

“Lumen”: A Case Study on Domestic Violence

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Abstract - A case study was done on “Lumen” a wife who is a victim of domestic violence with the husband as the perpetrator. Utilizing narrative analysis, findings, as supported by the propositions of Sociological Functionalist and Feminist Theories, revealed that “Lumen” has basically low self-esteem which later on became lowered due to the abuses, their family has a patriarchal system in which the husband dominates in decision-making and control of the family. She demonstrated an adaptation to the abusive condition as an effect to the repeated abuses, and has distorted decision-making ability. The inclusion of her children in the physical abuses of her husband led her to seek help at WCFC-VSMMC.

Keywords - Case study, domestic violence

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a serious public health concern globally since an estimated 20-50% of women in any given country have experienced domestic violence. Domestic violence is a problem that has been considered a private concern among Filipino families. The magnitude of reported cases of wife battering have reached alarming proportion, and led government and non-government sectors to intervene particularly in the areas of legislation, policy and programs (Jimenez, 1996).

The Women's Crisis Center, which offers counseling and shelter to battered women, reports getting an average of 100 calls each from abused women (Philippine Daily Inquirer, Nov. 27, 1996). Furthermore, six out of ten women in Cebu are battered, revealed a survey conducted by a Cebu-based group, Lihok Pilipina. The group's "Bantay-Bata" project on domestic violence noted that only 8.2% of cases are reported because wife-beating is often viewed as a "family matter".

In a random survey conducted by the Siliman University Center for Women's Studies and Development in 1995, 441 cases of violence were reported by 88 women respondents and out of the total number of cases reported, 60% or 266 acts of abuse on women were committed by their husbands (Guerrero & Sobritchen, 1996).

Violence against women or domestic violence centered among women, as used interchangeably in this study, is indeed a serious problem. It violates and impairs the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedom. It limits women's opportunities to achieve legal, social, political and economic equality in society (Women's Legal Bureau, Inc., 1998).

Domestic violence refers to the physical, emotional, sexual, and/or economic abuses taking place within the family household. (Goodman & Fallon, 1995). Violence and abuse against women in intimate relationships refer to the systematic power and control that an abuser attempts to exercise over his wife or intimate partner through physical, emotional, social, sexual and/or economic abuse (WCC Information Guide).

For the purpose of this present study, domestic abuse between husband and wife is examined. Exploring the changes in the socio-

psychological behavior of “ Lumen” (a fictitious name, which represents the wife in a laundry soap commercial that symbolizes a wise and empowered wife) before and presumably after the incidence of domestic abuse, and the circumstances the led to the occurrence of such abuse. Furthermore, the authors’ interest for the study included the coping behaviors, the insights and the factors that empowered “Lumen” to seek help at Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center -Women and Child - Friendly Center (VSMMC-WCFC), Cebu City. Through this study, it is hoped that the subject’s reactions to the abusive situation will provide a basis in identifying behaviors of women who have potentials to become another victim.

FRAMEWORK

Violence is generally defined as an act committed with the deliberate or perceived intention of hurting another person (Guerrero et al, 1997). Gender assault is a specific form of violence committed against a person because of the person’s being female or male. Since women are more often the victims, the term gender violence is used interchangeably with the phrase “violence against women”. A woman in this situation may be abused by her husband, former husband, boyfriend, former boyfriend, live-in partner, former live-in partner or someone with whom a women has had a child .

The theoretical perspectives of Sociological-Functionalist and Feminist explained the root causes of domestic violence among women in the family. With reference to the former theory, McCue (1995) explains that cultures that approve the use of violence have the highest rate of domestic violence. Since culture accepts spanking as an appropriate method of child discipline and violence is portrayed on television and in their daily lives, culture as seen as encouraging such as abuse.

In the family structure, husbands and fathers use force or threaten to use force as a mechanism for perceiving roles and enforcing discipline among family members. The pattern of abuse is not only done to the wife but to the children as well.

Moreover, the Feminist Theoretical perspective explains gender violence by examining the entire fabric of society and show how

cultural values, social institutions and mechanisms all operate to legitimize and maintain male power over women (Guerrero et al., 1998). As the dominant class, men have had access to material and symbolic resources. While women have been devolved as secondary and inferior.

Furthermore, they use the concept of patriarchy to argue that domestic and family violence must not be seen in isolation and distinct from other forms of societal violence because the same ideologies and mechanisms operate to legitimize male exercise of power, and the male desire to maintain such power both inside as well as outside the home.

