

An Overview of Violence Against Women (VAW)

Violence against women (VAW) appears as one of the country's pervasive social problems. According to the 2008 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the National Statistics Office, one in five Filipino women age 15-49 has experienced physical violence since age 15. It is indeed alarming that despite efforts to address the concern, VAW persists.

VAW is deemed to be closely linked with the unequal power relationship between women and men otherwise known as "gender-based violence." Societal norms and traditions dictate people to think men are the leaders, pursuers, providers, and take on dominant roles in society while women are nurturers, men's companions and supporters, and take on subordinate roles in society. This perception leads to men gaining more power over women. With power comes the need to control to retain that power. And VAW is a form of men's expression of controlling women to retain power.

Women are also put to blame as the cause of their own misery. In the home, some women are accused of being "naggers" or neglectful of their duties as wife that is why they are beaten by their spouses. Rape is sometimes attributed to a raped woman's "flirtatious" ways. A woman filing for sexual harassment, in some instances is blamed for being malicious by interpreting her employer's appreciation of her good looks.

These are just some of the realities that contribute to the vulnerability of Filipino women to VAW. An even greater problem is the lack of concrete information to show the extent of VAW in the country as many cases of violence against women often go unreported due to women victims' "culture of silence." Many of the victims are ashamed to relate their experiences while others tend to dismiss their ordeal as a result of their lack of faith in the country's justice system caused by frustrations over the lack of results in filing complaints.

Several government mechanisms have already been put in place to address VAW. Non-government organizations also take part in this crusade. It is uncertain when this trend will totally diminish in the Philippine setting, but as long as current efforts to fight VAW are sustained, hope could be set high.

What is VAW?

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women (VAW) as, "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public and private life. Gender-based violence is any violence inflicted on women because of their sex."

The Philippine definition as contained in Republic Act 9262 (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004) states VAW 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, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, within or without the family abode, 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.

It includes, but is not limited to, the following acts:

- "Physical violence" refers to acts that include bodily or physical harm;
- "Sexual violence" refers to an act which is sexual in nature, committed against a woman or her child. It includes, but is not limited to:
 - rape, sexual harassment, acts of lasciviousness, treating a woman or her child as a sex object, making demeaning and sexually suggestive remarks, physically attacking the sexual parts of the victim's body, forcing her/him to watch obscene publications and indecent shows or forcing the woman or her child to do indecent acts and/or make films thereof, forcing the wife and mistress/lover to live in the conjugal home or sleep together in the same room with the abuser;
 - acts causing or attempting to cause the victim to engage in any sexual activity by force, threat of force, physical or other harm or threat of physical or other harm or coercion;
 - prostituting the woman or her child.
- "Psychological violence" refers to acts or omissions causing or likely to cause mental or emotional suffering of the victim such as but not limited to intimidation, harassment, stalking, damage to property, public ridicule or humiliation, repeated verbal abuse and marital infidelity. It includes causing or allowing the victim to witness the physical, sexual or psychological abuse of a member of the family to which the victim belongs, or to witness pornography in any form or to witness abusive injury to pets or to unlawful or unwanted deprivation of the right to custody and/or visitation of common children.
- "Economic abuse" refers to acts that make or attempt to make a woman financially dependent. This includes but is not limited to the following:
 - withdrawal of financial support or preventing the victim from engaging in any legitimate profession, occupation, business or activity, except in cases wherein the other spouse/partner objects on valid, serious and moral grounds as defined in Article 73 of the Family Code;
 - deprivation or threat of deprivation of financial resources and the right to the use and enjoyment of the conjugal, community or property owned in common;

- destroying household property;
- controlling the victim's own money or properties or solely controlling the conjugal money or properties.

Philippine Initiatives to eliminate VAW

Significant progress has been made by both the government and non-government organizations in the Philippines in terms of addressing and eliminating VAW.

One of the major accomplishments of the government in addressing VAW is the passage of Republic Act No. 9262, otherwise known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004. The Act was signed into law during the celebration of "International Women's Day" in March 8, 2004. It penalizes all forms of abuse and violence within the family and intimate relationships. The Act classifies violence against women and children (VAWC) as a public crime. RA 9262 also mandated the creation of the Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children (IACVAWC).

