

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BATTERED MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to know the lived experiences of battered mothers, how they relate to their children, and respond to the maltreatment of their spouses. we used interpretative phenomenological analysis in analyzing the data. Through purposive sampling, 10 battered mothers, ages 32 to 52 were chosen to be participants in the study. We came up with five themes: sacrificing for their children, anger, sympathy in sorrow, physical pain, and active-passive responses. Mothers, although physically abused, have still shown their love for their children. Hence, they were characterized to be selfless as they can still care for their children despite being battered. They were characterized to be selfless, then. It was shown that they did not want to tolerate the abuse towards them, but their behavior of passively reacting and still staying in the relationship may display tolerance, because again, they were thinking of the their family and their children's welfare.

Keywords: *Battered Mothers; Child/Children; Physical Abuse; Maltreatment; Domestic Violence; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Battered Woman Syndrome*

INTRODUCTION

A mother is a provider, disciplinarian, and a protector. She is a selfless loving human, who sacrifices everything for the benefit of her children. A mother works hard to make sure her child/children are prepared with knowledge, skills, and abilities to make them competent human beings. Mothers play important key roles in establishing a family and at the same time in raising children.

Mothers who experienced physical, mental and/or emotional abuses are called battered wives/ mothers. As Levendosky and Graham-Bermann (2001) found, battered mothers emotions such us sadness, fear, anger, among others, increase their levels of depression and psychological distress, and lower their self-esteem compared to non-battered women. Research has shown that the women who experienced physical/emotional attack by their partners had severe behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and marital consequences, including serious physical abuses which endanger the women's own lives and the lives of their children (Dutton, Golding, Haj-Yahia, Humphreys, & Thiara, as cited in Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2008).

In addition, violence against women creates excessive stress, overwhelming the woman's ability to respond, resulting in feelings of anxiety and fear of safety. Physical abuse is the most common form of violence that causes injuries and illnesses for an individual. It may lead them to ask for help to social/health services. Sarasua, Zubizarreta, Echeburua and Corral (2008) found, battered mothers can cause a reduction of quality of life in the family. They also have a tendency to feel humiliation, shame, worry and fear. In this regard, Craparo, Gori, Petrucci, Cannella and Simonelli (2014) stated, both rich and poor experience physical abuse.

Moreover, according to Cameranesi (2016), battering consists of a variety of abusive tactics executed by intimate partners. These include physical assault; threat, fear, frustration and humiliation; isolation and restriction of resource access; risk of the safety of children and other family members; resentment towards the situation and use of any weapons to force unwanted activities.

There has been increasing recognition of violence against women in many countries worldwide. It is a consideration with regard to the significance of human rights as well as the consequent mental health problem occurring among battered women. This issue cannot be ignored in the society. Attitudes towards battered women should also be speculated in such a way that they will also be protected in the society (Haj-Yahia, 2011).

The relationship between parents and children plays a significant role in understanding the behavioral and psychosocial development of the child. According to Maccoby and Martin (1983, in Pereira, Canavarro, Cardoso, & Mendonca, 2009), parental rearing could be divided into two main dimensions: a) care that refers to acceptance, warmth and responsiveness, and b) rejection which states control. Such parental rearing may be understood as multiple behaviors that promote child discipline and management, supervision and overprotection.

Several studies suggest that negative parental rearing behaviors' may increase the risk of adjustment problems. Parental rejection and lack of parental warmth were consistently found to relate to children's externalizing and internalizing problems (Caron, Weiss, Harris, & Catron, 2006; Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000; Gracia, Lila, & Musitu, 2005; Javo, Ronning, Heyerdahl, & Rudmin, 2004; Muris, Bogels, Meesters, van der Kamp, & van Ossten, 2003) as well as low academic and social competencies (Chen, Morrison, & Cooney, as cited in Pereira et al., 2009).

Despite the rise in cases of battered women, there are still few studies about their coping strategies (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Coping strategies include a broad diversity of thoughts and behaviors used to manage the demands of a challenging situation (Lazarus & Folkman, as cited in Waldrop & Resick, 2004). It was also argued that the coping capacity is equated with the total coping skills of an individual. Coping skills are considered the ability to manage affect, gain support, solve problems, and change environmental factors. There are also other factors that may be termed as coping resources. These may be understood as intervening variables of perception of self-worth and personal power, family environment, social support, economic vulnerability, and active orientation toward problem solving (Rhodes, 1998).