Domestic violence is indeed devastating to the women and the children who are its victims. There are physical, emotional, social and financial effects which some are slight, others could be severe and lasting for a long time or a lifetime. It often enable the woman victim to survive the abuse but they leave scars such as low self-esteem (McCue, 1995), and helplessness which result from the repeated abuse resulting to disturbed perception of reality (Selignan, 1975 in McCue, 1995). Walker (1999) further states that victims often develop the battered woman syndrome, a terrified human being's normal response to an abnormal and dangerous situation. A victim who suffers from this syndrome feels helpless and depressed with lack of energy, powerlessness and inability to perceive alternatives to her situation.

Most women victims may develop other coping strategies which are more dangerous, unhealthy and ineffective such as substance abuse, frequent job changes, promiscuity, eating disorders, prostitution, troubled relations with others, physical problem and illnesses, stress reactions and child abuse. Severe and/or repeated violence could also lead women victims to suicide attempts (Lamanna & Riedmann, 1999).

Despite the different reports on domestic violence, women still remain in the same violent relationships. A number of emotional, social and structural factors make it difficult for a woman to put an end to an abusive violent situation (Dutton, 1999). Some of them are presented below:

Emotional factors range from the woman's hope that the abusive partner will change, concern for children, love and emotional investment on the relationships and the lack of confidence to make decisions (Heise, et al., 1995).

Structural factor, on the other hand, include the lack of resources to sustain themselves economically lack of support system, lack of education, or awareness on the part of women about domestic violence as an acknowledged social problem, lack of legal protective measures and lack of employment and training opportunities (Riley, 1997).

Furthermore, social factors refer to the woman's patriarchal understanding that men should hold position power over women, the concern for family preservation and the belief that abuse and violence is a normal part of a relationship.

Tan (2001) states that while some abused women find it difficult to leave the abuser or violent relationship, others eventually leave when circumstances make it possible. However, abuse increases in severity and frequency over time and may culminate in homicide if the woman does not leave or the man does not receive treatment or if there are no intervention from the community.

Finally, domestic violence among women has been recognized as a relevant social problem that requires immediate solution. The culture plays a factor in the development of such behavior, both of the victim and the assailant, as presented in the sociological – functional and feminist perspectives. The effects of this type of violence among women is indeed multifaceted as this does not only affect the physical aspect of the woman victim but her entire personality and the possible spread of such effects to other members of the family specially the children. Certain factors present the reason why women continue to live such life and such factors are not only personally-rooted but has social emphasis as well.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary method of investigation for this study was case study. Case study design focuses on the data analysis of one phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in depth regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents for a study and provides a detailed description and analysis of processes of themes voiced by participants in a particular situation (Macmillan & Schumacker, 1986). The quintessential characteristic of case studies is their holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1990).

The only participant in this study was “Lumen”, a 36 – year old mother of two children living in Banawa, Cebu City. She sought assistance at VSMMC- WCFC due to the abuses of her husband to her children and to herself. She was chosen since she was a client who qualified the characteristics of the respondents of this study which are: that she should be married, has experienced abuses in any form and that the abuse must be inflicted by the husband and has sought assistance from an institution such as VSMMC.

Data collection was done through a formal interview using a semi-structured interview schedule within the center’s counseling room together with the center’s social worker, informal interview during the time that “Lumen” stayed at the center the entire day and observation which was done by two researchers. The data obtained in both formal and informal interviews were validated by the social worker who also had her separate interview with “Lumen”. Field notes during observation included the interaction between “Lumen” and her children non-verbal cues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings focused on the experiences of Lumen and how she perceives them with reference to the following themes: a) her socio-psychological behavior before the incidence of abuse; b) the circumstances that caused the occurrence of abuse; c) the type of family structure and relationship; d) her coping behaviors; e) effects of abuse to her; f) reasons for continuing to live with an abusive husband; g) what lead her to seek help in women’s center.

Social-psychological behavior before the abuse. The Feminist Theory points out the cultural values that women have secondary roles in the family and subjects themselves to the control of the male partner (Guerero et al., 1998). Lumen is the typical “good wife” character who always follow the commands of her husband and is a voiceless member of the family. This was presented in the following statements during the interview:

“Sa bag-o pa ming minyo naa ra ko primi sa balay, magsilbe niya sa iya pagkaon kay Grade 3 ra man ako naabot unya wala sad ko kahibalo

naa ba ko matrabahoan. Linaw ra amo pamuyo kay mohilom man lang ko kon masuko siya". (When we were newly married, I always stay at home, serving him in his meals because I only finished Grade 3 and I do not know if there are any jobs available for me. We were living peacefully because I just kept quiet every time he gets angry with me.)

