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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BEYOND FEAR & SILENCE: UNVEILING THE REASONS WHY VICTIMS DON'T PURSUE IN FILING VAWC CASES

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ABSTRACT

La phénoménologie VAWC or the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, is a law passed to protect women and children from violence also known as RA 9262, the law is in keeping with the provisions on human rights enshrined in the Philippine Constitution. Violence against women and children (VAWC) appears as one of the country's pervasive social problems. However, a concerning reality exists where many VAWC cases remain unreported and unprosecuted. This raises crucial questions: Why do victims choose not to pursue charges against their abusers, and what factors contribute to this decision?. This study determined the Prevailing Reasons Why Most Victims of VAWC Will Not Pursue in Filing Cases. Descriptive type of research was utilized; the data were gathered through survey-made questionnaire as the main instrument in data gathering for the respondents from Lapu-Lapu City. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents were aged 37-40 years old and were from Barangay VAWC and WCPD investigators, were married, and the educational attainment mostly is bachelor's degree. A convenience sampling technique was used when the respondents were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The main instrument used had undergone content validation through the panel of experts to ascertain their functionality and reliability. Data Analysis was done using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. The findings revealed that physical, emotional, financial, and social aspects serve as a way for a researcher in determining the most common reasons why most victims will not pursue filing cases. Based on the results, in financial aspects, most of the victims will not pursue filing a case as they did not have enough money to file.

INTRODUCTION

Violence affects millions of women and children around the world. Those living in poverty are some of the most vulnerable to a range of everyday forms of violence—including sexual violence and domestic violence. Nearly 736 million women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Worldwide, up to 50% of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16 years old. Nearly 1 in 5 girls is sexually abused at least once in her life (International Justice Mission, 2022). As stated in the report of United Nations (2023), a woman's right to live free from violence is upheld by international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. For more than 10 years, UN Women's global initiative, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, has worked to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces, and since 2017 we have also been a key

member of the EUR 500 million Spotlight Initiative that deploys targeted, large-scale investments in ending violence in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific. It is this light that the Philippine Constitution's human rights enshrined are upheld by the VAWC Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, commonly known as RA 9262, which was created to protect women and children from violence. Republic Act No. 9262, also known as the "Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004," is a landmark legislation enacted in the Philippines to address the pervasive issue of violence against women and children within familial or intimate partner relationships. The law aims to protect the rights and welfare of women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Thus, Republic Act No. 9262 seeks to combat violence against women and children by addressing its root causes, ensuring protection and assistance for victims, and holding offenders accountable for their actions (Attorney.org, 2023). This study sought to determine the reasons why most victims will not pursue filing VAWC cases. The following factors make it challenging for women to report violence and follow legal actions: fear for their safety and the safety of their children; fear of their children being taken away by their husband; the extended

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family pressure, emotional ties to and loyalty to the abuser, low self-esteem and self-blame, religious principles, or social pressure economic dependency on the abuser; and lack of information on their legal rights. This study was anchored by Social Exchange Theory and supported by two theories the Resource Theory, and Feminist Theory. All of these theories consider confirming and explain violence against women and its emotional and psychological impacts on its victim. Social Exchange Theory theorizes that when engaging in social interactions, people seek the most return with the least amount of work, according to Kreager et al. (2013), violence utilized when taking control is worth the effort and possible legal consequences when it comes to violence against women (Resko, 2010). Despite the existence of laws prohibiting abuse, it does not always stop the abuse. Numerous factors contribute to this when reporting abuse women experience revictimization and are blamed for putting themselves in that scenario (Vidales, 2012). In addition to that, further harming the victim by holding her responsible for the violent actions of another person, this attempt to legitimize gender-based violence also motivates the perpetrator to commit more violent acts because society is condoning the violence. The effort of violence costs nothing but provides the perpetrator dominance in the absence of cultural retaliation against the acts of violence. Additionally, legal sanctions for violence are not always essential. Countless judges will reduce the perpetrator's sentence if the victim stands her ground (Sage Publications, 2012). Furthermore, according to Kenny et al. (2019), Resource Theory asserts that the use of force or the threat of using force is the basis of all social relationships. According to this theory, the more resources a person has, the greater the threat of force, but the less likely it is that violence or intimidation will be employed in that relationship (Walters, Basile, & Hall, 2013). It just means that no physical violence will be utilized; threats will still be used to retain control. Instead, the violence a woman can encounter in this circumstance is emotional violence rather than physical violence. However, when someone is short on resources, their only option for maintaining control over the relationship is by force or violence (Walters, Basile, & Hall, 2013).