Other Philippine laws related to VAW include:

- RA 3815: The Revised Penal Code
- RA 7877: Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995
- RA 8353: Anti-Rape Law of 1997
- RA8369: The Family Courts Act of 1997
- RA 8505: Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998
- RA 9208: The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003
- RA 9710: Magna Carta of Women

Local legislative bodies such as the local governments of Cebu City and province have also demonstrated the power of legislation to address domestic violence. The Cebu City Council, as well as the Provincial Board, passed ordinances penalizing domestic violence and providing protective measures for women and child victims of abuse. One of the more noteworthy features of the province's ordinances is the "barangay protection order" (BPO) which may be issued by the barangay chair upon petition of the victim. The BPO makes it possible for local officials to "remove and exclude (the abuser) from the residence of the abused person temporarily for the purpose of protecting the victim regardless of the ownership of the residence." The protection order is deemed necessary because it is usually the wife and children who are compelled to leave the family home to escape the abusive husband.

The PCW, along with other government agencies and non-government institutions commemorates the 18-day campaign to end VAW(formerly 16-day campaign) since

2002. Also, to encourage the participation of men in the campaign to stop VAW, PCW helped organize the Men Opposed to VAW Everywhere (MOVE) in 2006.

Facilities and programs have also been established to alleviate the impacts of VAW. These programs and facilities include temporary care and shelter for Women in Especially Difficult Circumstances, called the Haven, Crisis Intervention Unit of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. On the other hand, the Department of Health (DOH) institutionalized the Women and Children Protection Program in a number of hospitals nationwide while the Philippine National Police now has a Women's and Children's Desks. Staffed mainly by female police officers, these units receive complaints by victims-survivors of crimes committed against women and children.

Non-government organizations should also be recognized and given credit for raising public awareness on VAW and providing support for women victims long before government facilities were set up. Many community-based programs to assist women victims of violence initiated by NGOs have now been adopted and replicated by national government agencies and local government units such as the Community-based Approach to Violence Against Women (COMBAT-VAW) pioneered by the Women's Legal Bureau and the HASIK. The Lihok Pilipina's Bantay Banay or "community watch" is the backbone of Cebu City's anti-domestic violence program.

The first crisis center for victims/survivors of VAW in the country, the Women's Crisis Center (WCC) launched its National Family Violence Prevention Program in 1997 with 18 cities and municipalities all over the Philippines. The program is a community-based strategy of preparing family members to protect themselves against violence and manage peaceful resolution of conflict within the context of family relations. It aims to organize and mobilize multi-agency action groups in the prevention of family violence from the regional down to the barangay level.

Other notable women NGOs that have been at the forefront of the crusade against VAW are SALIGAN (a legal group), KALAKASAN (Women Against Violence, an NGO providing shelter and counseling) and Women's Legal Bureau (legal group). These women's groups implement research projects dealing with violence and maintain a network of services dedicated to helping VAW survivors. These NGOs have also conscientiously tried to maintain records of their clients and services to help establish data on the extent and nature of violence committed against women. Several networks on VAW such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women focus on the issues of prostitution and trafficking both locally and internationally. They hold preventive education seminars and training in communities, among NGOs and with selected youth groups. The Philippine Migrants Rights Network on the other hand, particularly Kanlungan, assists women who are victims of violence in the context of migration.

VAW Hotlines

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)
Batasan Pambansa Complex, Quezon City
Tel. No.: (02)931-8101 to 07

DSWD –NCR Ugnayan Pag-asa Crisis Intervention Center
Legarda, Manila
Tel. No.: (02) 734-8639/ 734-8654/ 734-8626 to 27

Philippine National Police (PNP)
Camp Crame, Quezon City
Tel. No.: 723-0401 to 20

PNP-Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC)
Camp Crame, Quezon City
Tel. No.: 410-3213

NBI-Violence Against Women and Children Desk (VAWCD)
Taft Avenue, Manila
Tel. No.: 523-8231 to 38 / 525-6028