From her testimony, it can be deduced that Lumen has basically a low sense of self-esteem and considers her husband's words are the only words that should be heard. Stuart and Sundeen (1995) support that in almost all forms of family violence the abuser has some form of power or control over the victim. It was presented at the beginning of their marriage that she only has a secondary role, not a complimentary role, to that of her husband. Furthermore, Lumen constantly focus on the fact that she has no work at that time and she cried when she told the researcher that she has a low educational attainment having finished only up to Grade 3. Moreover, she is a migrant from Leyte who doesn't have any close relatives to cling to. The economic, educational and family support system are factors that contribute to the inferiority that wives feel toward their husbands (Nguyen, 2004).

Circumstances that caused the occurrence of abuse. In most incidence of physical abuse (pulling her hair, punching her face, sides and back, etc.) done by Lumen's husband to her, the common cause is his jealousy that Lumen has another man, but most of the time does not identify any particular man. She recalled that her husband comes home from work and starts nagging her because of his unfounded suspicions. Sometimes, he will interview the older child whether there was a man who came to their house while he was away but seems frustrated when his suspicion will not be validated by the child. Stuart and Sundeen (1995) explain that the common reasons of violence in the home are extreme jealousy and controlling behavior of the spouse. Other times, her husband will just go home in a foul mood and that will start the verbal abuse which is sometimes interspersed with physical abuses. The recent abuse was narrated by Lumen in the following statements:

"Karong bag-o lang gatrabaho ko isip katabang pang-adlaw. Ang ako amo, adtong atol Sinulog, naghatag namo ug pagkaon unya daghan man ang sud-an nananghid ko sa ako bana kung pwede ba hatagan ang amo silingan nga suod nako. Misugot man siya basta

dili ko magdugay kay basin momata ang bata unya mohilak, maong niadto ko sa pikas balay para ihatod and pagkaon, unya kay misyagit man lang siya ug kalit kay dugay daw kaayo ko nga mga ten minutes ra man ko nawagtang. Pag-abot nako sa balay gikasab-an na ko niya unya gidapatan ko. Mao diay nasuko siya kay nagselos siya sa bana sa among silingan.” (Just recently, I had a work as a daytime household help. My boss, during the Sinulog, gave us food, then since the food was more than we need, I asked permission from my husband if it's okay if I will give some to my close neighbor. He approved with the instruction that she will not stay long because the baby might wake up and cry, so I went to the other house to bring the food, then he shouted for me because I was gone too long when in fact I was only gone for about 10 minutes. When I went back he scolded me and hit me. His reason for doing that was because he was jealous of our neighbor's husband.)

Such behavior of the husband according to her was nothing new. She believes that her husband by nature is a jealous person. It is remarkable to note that Lumen still has to ask permission from her husband for petty things such as the giving of food to their neighbor despite the fact that she was the one who brought the food home and she contributes to the earning of the family. The shouting of the husband to the wife because the child cried implies that the husband does not take part in the care of their child. The circumstance that triggered the abuse was unfounded yet the husband still inflicted pain on his wife. Such behavior is an exercise of male power and the male desire to maintain such power both inside and outside the home. Power issues appear to be a central factor with wife abuse. Although abusers will justify the use of violence for trivial events such as not having a meal ready or not keeping the house tidy, violence often is related to the husband's need for total domination for his wife (McCue, 1995; Stuart & Sundeen, 1995).

Type of family structure and relationship. In the family structure, husbands and fathers use force or threaten to use force as a mechanism of perceiving roles and enforcing discipline among family members (WCC Information Guide).

When asked who has the authority and the decision-maker at home, Lumen directly answered without hesitation and quickly,

“akong bana” (my husband). She describes her relationship with her husband as, “maayo among relasyon kung dili siya sapoton”. (Our relationship is good if he is not in a bad mood). She further describes her relationship with her husband as good since, “magpauyon-uyon ra man ko niya.” (I just go with his flow). She explained the type of communication that they have with her husband as, “depende sa iya mood, usahay magsige lang siya kasuko, pero talagsa ra gyud nga mag-istorya mi ug bahin sa kaugmaon sa amo mga anak ug ubang mga importanteng butang.” (depends on his mood, most of the times he is angry and seldom do we talk about our children’s future and other important matters).

Lumen’s responses show the repeated theme of referring everything to her husband. The family is husband-oriented and is very patriarchal in its authority and decision-making. It is obviously reflected on her responses that the family is surviving at the mercy of her husband’s decision and mood. There is also a one-way communication between them and the communication that they have is not healthy. Shives (1990) states that poor communication skills may result in the use of verbal or physical abuse.