On the other hand, Feminist theory by Healey et al (1998), has been instrumental in raising the public consciousness about sex role conditioning and how much can lead to belief systems that justify sexism, male privilege, and gender socialization. Acts of domestic abuse involve the male partner imposing forced subservience to the female partner will serve as a reflection of society's patriarchal structure because of the transfer of these belief systems (ibid.) These views on domestic abuse are in line with various feminist schools of thought, especially radical feminism, which contend that the use of violence keeps women subjugated in the home and society as a whole. The perpetrator is typically male, and the victim is typically female, which highlights two fundamental parallels in crimes including sexual assault, stalking, marital rape, and domestic abuse. All these acts also helped to abuse and restrict women's sexual and social freedom to live equally within and outside the family. Since, these crimes target women and are most often committed by males, it is easy to see the connection to feminist theory.

METHODS

To know the prevailing reasons behind why most victims won't pursue in filing VAWC cases, the researcher used the

descriptive survey method to collect descriptive data from the research. Survey methodology studies simply, the survey approach, is the sampling of quantities from a population and tactics including questionnaire construction and ways to increase the number and precision of survey responses. This study was conducted in Lapu Lapu City. It is a first-class highly urbanized city in the province of Cebu in the Philippines. Formerly, known as the Municipality of Opon, The City of Lapu-Lapu named after the first Filipino fighter who successfully defeated the Spanish invaders in the Battle of Mactan, which led to the death of the Spanish Leader, Magellan. The city occupies most of Mactan Island, located a few kilometers off the coast of Cebu Island, as well as a small number of smaller islands all occupied by the city. The city has a total lands area of 58.10 km² (22.43 sq mi) occupied by a total population of 495,666 residents as of 2022 (Census). Furthermore, Lapu-Lapu has 30 barangays, Agus, Babag, Basak, Gun-ob, Calawisan, and many more. Lapu-Lapu Police Station 2 is located at Proper Mactan St, Lapu-Lapu City which is near at Mactan Liberty Shrine. The Mactan, Punta Engaño, Pajac, and Maribago are the names of barangay under of this specific stations.

Lapu-Lapu Police Station 3, located at Hoopsdome Brgy Gun-Ob, Lapu-Lapu City. There are seven barangays under this, namely barangay Pajo, Poblacion, Looc, Gun-ob, Canjulao, Babag and Calawisan. There are 3 filed VAWC cases in the year 2021, mostly on physical violence, psychological abuse, and financial abuse. Lapu-Lapu Police Station 4 is located at Bayswater Subdivision Clubhouse, Brgy Marigondon, Lapu-Lapu City, there are four barangays under this station which are the barangay of Basak, Marigondon, Agus and Subabasbas. The hotline numbers of this station are 94-3055, 0998-598-6316. The estimated population of barangay Basak is 71,990, at Marigondon is 25,584. At Agus is 19,525 and at barangay Suba is 7,961. Lapu-Lapu Police Station 5 is located at Barangay Pusok, Lapu-Lapu City. The barangay of Pusok, Ibo, Buaya, and Bankal are under this station. The estimated population of Barangay Pusok as of March 31, 2022, is 32,791, at Ibo is 8,318, Buaya is 19,078 and lastly at barangay Bankal is 22,863. The respondents of the study are the VAWC Victims, Barangay VAWC, and the WCPD Investigators as the women's presently residing at Lapu- Lapu City. Selected 19 barangays coming from the four (4) station which are the station 2, 3, 4 and 5 since the mentioned stations above have the most VAWC cases. The researcher was able to survey thirty VAWC victims and two WCPD Investigators in every station with a total of 57 respondents for this study. The researchers study involved a vulnerable population such as women who are victims of violence. No minor participants were involved in this research because the respondents must be a woman of 18 years or older and who are victims of domestic violence or abuse who filed the case themselves.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

Classification	N	Percent
VAWC Victims	30	53%
Barangay VAWC	19	33%
WCPD Investigator	8	14%
Total	57	100%

Distribution of Respondents: This Table represents the number of respondents based on their classifications using a non-probability sampling method used in data gathering. Specifically, the convenience sampling technique in selecting the respondents to be conducted by the study.