When battered women do not have internal resources to cope with the partner violence they are experiencing, they utilize external resources, which they think may be able to help them. This includes different organizations, which may deliver formal or informal services for battered women. These services include assistance, support, and protection against their spouses (Gordon, Lempert, & Rhodes, as cited in Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2008).

However, battered women with children often receive painfully ironic mixed messages from the government. They are urged by state actors such as the police, child welfare agencies, and district attorneys to leave their batterers and flee to a confidentially located shelter to protect themselves and their children. On the other hand, when battered mothers have the courage to leave already, they are pressured by the regulations being given by the court system. The need to negotiate about child custody and at the same time maintain relations with their husbands, otherwise, they might lose custody of their children (Slote, Cuthbert, Mesh, Driggers, Bancroft, & Silverman, 2005).

Since there is severity and chronicity to the violence that is brought about by battering, research on the area is scarce. Moreover, Cameranesi (2016) argued that because of the associated intense fear that is felt by the victims, it is a challenge to gather profound data not only for the abused mothers, but also for the whole family that is involved in the threatening situation.

Furthermore, studies about battered mothers and how they address their situation as well as their responsibilities for their children do not receive enough attention in research (Holden & Ritchie, 1991).

We believe that the role of mothers is significant as they establish the family and nurture their children. However, impediments may arrive when a mother experiences physical abuse. Such abuse may hamper their physical, emotional, mental, and social facilities in being a psychologically healthy person and at the same time in being a mother.

We sought to investigate the lived experiences of mothers who have been battered by their spouses. We also looked into the aspect of how they relate to their children, given a lamentable experience of being physically abused.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Battered Woman Syndrome

According to Walker (1984), domestic violence occurs in a cyclical manner through different degrees of severity. The battered woman syndrome (BWS) is a term that characterizes women who develop specific psychological and behavioral symptoms because of non-stop and continuous experience of being victims of intimate partner violence. The woman is stuck in the violent relationship, although she may choose to stay despite the harsh situation. Since women cannot prevent the situation, they may already be able to predict that a violent episode may happen in certain situations. In this way, they may be able to name the time and place of the said battering incident. Women may fear to be separated from their spouses even if violence occurs, but severe injuries may make them leave the relationship in the end. Women's experience of being in such a violent relationship may affect their state of well-being. Being so, battered women may have psychosexual dysfunction, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder (Cascardi, O'Leary, Lawrence, & Schlee, 1995; Gleason, 1993; Kahn, Welch, & Zillmer, 1993, as cited in Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

Jekyll and Hyde

"Jekyll and Hyde" has become a metaphor to describe a duality of, or a transformation from, good to bad. It has been noted that this metaphor is commonly used by abused women when describing the abusers (e.g. Enander, 2009; Goetting, 1999; Zink, Jacobson, Regan, Fisher, & Pabst, 2006, as cited in Enander, 2010).

Enander (2010) suggested a process in which women's conceptualizations of their abusers shifted from good/Jekyll to bad/Hyde, as a result of increasing cognitive and emotive dissonance related to violence. The image of the abuser as Jekyll/Hyde yields two different interpretations. Within the pathology/deviance discourse, the Jekyll/Hyde behavior of violent men is regarded as resulting from some sort of psychopathology be they passive-aggressive, narcissistic, antisocial, borderline or psychopathic personality traits or disorders (e. g. Bernard & Bernard, 1984; Dutton, 2006; Hamberger & Hastings, 1986). On the other hand, within the feminist/normality discourse, the Jekyll/Hyde behavior is interpreted as a strategy to make the victim confused and dependent, i.e. as a means to achieve dominance and control (e.g. Graham, Rawlings, & Rigsby, 1994; Herman, 1992; La Violette & Barnett, 2000; Lundgren, 2004; Yoshihama, 2005, as cited in Enander, 2010).