The coping behavior. This aspect of the interview was asked in terms of how Lumen reacts every after the abuse in any form is done. After the first incident of physical abuse, she fled to their hometown in Leyte but after a while, her husband fetched her, asked forgiveness for his offense and promised not to hurt her again. She believed what he promised, thus came back to Cebu. Later on, she narrated that every time these incidents happen, “maghilom lang ko, magbantay gyud ko nga dili siya masuko ug maayo, unya ako lang gihapon siyang silbihan inig katapos kay mahilom ra man sad siya, unya linaw na sad sa balay.” (I just keep quiet, careful not to irritate him further, I still serve him because after that he will be calm and quiet and they will have peace at home).

Domestic violence is devastating for women who are its victims. The first time this happens, the initial reaction is usually to flee from the painful experience but since a tolerant culture considers it as part of the marital experiences, abused wives usually goes back to the family (Nguyen, 2004). Johnson validated that women who leave their homes at the time of acute abuse return home later again and again.

Furthermore, Lumen's reaction is typical of a wife raised in an Asian culture that upholds the husband as having the authority and the right to inflict abuses on her. Keeping quiet after being abused shows a behavior of a woman who has been immuned to the abuses she has received for quite a time. She believes that if she'll do it, this will please her husband and stops the abuses only to be repeated in the future (Lamanna & Riedmann, 1999). She generally does not take assertive action to stop the abuse because she believes her husband will change. Lumen's behavior reflected a sense of helplessness, powerlessness and an inability to perceive alternatives to her situation. She was reduced to a voiceless creature who doesn't seem to know how to flee from such situation and more importantly, doesn't see the need to flee.

But Lumen also developed positive coping behavior when she said, "mosulti ko sa akong problema sa akong suod nga amiga" (I confide my problems to my close friend). This attitude helps to lessen the burden that the victim is experiencing and provides an outlet to her emotional turmoil, although she didn't fully understand the gravity of the situation.

Effects of abuses. Lumen was asked the effects of the abuses to her and she responded:

"Sa primero, nasuko gyud ko niya, pero sa nadugay na nakat-on ra ko pagpasensya sa iyang binuhatan. Mohilom ra man ko aron di siya masuko maayo. Ang iyang pagkulata nako dili man na permanente... maulian ra man ko, mayo ra man ko. Wala man ko'y nakita nga dautan nga epekto sa iyang pagpanagmal nako sa una, hangtod sa diha'y usa ka hitabo." (At first, I hated him, but later on I learned to forgive his acts. I just kept silent to avoid escalating his anger to me. The abuse is temporary and shortlived and I can be healed of its effects. I can't see any harmful effects of the abuses to me, not until one incident happened).

An alarming response noted from Lumen is her inability to see the effects of the abuses to her. She seems to have accepted all abuses inflicted on her as part of a normal life situation. This reaction demonstrates that these abuses are fine for her which she confirmed. A behavior which describes a battered syndrome in which the individual doesn't perceived any sense of alternatives or a disturbed perception of the real condition (McCue, 1995). Her behavior can also be attributed to

the common characteristic of an abused wife who becomes emotionally dependent, rigidly adheres to patriarchal sex roles, low esteem and emotionally insecure (Johnson).

Lumen's acceptance of the abuses of his husband as evidenced by her keeping silent to stop the abuses is a common behavior of an abused wife who takes responsibility for the batterer's actions (Frisch & Frisch, 2002). This situation projects a one-sided way of stopping the violence when a violence cannot take place without the victim and the perpetrator. This reaction of the victim further demonstrates the lowered self-esteem and her subscription to the traditional feminine sex role.

When Lumen was asked what she is planning now , with hesitation she stated, "Mouli siguro ko ug Leyte, di na mi mobalik sa amo".(I might go home to Leyte, we'll not return home). This response was punctuated with a longer silence as observed from her. Later that day, she asked permission from the center that they will leave already, when asked where she is going, she answered, "mouli na mi sa amo diha sa Banawa" (We will go home to Banawa). There is a contradiction between what she verbalized in the interview and her actions. This behavior shows indecisiveness on the part of Lumen. According to Stuart & Sundeen (1995) several studies have found that battered women have trouble with problem solving. Undoubtedly, they were frequently and severely beaten and controlled that their ability to problem solve is severely and chronically affected.

