

THE ROLE OF THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON WOMEN (PCW) AND GABRIELA PARTY-LIST GROUP IN ERADICATING VICTIM BLAMING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Victim-blaming on social media became increasingly influential which includes spreading negative comments to large masses. It allows individuals to create and publish content for free and gather audiences all over the world. This study will focus on the role of government agencies such as the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and the GABRIELA Party-list group in eliminating victim-blaming on social media in the Philippines. Victim Feminist Theoretical approach was used to establish a foundational understanding of the roles, programs, advocacies, support system, and social media propagandas of the two agencies. An additional in-depth case study in qualitative-descriptive approach was conducted to this research. Study shows that the response of the victim towards the crime committed to them opens the factor that they may be responsible for their life's misfortune. Despite the lack of policies and laws covering the issue of victim-blaming, the role that the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and GABRIELA in eradicating victim-blaming on social media to publicly educate the community to recognize and reduce victim-blaming in themselves and others. The researcher recommends that more policies should be submitted to address the issue.

Keywords: Victim-blaming, Social media, Victim feminist theory

INTRODUCTION

As internet penetration takes on the world, people have grown fond of the usage of different apps like Facebook (FB), Messenger, Twitter, Instagram (IG), Snapchat, Wattsup, Viber, and others. The boundaries of conversation between families, friends, and new acquaintances separated through states and nations have diminished with the help of these social media apps. The use of these apps has certainly made a huge difference in the lives of human beings around the globe. Not solely is it used for constant verbal exchange but also market networking as well.

Asia has dominated the biggest social networking market (FB) and that happens to be the Philippines in 2011. Six years after, the Philippines still ranks number 1 and is titled as the "Social Media Capital of the World". Makati City and Pasay City located in the Philippines was also named as the "Selfie Capital" of the world in 2014 (Vince, 2014).

The digital lifestyle is an extension of the way we live today. It is one's reality-powered by using apps, sites, and devices that compliment one's physical lifestyle. Users of social media apps pursue to accomplish stuff such as to socialize, to discover, to shop, to travel, and most importantly, to express themselves. Internet users' intention in spending extra time in social media apps helps them in developing new ideas, taking part with different users, sharing

their internal most ideas and feelings, expressing their artistic Genius, and of the route to socialize, make friends and find partners on dating apps. The above stated are pros of the world's modernity, the way of life, and globalization. However, each pros have its cons. In the easiest get the right of entry to self-expression, are these people, the so-called "netizens", using their rights to self-express for the benefit of everyone? Or is it the other way around?

Theoretical Background

Feminists became aware of harassment as a source of women's disempowerment and as a section of their systematic oppression. Violence in opposition to girls is one of the most salient effects of systemic gender inequality across the globe. For the past three decades, violence in opposition to ladies in the US has been addressed by feminist and social justice-oriented campaigns supposed to raise recognition about the incidence of violence and to grant girls with the physical and psychological capabilities to avoid and combat their doable encounters with violence (Frazier & Falmagne, 2014). In the realm of feminism, "victim feminism" is addressed as casts women who are "beleaguered, fragile, intuitive angels" and encourages them to "seek energy through an identification of powerlessness" affords a long-lasting of attributes of victim feminism that she detects in a host of feminist activities, institutions, and texts. "Victim feminism" is something that Christina Hoff Sommers, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of Who Stole Feminism outlined as what she describes as "fainting couch feminism". That is, the idea that modern feminism has trained or enabled women to see themselves as victims. The conversation was specifically framed around the issue of sexuality. It views women as fragile and easily traumatized. It calls for special protections for women in sexual assault cases because it views women as an oppressed and silenced class (Busch, 2017).

Feminism shall be the main guiding theory of this paper since this is also the frame that is used by PCW and GABRIELA in their advocacies and actions.

Literature Review

Victim-blaming

To understand rape culture, it is defined as violence in the form of rape, incest, murder, and battery. It is generally understood that we consider rape and assault as what it is —

a crime. Rape culture starts with victimization "boys will be boys", rape jokes, non-consensual photography, homophobia, and victim-blaming. This is why women do not report because every time they do, the media tears the victims apart.

Why did these women wait so long to come out? They must be lying. If he, did it, they would have come forward.

She's lying. Even police officers too often take it for granted that the woman is lying about being raped.

She was wearing something provocative. Right, because women wearing baggy jeans and sweatshirts don't get raped?

She was drinking too much. Being drunk isn't an open invitation to have sex. Remember that pesky little word, consent? It's hard to give consent if you're unconscious (Galpin, 2017).