Learned Helplessness

According to Rhodes and McKenzie (1998), the first attempt to use cognitive theory to explain battered women's tendency to remain in abusive relationships was made by Walker (1978, 1979, 1984) who applied the concept of learned helplessness to this subject. Walker also concluded that battered women learn to see themselves as functionally helpless and powerless to escape their situation. Therefore, they remain not because they want to, but because they believe there is no point in trying to get out. On the other hand, Strube (1988) has expanded this framework into a two-stage model called "Entrapment and Learned Helplessness." The theory states that a woman may exert a great deal of effort to improve the relationship and stop the abuse; and she may continue to make such efforts partly to justify her past efforts (i.e., she has too much invested efforts to quit).

Research Question and Objectives

We aim to answer the research questions: What are the specific experiences of mothers from their husbands who have been physically abusing them through battering? How do they experience such physical abuse? How do they relate to their children while having domestic violence at home? The objectives of this study are: to investigate on their lived experiences of being physically abused and at the same time given this situation, we determine how they relate to their children and respond to the maltreatment of their spouses.

Significance of the study

The paper aims to help people understand the plight of battered mothers. We hope that the readers will gain more insights on how mothers relate to their children despite the unfair treatment that they get from their spouses.

Specifically, the study is beneficial to the battered mothers because this paper may provide a way to understand their typical responses to abuse. Also, the study acknowledges the significant role of mothers to their children. The current study shall also inform the government on the reality of women being maltreated by their spouses. Such knowledge may heighten their programs and advocacies in protecting women's rights. This study will also help guidance counselors in the academe to develop awareness that some children in school are experiencing domestic violence. Hence, programs in school may be developed to mitigate the effects of the negative experiences of children so that their academic performance will not suffer. Social workers may also have ideas on how to buffer the mothers from the physical abuse from their spouses, by visiting houses and ensuring that no violence is taking place in all homes of families. Psychologists may also use the current study in designing specific psychotherapies and interventions to address the battered woman syndrome of mothers, heighten their self-esteem, and preserve their belief in themselves as rightful citizens in the society, most especially as a mother of each home in the community.

METHOD

Research Design

The current study applies a qualitative approach using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This aims to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social world. It is concerned with understanding people's experiences such as a major life event. It is also able to develop important relationships or processes which are significant to the participants. And lastly, it tries to understand the point of view of the participants. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has similar approaches with cognitive psychology and social cognition particularly in analyzing mental processes (Fiske & Taylor, as cited in Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Participants

We used purposive sampling. Participants in this study should be mothers who are 18 until 60 years old. They must have had experienced being physically abused more than once by their husbands and have a child or children who were witnesses to the abuses. They should be fluent in either English or Filipino and have not experienced psychosis so they may comprehend the interview questions.

The participants in this study were 10 mothers between the age range of 32 to 52 years old. They live in Metro Manila, Philippines and have low socioeconomic statuses. Nine of the participants are still living together with their husbands, while one is separated from her spouse. All participants had low socioeconomic status. They have been being physically abused or battered by their spouses. They have three to seven children, aged 3 to 35 years old. They have reported a situation that could be construed as an experience of domestic violence.

Data Gathering

We used in-depth interviews to get an optimal data from the individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly in sensitive matters that have been explored by this research. Informed consents were given and participants were assured that everything would be held confidential. We intended to gather more awareness on their experiences as battered mothers and how they respond to the maltreatment of their spouses. We had an interview guide validated by the experts to accurately explore the lives of battered mothers. Audio recorded interviews were transcribed.

Data Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis via thematic analysis was utilized by this research. The transcripts were carefully analyzed to gain the underlying meaning and the whole sense of all their lived experiences. Essential themes were generated to capture their lived experiences. We consciously ensured that the research questions were answered. We also went back to the participants to validate the results. The adviser further validated themes and three externally tapped experts in the field of psychology.

FINDINGS

Sacrificing for their Children

The participants claimed that they were staying in their relationships with their spouses for the sake of their children. Despite the constant battering, the informants claimed that they endured everything because of the offspring. They claimed that they did not want their children to grow up without fathers. They were also concerned about losing financial assistance.

“Syempre masakit, (teary-eyed) masakit, tsaka yun mmmm.. ayaw ko na makipag-asawa. Parang ganun pero ok lang for the sake of my kids.” (Bella) Despite the fact that she experienced being beaten up, she chose to suffer for her children.