Reasons for continuing to live with abusive husband. Despite the increasing reports of domestic violence, women victims still cling to the relationship with the husband. There are many factors to consider and some of these are indeed manifested by Lumen:

"Nagtuo man ko nga magbalikbalik ra ni, dapatan ko, pagkahuman mangayo siya ug pasaylo tapos wala na, linaw na sad mi taud-taud na sad mobalik." (I believe that this is just a cycle, he will hit me then he asks forgiveness, then we will be at peace again, until the next incident). This reason is attributed to social factor that women have patriarchal understanding that violence is a normal part of the relationship and that men hold power and they can just manipulate the family whenever they need it (Riley, 1997). Although Lumen had a history of leaving their home but later on returned because her

husband promised not to hurt her again. Johnson (1990) reported that it usually takes a number of separations, some as many as 20 times, before leaving the abusive situation permanently. According to Stuart & Sundeen (1995) such is not a sign of weakness but a normal pattern that is influenced by the quality of social support and assistance to the woman and the batterer's behavior rather the women's psychological factors.

"Naglaum man sad ko nga mausab ra gihapon siya bisan wala ko'y buhaton, wala ko kahibalo kanus-a ug unsaon basta mausab ra gyud siya." (I am hoping that he will change, even if I won't do anything, I don't know when or how but he will change). This is the emotional factor that influences women's decision to cling to the relationship (Dutton, 1999). A vicious belief that only time can answer until the victim will suffer severe abuses that will leave her nothing for herself.

Seligman's Theory of Learned Helplessness (Frisch & Frisch, 2002) further explained that women stay in abusive relationships because they learn to become helpless as a result of being abused, they become anxious, depressed and dependent on the abuser and believe that they are unable to control or prevent their abuser. Their perception of helplessness becomes a reality.

Factors that lead to seek help. After the many years of being in the abusive relationship, Lumen narrated her supposedly awakening experience:

"Okey ra man nako nga ako lay pasakitan, pero sa dihang giapil na niya ang akong usa ka anak ug dagmal, gigunitan niya ang liug sa bata unya gihanger niya and bata, nakahukom na gyud ko nga isumbong nako siya. Dili na pwede kay giapil na niya akong anak. (It was fine with me that I was hurt, but when he included my child, he held the child's neck with a hand and lifted her like the child is hanged, I decided to come here. It cannot be, he has already included my child).

Even before the recent physical abuse that one of her children experienced, they were already subjected to verbal abuses when her husband shouted at her children as she narrated, "Gisiyagitan niya ako mga anak nga pamatyon daw niya unya gipakitaan pa mi ug kutsilyo" (He shouted at my children and told them he will kill them at the same time showing a knife to them).It took another member of the family to be abused also before she realized the inappropriateness

of his husband's behavior to her children but her statement shows that she is hardly convinced or she is not sure whether her husband's behavior towards her is also inappropriate. Gilligan, as cited by Stuart and Sundeen (1995), observed that women usually make moral decisions by weighing the consequences to others more heavily than consequences to themselves. Thus, concern for her children is a major issue in the woman's decision making. In the social sciences' point of view, McCue (1995) explains that a husband who abuses his wife has a greater tendency to abuse the children since the abusive behavior became a part of the family system. Lumen has found her strength in her children, they have become her source of power and she can't afford to see them hurt again.

Furthermore, support from peers play a major factor in her awakening. She recalled that her close friends advised her to report the matter to the police and she was referred to VSMMC-WCFC where she stayed there overnight with her children. While at the center and during the formal interview, she emphasized on the abuse of her husband to his daughter not mentioning the abuse she received from her husband until further interview was done. She did not even mention to the social worker her abusive experience until she was told by the researcher to inform the social worker about her case. This implies that up to the time she sought consultation, she doesn't see the need for consultation for herself.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, a woman victim's behavior has a pattern before and after the incidents of abuse. There is a sense of low self-esteem which was later reinforced by the abuses she experienced, defiance at the first instance of abuse which later on turned into helplessness and adaptation to the abuses acquired. Furthermore, cultural factors contribute to the development of abuse in the family and the reactions of a woman towards an abusive relationship. Moreover, psychological factors, such as the low self-esteem, lack of assertiveness of a woman in a relationship can both be the cause or the effect of the abuse. Finally, abuses can lead to the distortion of the decision-making abilities of a woman victim and the possibilities of seeking for crisis

intervention is sometimes vague unless other members of the family have become victims of violence themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A lot of factors may contribute to the occurrence of domestic violence to either of the spouses or to the children. It is recommended that further studies must be done on the experiences of other women either single or married, and the children in an abusive family. It is further recommended that in-depth study on the profile and experiences of the husband or the perpetrator's background must be studied. Other propositions of Family Systems Theory should be further used as basis for further studies. Crisis Centers should cater services not only to the victim but also to the perpetrators because there could be a need to provide counseling to these victims in as much as they themselves could be victims of violence before in their family.

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