Women who become victims of sexual harassment have the right to protect themselves. They must take some actions towards these kinds of unlawful doings and must not let fear overpower them. Sometimes women just ignore all kinds of harassment that they experience. At other times, they reacted, for example, by staring back at the harasser, hitting them, or shouting at them. Also, women chose to move away from harassers due to fear that the situation might escalate further. It was also said that some women did not want to create such scenes (Quinn, 2002). This fear is the cause why these male harassers start pointing fingers and putting the blame on their victims or commonly known as "Victim Blaming". It is the case when men or other people would say that women wearing sexy clothes provoke men to give sexual gestures to them. People would tell them that they wouldn't be harassed by wearing loose clothing that cover their bodies. Despite knowing clothing could not provide protection from harassment and believing that clothes were not responsible for harassment, women would continue to wear clothes that covered her body so that no one would get a chance to blame them for the harassment. Confronted with complaints about sexual harassment or accounts in the media, some men claim that women are too sensitive or that they too often misinterpret men's intentions. In contrast, some women note with frustration that men just "don't get it" and lament the seeming inadequacy of sexual harassment policies (Quinn, 2002).

Social Media

In recent years, the term social media has become a popular way to describe a collection of online systems that allow for the production, storage, and distribution of user-generated content (UGC). Social media allows for the creation of a virtual social space where groups of users can come together in synchronous and asynchronous interactions. These interactions can be structured (such as threaded responses to blog posts that are moderated), semi-structured (e.g. the discussion amongst groups of friends within extended FB social networks), or unstructured (such as in Twitter, where topics are not ‘owned’ but tied together through the ad hoc application of hashtags that can be used to locate and link together posts by a variety of different users. Cohen (2011) points out that definitional ambiguity reduces our ability to make concrete statements about social media. Common definitions include allusions to the comparative ease of participation in social media, and its emphasis on multiple and simultaneous user participation in the production of conversational, initiation, response, and comment, social filtering/quality control (Chen, 2013).

The gender equality principle in the 1987 Philippine Constitution became the government agenda because of women’s concerns. Thus, establishing the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) which is the primary policymaking and coordinating body on women and gender equality concerns. As the policymaking body and oversight agency on women’s concerns, the PCW acts as an advocate of women’s empowerment, gender equity, and gender equality in the Philippines. It was formerly known as the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) until August 14, 2009, when it was renamed as PCW and its mandate was expanded by the enactment of Republic Act 9710, otherwise known as the Magna Carta of Women (MCW). The PCW, together with Senator Riza Hontiveros as the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on women and the author of Senate Bill (SB) 1252 or the gender-based electronic violence (GBEV) bill, seek to give women more protection against sexual harassment and violence, including attacks on social media (Elemia, 2016).

Another political Filipina group that demands equality, social justice, democracy, and freedom is the GABRIELA. Founded on the 28th of October 2000, Gabriela Women’s Party is the biggest alliance of women’s organizations in the Philippines. Rich with experiences and lessons of having been the Philippine women’s movement in its over 20 years of existence, GABRIELA in 2001 first joined the electoral arena

and Secretary-General Liza Largoza Maza ran as the party-list representative under Bayan Muna (People First) Party. With the passage of pro-women legislation including the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act in the 12th Congress and the anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, Gabriela Women’s Party fielded its nominees in the national party-list elections for the first time in 2004.

Victim Blaming on Social Media

“Social media has become a powerful tool for expression, information, and advocacy, but it has also become an avenue for harassment, misogyny, and homophobia. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of online violence resulted in physical harm and fifty-three percent (53%) have been perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Filipino youth are the biggest consumers of the Internet, with six out of ten aged 15-24 being regular Internet users, and seventy-eight percent (78%) having mobile phones. Currently, there are forty-seven (47) million active FB accounts in the Philippines, but there are those who cross the line, and the problem must be addressed. There is an urgent need to institute protective measures and strategic policies to combat the prevalence of the rape culture in our society which leads to physical sexual assault and other forms of violence against our women and children. You have the power to change the social media landscape. With your peers, you can promote equality and respect, and finally stand up against online violence. Let’s reclaim the Internet,” –Sen. Riza Hontiveros, chairperson of the Senate Committee on women (News, 2017).