Marie also had the same experience. She said, *“Sa mga anak ko pag ano ginawa mo yan sakitan sila, yung ginawa mo sakin, kabit sa akin ulitin mo o kaya sa mga anak ko ang ano ko sayo, nagtitiis lang talaga ako sayo para sa mga anak natin.”* She had to bear the physical abuse despite the fact that this posed risk for her. She would rather be beaten so that she could be there for her children.

In the same way, Marie also shared *“Ayun naman ang hindi ko inaalís. Kaya nga ako nagtiis sa asawa ko e, dahil nga sa mga anak ko e, kaya nga hindi ko pwedeng iaalis na ang pagganap ko sa kanila. Ano ung dapat kong gampanan sa kanila, binigay ko talaga, kaya nga hindi ako humiwalay sa asawa ko e, kasi yan nga sila ung inisip ko e.”* Being an effective mother to her children is still her top priority despite the maltreatment of her husband. Elsa had the same sentiment. *“Di bale na akong masaktan wag lang ang anak ko. Yan ang sinasabi ko sa asawa ko”* she quipped. She will bear everything, even the physical harm from the husband to avoid further risk to her children.

These mothers were not only thinking of themselves but also their children's safety. They did not want to see their children being hurt by their husbands. *“So tiniis ko ang lahat. Kabit masaktan ako ng paulit-ulit, wag lang ang mga anak ko. Pero ok na lang sakin na maging kami pa din para sa mga bata,”* Marie shared. Regardless of the physical abuse she experienced, she endured everything. She also claimed that she would continue to tolerate the battering of her husband for the sake of her children.

Anger

All participants showed anger towards their husbands' physical abuse. They described anger in various ways, too. This seems to be the mothers' way to cope with the abuse. They also justified the abuse by verbally uttering their anger to their husbands. It seemed to be their defense.

Since mothers could not fight back physically, they resorted to verbal expressions. This is because there are times when their anger led to aggression. Their way of expressing their anger towards the pain they felt from the maltreatment of their spouse is through verbal means such as name calling, using foul words, shouting and other verbal means.

"Pag ano, lalabas ka sinusundan ka na. Nagagalit na nga ako pati na nga rin si Jerome nagagalit na rin sa kanya nung mga panahon na yon. Nagsasawa na ako kulang na lang buong araw nakabantay siya sakin! (shouting)" Olivia confessed. She became angry, sick and tired of her husband's false accusations against her. This heightened her emotion during the interview.

Olivia said, *"Oo, sabi ko.. sabi ko.. 'T*ng*na, kulang na lang sundan buong magdamag nakabantay ka sakin!"* *sabi ko mapapatay kita sa puro kakaganyan mo! Sabi ko, "wala naman akong ginagawang masama"* *sabi ko sa kanya nasa trabaho ako. "Bakit ganyan ang iniisip mo? tanga ka ba?"* Accusing her of having an affair made her aggressive. She then resorted in using foul words. This was her way to let out her anger to her husband. The feeling of being accused of something she did not do was painful for her. To make matters worse, she received maltreatment because of an accusation. She withstood pain and suffering despite being accused of a wrongdoing.

*"Nagagalit ako. Para malabas ko galit ko, ang gagawin ko magpuputak ako ba. Tataasan ko kaya boses ko, nung sinubukan ko isang beses yun, aba hindi siya nananakit sakin kasi siguro nahiya siya. Pag nakita ko sa mukha niya mukhang ng tingin ko mukhang demonyo na parang wala ng awa sakin, lalapit na sasaktan na ko, nag-iingay ako "sige! P*t*ng*n* mo!"* Marie confessed. The informant also shared that in order to let her anger out and defend herself, she used verbal aggression so that her husband would stop from beating her. Such response became automatic because she wanted to defend herself. She further opened that she could not accept such demeaning treatment so she had to do something about her situation. Shouting became a learned response to prevent her husband from harming her.

On the other hand, these mothers tend to shift their emotions from the desired target to a substitute object that is less threatening.

