may report to the barangay officials about their current situation so that they will be provided with protection from their abusive partners. Moreover, the victims of domestic violence in this study may continue their coping mechanisms like joining prayer meetings, counseling, sharing their problems with their families, finding a job like online selling, and other things that may help them heal from their painful experiences.

This study may also allow abusive husbands to realize the consequences of their actions; through this study, they may consider being good to their wives. Abusive husbands may also seek counseling to share their burdens and why they are offensive.

The families of the abused women in this study may also offer comfort to their daughters and treat them with special care so that they can at least move on a little from their experiences. They may also take a vacation together to unwind or even stay beside their daughter for some days so she can feel at ease, knowing she has a shoulder to cry on.

The public health offices may also pay attention to the victims of domestic violence and explain its impact to the participants. This study may serve as an avenue for a multidisciplinary approach to developing public health interventions that would most effectively address the issue of domestic violence. This study may bring to the forefront their difficulties as well as those that surround the problem of domestic violence; it may be of the utmost benefit to the people participating in this study – more specifically, the victims of violence.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development may also incorporate the study's findings into the design of social service interventions to prevent violence against women; they stand to gain from the research.

Implication for Future Research

As a researcher, I hope that the results of this study will motivate future researchers to conduct the same research and continue to create a program that will assist those who have been victims of domestic abuse. Additionally, future researchers may expand their understanding of and sensitivity to the issue of violence against women and conduct studies related to the present research.

Concluding Remark

This research serves as an avenue for victims of domestic violence to realize their situation. Violence in an intimate relationship is known as domestic violence, and threats of physical, sexual, or emotional violence are also considered kinds of domestic violence. Domestic abuse has the potential to affect individuals from all walks of life, but women are disproportionately affected. Based on the result, it is concluded that there is always an imbalance of power and control in abusive relationships; most commonly, men abuse women for various reasons, and some of those are even irrational.

Additionally, relationship abuse might be evident from the start, but more commonly, it begins silently and gradually escalates. Based on the study, pregnancy might be a time of heightened vulnerability to domestic violence. The health of both the mother and the baby is at risk when domestic abuse is present.

Any exposure to domestic violence, even if the child is not directly mistreated, can have adverse effects. Children who come from households characterized by abuse are more susceptible to experiencing subsequent abuse and developing behavioral problems. They grow up to either become abusers themselves or to accept abuse in relationships as the norm. Victims may be concerned that coming clean would put them at risk and maybe cause their families to fall apart. However, the best approach to safeguard abused women and their loved ones is to get professional assistance and support from higher authorities so that they can address their current situation.

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