The case of Jennifer Laude has skyrocketed on different social media platforms. Jennifer “Jerry” Laude, a transgender individual, was allegedly murdered by a U.S. Marine, Private First Class in 2014. The militant group representing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community cried foul over “hate posts” online against murdered transgender Jennifer Laude. Some netizens also blamed the death of Laude herself for being transgender, which is the general term for those who identify their gender as opposite from their biological sex. These outbursts of discrimination show how hostile some sections of the Philippine society can be towards people of different gender, (Cayabyab, 2014).

ASSUMPTIONS

The primary assumption of this study is to describe the role of the Philippine Commission on Women and the

GABRIELA Party-list Group in eradicating victim-blaming on social media. Hence, the assumptions based on the discussion above are as follows:

- The PCW supported senate bills that would combat the issue of victim-blaming on social media.
- The GABRIELA Party List created “Gabbie” an online app that may help address problems about victimization, harassment, and other cyber-crime-related issues.

METHODS

Approach

A case study qualitative approach was used in this research. Interviews with the elite/ head of government agencies were conducted by the researcher.

Design

To have an in-depth understanding with regards to the role of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and GABRIELA Partylist Group in combating the rampant issue of victim-blaming on social media, a case study design qualitative, the descriptive approach was used to describe the role of the PCW and GABRIELA party-list group in eradicating victim-blaming on social media. To further disseminate the programs and advocacies they have implemented in eliminating discrimination towards women on social media in the Philippines, the study also aims to know more about the support system and legal remedies that are given to the victims of sexual assaults, harassment, bullying they have had encountered thru social media and also to elaborate the roles of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and GABRIELA Party-list group in combating victim-blaming on social media.

Data Gathering Technique

During the gathering of data, the researcher conducted an Expert interview on two of the representatives of the PCW and learned more about their actions in addressing the issues of victim-blaming on social media. A Key Informant Interview (K.I.I.) on two of GABRIELA Party-list Group

and knew more about their social media propaganda in eradicating the issue of victim-blaming were also done.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in two different offices in Metro Manila; one is done in Room 104, 1st Floor, Philippine Commission on Women Building, 1145, Jose Laurel Street, San Miguel, Manila where the Philippine Commission on Women’s head office is located and the other one is in Central Avenue, Constitution Hills, Quezon City, where the head office of GABRIELA Party-list group is located.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

PROGRAM INFORMATION

The National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reported that only 3 out of 10 Filipino women sought help after being sexually abused and they sought help from their family and friends than from lawyers or police officers. The World Health Organization (WHO) observed reasons such as not enough support systems, fear or risk of retaliation, shame, blame, disbelief, social stigma, and fear or risk of mistreatment are reasons why women do not report directly to authorities. According to the PCW, Filipino women keep their silence due to the “cultural and social stigmatization” that is following rape. The third of the most reported case of Violence Against Women (VAW) in the Philippines is rape. While seeking justice, survivors tend to receive discrimination like victim-blaming instead of support due to misinformation.

Long before the age of social media, people target victims in gossips and hatred “*when ladies or LGBTQ members experience misfortune such as rape, or harassment even catcalling the neighborhood has so much to say such as they wore provocative clothes, they went out late at night, etc.*” said PCW. Now with the internet, as it could be used to amplify advocacies it is also a tool for spreading hate comments and victim-blaming. The threatening problem of this social media caters people to give their opinions without being sensitive about the issue. “*Unfortunately, there are no specific laws which directly address victim-blaming, no programs as well that focus on the issue alone,*” PCW on protocol 1. Despite the rampant issue of victim-blaming on social media, the government has not yet made any laws on

its eradication, but Akbayan Senator Riza Hontiveros passed the Anti-Discrimination Bill (ADB) which subjects to stop victim-blaming as an excuse for crimes. *"We are hopeful that this bill will soon become a law to raise awareness to users of social media and even non-users to be mindful and that freedom of expression is not absolute especially when it comes to sensitive cases such as rape or harassment"* PCW on protocol 10.

Even without a specific policy or program or law about victim-blaming, the PCW highlighted the Memorandum Circular No. 2017-114: Guidelines in Monitoring the Functionality of Violence Against Women (VAW) Desk in every barangay. It is the easiest access to address VAW cases in a gender-responsive manner who are experiencing violence and exploitation in any form. Another is R.A. 8008 the Anti-CyberBullying of National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) bullying in the form of using computers or gadgets through the internet. These laws still pertain to protecting victims to help in regaining themselves with the tragic experience they have had encountered.