Lucia, for one, said, “*Kaya nga ngayon yung pag sinasaktan ako pag lasing na siya, nagbabasag narin ako. Oh ayun naintindi so magulo na, kasi nagbabasag narin ako eh. Ikaw lang ba marunong sige, dati pinagbigyan kita eh. Pinagbigyan kita dati sige, ikaw lang ba yung marunong ohm. Basag labat! Pati lalagyanan ng ano, basag naming labat. Itong huli na.. umano na rin ako, kaya nakita ng mga anak ko ganun.*” In continuously experiencing physical harm from her spouse she would vent her anger by throwing objects, instead of fighting back her husband.

“*Pinagbabato ko talaga sa kanya e... kay Aries. Sinusunog ko pa nga yan e. Dumating din ung oras na nakahiga sa foam. Ngayon nga natuluyang masunog ung foam namin. Kasi nga sinunog ng anak ko, si Justin. Sinindihan ko ung foam tapos nagalit sa kanya. Nakahiga ayaw bumangon, sabi ni Justine patayin mo na yan! Malaki na ung apoy ng foam. Hayaan mo masunog yung papa mo ng mawala na sa bubay ko yan!*” Rose shared. Her anger aggravated her aggressive behavior. Because this anger is heightened, the emotion of anger is inappropriately displaced toward other things.

Rona, another informant, claimed, “*Ang sakin, nung talagang masamang masama ang loob ko, parang may iniisip ka kung minsan ng ano siguro kung hindi lang ako mag-iisip ng matino matagal na akong nakapatay.*” The pain and anger that she felt towards her husband provoked her to think negatively. This also made her more aggressive. Such experiences show that when battered mothers become so angry, they tend to think violently and act on an impulse without any deliberate thought of the possibility of putting their husbands’ lives at stake.

Sympathy in sorrow

According to the informant mothers, they are being beaten up because their husbands did not have permanent jobs to sustain the financial needs of the family. It seems that the wives sympathize to their partners. This is simultaneous with their sentiment to tolerate their continuous suffering from being battered wives.

Rose said, “*Oo sa ngayon, sa ngayon scavenger, ngsisidecar nga ngayon. Syempre kelangan ng.. ngayon magpapasko. May sakit din kaya si Jerome, diba may sakit nga. Kaya kailangan kumain palagi, dahil nga mahina*

din ung бага. Dun siya parang nabubugnot. Syempre nasasabayan ko ng inis tapos naaawa din ako sa kanya kasi wala siyang trabaho para mapakain mga anak namin tsaka mapagamot si Jerome. “She also expressed pity for her husband for not having a permanent job to provide the needs for their children.

In addition, Josie also said, “*Ano.. mga konting bagay lang. Yung mga ano.. yung mga nakaraan na katulad nung sa mga utang, syempre wala siyang permanenteng trabaho.*”

The same sentiment has been observed from Olivia who said, “*hmm hmm, kasi nga biktima nga siya ng impluwensiya ng droga, naawa ako diyan kasi kung hindi siya biktima ng droga, hindi siya magiging ganyan.*” The wives still think that there are reasons why their husbands end up beating them up. Most of them link the reason to their spouses’ unemployment, inability to have permanent job or drug addiction. These wives/mothers thought that their husbands would have a heart not to physically abuse them given that they can provide for the family.

In addition, since they still acknowledge their being wives to their husbands, they still continued to stay with their partners’ side. This mindset is still present despite of what they had experienced. The wives showed sympathy towards their husband, because they tried to understand the emotional state of their spouses. The wives tried to justify the acts of their husbands, thinking that they physically maltreated them since they could not provide for their children’s needs.

Rose said, “*Ano ba tong papa nyo balim na ba yan dahil ba sa walang trabaho? Nagalit samin, nagalit talaga. Kayo wag niyo nga ako tatawaging balim. Sabi niya akala niyo di masakit sakin yun, sinasabihan niyo akong balim, porket nakatingin lang ako sa kawalan?*” She justified why her husband felt worthless. She seemed to think that her husband’s problem is financially related. Rose felt that the feeling of insignificance triggered her partner to hurt her.