"Sexual Harassment is a sensitive issue and for victims not to hesitate to report such acts we made a tool that people use every day, for easy access. It's called Gabbiegabriela, a chatbot where victims can file complaints or reports that they have had experienced" GABRIELA on protocol 4. In late 2017, the chatbot was created and Gabriela recently introduced the first chatbot in the Philippines to help make the reporting of sexual harassment easier. It can be found on Facebook messenger, and they can handle reports with confidentiality and comfortably.

"Teaching respect is the best campaign vs. Rape" GABRIELA on protocol 1. Furthermore, they emphasized police stations that the Women and Children's Protection Desk (WCPD) should also learn how to handle cases of Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) for they have been receiving unprofessional complaints like *"complainants were told that maybe they were naggers that's why their husbands beat them up when they went to Women's desk and filed a report. That's victim-blaming and it is causing women to lose trust in the capacity of authorities to solve a problem like this"* GABRIELA on protocol 5. With a lack of knowledge on the issue, authorities do not know how to handle situations on which it is necessary to act with precautions towards their complainants.

Support System

The Philippines local statistics drew a painful picture that out of five women, three have experienced sexual harassment, and every hour one woman is raped. Survivors

of this mistreatment tend to be silent to forget this tragic scenario of their life. People surrounding the survivors do not know what to say or react to cases like this. To help them, one must understand the struggle that they are going through. Studies have proven that sexual trauma can cause psychological harm. *"I couldn't sleep on my bed for over a year. I also got agitated when people would touch me."* A lot of survivors report intense feelings of guilt, stress, shame after the experience, and terror which lead to long-term mental health problems like anxiety, depression, or even post-traumatic stress disorder. Experts say sharing can help alleviate negative emotions that will help victims heal so they can get advice on the next action they can do whether legal or psychological.

In this age of social media, it is now a powerful tool to create a community for survivors to share their experiences, to receive moral support from other survivors, to gain knowledge on how to handle related cases, and to share courage that they are not alone in this fight. *"Being able to establish that small but safe place to talk about shared experiences without being judged can make a huge impact on survivors."* GABRIELA on protocol 9. However, survivors' decision in coming out is difficult for it only brings up old pain and trauma and many are not ready for that. *"Victims do not seek remedies or ask for expert's help because they think they will get judges or humiliated or get blamed instead of being understood and sympathized and victim-blaming is very much alive here in the Philippines."* GABRIELA.

"Gabbiegabriela chatbot can file a complaint that they can submit to their lawyers, human resource departments or government agencies or even directly to Gabriela." Protocol 3. With this kind of program, victims can feel safe and at ease because they are surrounded by people who support them.

Role in Eradicating Victim-blaming

Public Education

Victim-blaming has now become a trend in many cases, society tells the victim to change their behavior for them to avoid being harassed or raped. *"Dress less provocatively, drink less alcohol, do not stay out late at night they make the victims believe that it's their fault why they got attacked."* Victims feel weak, passive, or vulnerable in the stage where they are at their lowest due to the negative feedback society is throwing at them. *"It is a traumatic experience to get blamed and it can lead to increases in mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, etc. The tendency for victim-blaming also is that it decreases the possibility to seek help and support"*

due to fear of being further shamed or judged” GABRIELA on protocol 15.

GABRIELA Partylist Group is emphasizing massive education on consent and the concept of victim-blaming. Women are being informed of their rights and men are being informed on how to respect the opposite sex. They are against the public stigma on a particular way of dressing to be respected and avoid being raped. Instead of focusing on dress codes, giving education to the public, especially to men, that they should understand that consent from a person is important and not to force themselves. According to GABRIELA, they are correcting the notion that wearing short skirts and getting drunk cause rape. In addition, what they want people to understand is that rapists are the ones responsible for cases of rape. With the kind of mindset society has, victims lose trust in police officers or authorities about their complaints for they would feel unsafe and condoned.

Rape prevention education for young boys and men is important so they can learn about consent and hold themselves accountable for their misconduct. To address prejudices towards the victim, public education is necessary to groom the younger generation to be sensitive, aware and influence others positively.

Policy-Making

In victim-blaming, women are in nature seductive, and men are at the mercy of women and that is natural hormones. In layman's terms, women are “asking for it” with the behavior and attire that makes men out of control with their sexual drive. In rare cases, women are not wearing provocative clothing or expressing themselves sexually. There will never be a justification for the act of rape or harassment by an offender. So, to stop pointing fingers, policies should strictly be implemented.