Physical Pain

The participants shared that they experienced being battered by their husbands. The shared experiences described the physical pain as throbbing, burning, or aching discomfort. “*Pag ano binugbog nila, pinagsusuntok ako. Hindi na ko makatayo*” Josie shared. She added that, “*Tapos nagsasaing ako, inanubhan ng rice cooker yung ulo ko.*” During the times when her husband would beat her up, she always experienced pain that disabled her from standing up.

In the same way, Fatima said “*Masakit kasi binubugbog niya ko.*” The pain she experienced from her husband had a big impact on her not only physically, but also emotionally.

Experiencing such physical pain is really traumatic for the mothers, most especially because they are hurt by the ones they love. They also shared that they are not doing anything wrong to deserve such maltreatment and punishment.

Active-Passive Responses

Battered mothers handled their situation by doing two responses: active and passive. Active response is performed when a person would act upon the situation. On the other hand, passive response happens when a person leaves the situation or the problem.

Marie said, “*Nag-away kami nun nung hapon hanggang gabi, hinampas ako ganyan ganyan. Tas tumakbo ako sa labas.. pumunta ako sa barangay namin. Dun nagsumbong ako.*” She asked help from the barangay that her husband is maltreating her. The barangay police forces are usually the first ones to help and protect the mothers.

The battered mothers, however, did not seek help from the barangay and police stations. There were times when they would only passively respond to the problem. The mothers would be silent and pray.

“*Ayun, unang-una syempre sa dasal. Nagdadasal ako, kaya lang naman ano ako eh.. nagiging matatag ako. Siya lang naman, si Lord lang naman ang talagang ano ko eh. Parang pinaka ano ko para maging matatag ako. Saka yun nga yung normal na ano.. na balang araw magbabago din siya.*” (Elsa) She learned to move on because she exercised religiosity.

Moreover, Marie also shared the same sentiment. She shared that, “*Unang una lakas loob tapos manalig sa itaas na gabayan na lang ako wala akong ano e, kumbaga parang ako feeling ko wala akong dalawang kamay e, wala akong malapitan e.*” Despite the circumstances she had encountered, she remained quiet and always prayed to God for guidance.

Also, mothers tended to avoid having any conflict with their partners. It seems that when they know that their husbands are angry, they would just remain silent and not actively confront the situation.

Rose said, “*Pero sa ngayon, di ko muna siya pinapansin kasi ayoko magkakasalubong kami lagi ng init ng ulo e. Iniinwasan ko siya.*” She knew that when her husband is angry, she would resort to staying away from him.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we identified five themes that described the lived experiences of battered mothers in Metro Manila. The informants claimed that they take the battering since they are “sacrificing for children”, wherein the experienced physical abuse from their spouses almost certainly give them intense panic, specifically when their children are involved. Mothers are also worried about their children’s needs since they often lack the financial skills to provide for themselves. Taking this financial capacity of the father to provide for the family, mothers in this study would choose to stay and endure the physical abuse.

The mothers were also torn between leaving the husbands for good and staying to keep the family together. Most participants wanted to be separated while some have claimed confusion. Some who left the relationship also had the insight of reconciling with their partners for safety and financial reasons. Why do women stay once they become victims of intimate violence? The answer is complex because it involves individual, community, and societal influences that prevent a woman from leaving an abusive relationship. On the individual level, a number of explanations have been proposed to explain why women remain in abusive relationships. These include commitment to the relationship, felt responsibility for the abuse, sensed liability for helping the partner, fear of financial losses, reprisals, and physical safety of themselves and their children (Bullock, Sandella, McFarlane & Landenburger, as cited in Smith, 2003).

The study also revealed a sense of anger among the participants. Mothers had psychological distress. Their partners’ abuse towards them made them react negatively. This means that sometimes they respond in a maladaptive way, because they would have to throw or damage objects, because of their anger. The mothers were angry because of the physical maltreatment and the

accusation of infidelity. Jealousy is a “normal” condition in the relationships, too, as wrongful accusations were common sentiments among the participants. Mothers tended to vent out their anger towards their husbands, but this defensive act would make their husbands hurt them more. This cyclical mechanism of the use of anger led to more violent engagements and feelings of revenge.