In this culture of victim-blaming, instead of recognizing and punishing the criminals, the quick and simple solution for many is that it's much easier to point the finger over the victim rather than punish the perpetrators because it is the stigma, and it gives underprivileged and oppressed groups an idea that they can avoid abuse and social injustice if they make themselves in a particular fashion or manner. *“Since there aren't laws that focus on victim-blaming, people easily get away with it, even celebrities or government officials cannot be held accountable” PCW on protocol 16.* The only person at fault for a crime is the perpetrator. When perpetrators make excuses, hold them

accountable and do not let them rationalize their actions by blaming the victim or minimizing their crime.

“Lots of laws protect women. We're very good at making laws but it's the implementation part that we need to work on, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done in media, especially in social media,” PCW on protocol 6. In terms of policy implementation despite the existing law, no specific law focuses on victim-blaming, and according to PCW that the implementation of these laws or policies is tough work.

Women Empowerment

The Angono Municipal Police issued 10-point guidelines on what women should do or how women should behave to prevent getting raped on their Facebook page which gathered negative comments from different women advocates. *“What a classic case of victim-blaming and gross misinformation of rape”* GABRIELA on protocol 12. According to the do's and don'ts of guidelines released by the Angono Municipal Police Station, women are encouraged not to wear short skirts and not to get drunk to prevent from being raped. GABRIELA urges to delete the public advisory on rape that the Angono Municipal Police Station posted on social media. *“Short skirts don't cause rape. Drinking does not cause rape. Rapists do cause rape. The misogynist exhortations of the President do cause rape”* GABRIELA.

Women advocate groups such as GABRIELA organize protests as their way of addressing issues on women's rights. It is one way of empowering oppressed victims to boost their self-esteem and regain their self-worth. Through seminars and group workshops being conducted by GABRIELA, they explain the phase that victims are experiencing. Proper guidance, psychological assessment, and other strategies will give enough support for them to heal and overcome the trauma that they have experienced. The successful recipients of those seminar workshops give back by being part of the organization as volunteers and becoming an inspiration to others.

DISCUSSIONS

Study shows that the response of the victim towards the crime committed to them opens the factor that they may be responsible for their life's misfortune. They start to blame themselves for the behavior they have committed and leave

the perpetrator free of guilt. The victimization they are experiencing contributes to their guilt feeling due to lack of education and support from peers. Social media is now the tool for crimes like victim-blaming. Misogynist perpetrators hide behind dummy accounts to feel dominant over the others. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) being the policy-making body that sights women's rights in the Philippines may have disregarded the rampant issue of victim-blaming that has been happening on social media. Without policies or programs specifically tackling or addressing victim-blaming, there will be no person that shall be held liable. More victims will fear to speak up for themselves. Without the appropriate programs about victim-blaming it does not just reinforce the fallacies perpetrated and social expectations, but also the victim is prevented for the crimes committed against them as well as the ability for them to recover. GABRIELA is an active movement that fights for women's rights has no policies as well to help in raising awareness about the existence of the culture of victim-blaming. Through the years, a rapist has been off the hook cause of the victims' failure to fight them off.

GABRIELA aims to change a law and culture that have condemned women. The support system that the organization has made in seeking to achieve gender equality is being recognized by the government. The empowerment they give to the members and victims of victim-blaming is making a huge impact in helping them overcome traumatic experiences. Seminars, workshops, forums conducted by the two organizations in educating and guiding oppressed groups will help for their fast recovery. Despite the lack of policies and laws covering the issue of victim-blaming, the roles that the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and GABRIELA in eradicating victim-blaming on social media are to publicly educate the community to recognize and reduce victim-blaming in themselves and others. To make policies that shall hold perpetrators liable for their actions, and to empower and support the victims to regain their self-worth.

RECOMMENDATION

Upon understanding the role that the government agencies and organization plays in eradicating the rampant issue of victim-blaming on social media the researcher recommends that more policies should be submitted to

address the issue and for it to be taken seriously there must be corresponding penalties to the offenders. As a policy-making organization, the Philippine Commission in Women (PCW) and GABRIELA need to act upon the issue with proper dissemination of information and raising awareness about its impact on the victims and their perpetrators.

Positive environments like groups shall help victims feel safer and less guilty about what they are going through. People who handle them with vulnerability and sensitivity slowly forget the past experiences they had. and strengthen the bond that connects each other to be an inspiration to other victims.

Lastly, proper education on young adults, that in an early age they shall grow cautious with other people's emotions and learn to respect the right of others. Education, if not to eradicate at least lessen the rate of victim-blaming on social media and to use it as a platform in raising awareness. Further, the researcher is recommending that more studies regarding victim-blaming should be conducted which will help in making more policies and programs.

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