Mothers in this study seemed to lack the ability to fight back physically because of the lack physical strength. Also, these mothers were perceived to be afraid that fighting back may add more tension inside the household. They also had the impression that if they fight back, their children might hurt the children. The mothers thought that through verbal means, they could fight back. These verbal mechanisms include blaming, disrespecting, name-calling, teasing and even criticizing the partners. It may have served as their alternative way of “fighting back” because of their felt anger towards the partners. According to Edwards (2010), angered states typify conditions in which a person usually loses self-control. In this situation, the person who has anger outbursts loses self-inhibitions and outwardly expresses rage through overt physical acts of being aggressive towards another.

The theme “sympathy in sorrow” showed the wives’ compassion for their husbands despite being victims of domestic violence. They claimed to have shown pity to their partners because their husbands’ erroneous accusations. Since the mothers perceive their husbands as providers, they feel that the reasons why they are being physically and mentally harassed rest on their inability to financially provide. It also appeared that the mothers think that the abuses against them were reasonable because they think that their husbands see them as useless and worthless.

Findings of this study appear to support Caponey’s (2002) argument that unemployment places tension on marital relationships. Aside from the financial implications of unemployment, there are also undesirable actions. Caponey’s work also said that husbands who continued to be unemployed face their own issues in dealing with displacement, depression, and worthlessness for being the family breadwinner. This perhaps creates more sympathy from their wives.

On the other hand, some mothers describe other causes of physical violence, which may be due to their partners’ abuse of drugs and alcohol. The mothers said that if their husbands were not into substance and alcohol abuse, they might not have received or experienced maltreatment from them.

The mothers also considered “physical pain” as a common insight. They asserted that their husbands would hurt them in various parts of their bodies. Domestic violence is committed in situations where depression seems to be high (Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Cascardi & O’Leary, 1992; Orava et al., 1996; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999; as cited in Jarvis, Gordon & Novaco, 2005).

Lastly, the theme “active-passive responses” showed that the participants’ had two types of responses for the physical assaults. On one hand, they said that they sought help from the barangay and police stations to provide a temporary safety protection away from the violence of their husbands. Several studies identified that mothers who experience abuse seek help from other people particularly from the government state officials. Battered women are sometimes able to cope with partner violence using their own internal resources. However, they also need outside resources so they also apply to formal and informal services for assistance, support, and protection against their violent spouses (Gordon et al., as cited in Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2008). These outside support systems help battered mothers to withstand their fears in crisis, especially when their lives and their children’s are in danger.

On the other hand, some participants just responded passively to the abuses. They were silent and just let their religious belief take over their decisions. It appears that they will not be as tough as they are now if it is not because of their belief to God. Despite the hardships and grievances that they have experienced, they asserted to have remained good and loving mothers to their children. They still continued to use their remaining strength that to still perform their duties and responsibilities as mothers. They also stated that they would do everything to protect and take good care of their children’s needs. They also remained strong in overcoming the problems they encountered so that they would sustain their children’s welfare.

All of the participants in this study expressed their faith and their belief that God has control in everything that happened in their life. After the physical abuse from their husband, they passively reacted, praying to God, asking for guidance to make everything good for the family.

LIMITATIONS

There are few limitations of the study that should be noted. First, the paper only focused on the physical experiences of abuse that were experienced by the participants. Second, participants

may not have narrated everything that they have experienced with their husbands, as they can only tell what they can remember during the interviews. Third, the findings may apply only to battered women who may have the same characteristics to the participants in the study.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the lives of battered mothers who were physically abused by their partners. We noted five themes that emerged from the interviews namely: sacrificing for their children, anger, sympathy in sorrow, physical pain and active-passive response. Mothers tend to bear all of the physical pain and abuses from their husband for the sake of their children. They also remained good mothers to their children to the extent that they would sacrifice even their well-being just for their children's welfare. Even though they disdain the physical maltreatment from their spouses, sometimes, they also pity their husbands. Because of the physical abuse and the negative consequences on the mothers' psychological well-being, battered mothers sometimes lose their internal resources to adaptively respond to the situation. This means that they no longer have any other adaptive way of finding resolution to their lamentable situations. Because physical maltreatment rips them off of their resources to have adaptive coping responses, battered wives could not be blamed for reacting maladaptively, as it had been their way to defend themselves and protect their children. The domestic violence they have experienced may just continue viciously inside their homes.

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