A convenience sampling method collects data from those who are readily available to respond or their willingness to respond to the research, and it simply includes the respondents who were the most accessible during the research period. The instrument utilized in conducting the research was a researcher-made questionnaire to determine the reasons why the victims will not pursue filing a VAWC case. It gathers data faster than any method and it is the most convenient among all other instruments. The questionnaire is composed of two major sections. Part I asked about the profile of the respondents in terms of their age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, classifications of respondents, and length of service. Part II dealt with open-ended questions in order to determine the respondent's reasons why they do not pursue in filing a case based on physical, emotional, financial, and social aspects. The questions used a rating scale questionnaire where the researchers used the 4 points Likert scale to get honest information from the participants. It requires the participants to check on the four-point scale, which consists of the responses: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The following statistical methods were applied to respond the statement of the problem: Simple percentage. computation helps to determine the summary and analysis of the profile of the respondents, and weighted mean in computations which helped determine the reasons why most victims will not pursue in filing VAWC cases in terms of physical, emotional, financial, and social aspects. Anova was also used to determine if there is significant difference between the group of respondents. The responses to the questionnaires were tallied, and to interpret the data accurately and effectively, the statistical analyses that the researchers used in this research to facilitate the analysis and interpretation are frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. Frequency and Percentages were used to summarize and analyze the respondent's profile. Weighted mean involves multiplying each data point in a set by the value specified by some attributed of whatever contributed to the data point. The weighted mean was used to calculate the common reasons why most victims will not pursue filing VAWC cases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data gathered from the VAWC victims, Barangay VAWC and WCPD Investigator respondents at Lapu-Lapu City. The data are presented in a tabular form with corresponding analysis and interpretation with their implications. The following table showed the data about the assessment of the profile of the respondents, such as their age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, classification of respondents, and length of service.

Profile of the Respondents: This table also provides insightful data regarding the age distribution of VAWC (Violence against Women and Children) victims, Barangay VAWC, and Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) respondents. The information sheds light on the age-related patterns and implications for understanding the dynamics of VAWC cases. Tailoring interventions and support services to the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals in this age group is critical. This may involve focusing on relationship, counseling, empowerment programs, financial independence initiatives, and legal education to help them understand their rights and options. Public awareness campaigns and educational programs aimed at preventing VAWC should target this age group specifically.

Providing information about healthy relationships, consent, conflict resolution, and recognizing signs of abuse can help individuals in their early thirties to mid-thirties make informed decisions and seek assistance if needed (National Library of Science, 2017). The following tables presented below are the prevailing reasons encountered by the group of respondents by the time they filed VAWC complaints but did not pursue in terms of physical, emotional, financial, and social aspects, which was vital for the researcher in order to attain these insightful data. Table 3 revealed that the highest mean is 3.60, which the respondents find that the victim may have bruising and or scarring on her body parts. This analysis implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that they find victims may have bruising and or scarring on their body parts the reason why they did not pursue filing the case. The presence of physical injuries can be evidence in a VAWC case. Thus, the pain and discomfort experienced by victims may deter them from pursuing legal action. It is essential to have a holistic approach to address the complex issue of VAWC, considering both the physical aspect. Collaborative efforts involving legal, healthcare, social, and advocacy sectors are vital to create an environment where victims feel supported and empowered to take the necessary steps to seek justice (NCJRS, 2019).

Table 4 showed that the highest mean is 3.68, which the respondents find that the abuser threatened the victim and the victim felt worried that her family would be destroyed. This analysis implies that the majority of the respondents strongly agree that the reasons why they did not pursue filing the case are that they find that the abuser threatened the victim and the victim felt worried that her family would be harmed as well. Victims of violence against women and children (VAWC) often face complex emotional and psychological challenges that can deter them from filing a case against their abuser. The decision to not report such cases is deeply rooted in a combination of fear, threats, and concerns about the stability and well-being of their family unit.

Financial Aspects: As shown in table 5, the highest mean is 3.72, which the respondents find that the victims do not have enough money to file the case. The data implies that victims who are financially dependent on their abusers may feel trapped and unable to escape the abusive situation. Fear of losing financial support, housing, or access to basic necessities can be a powerful deterrent from reporting the abuse and seeking legal assistance (NCADV 2022).

Social Aspects: As shown in table 6, the highest mean is 3.63, which the respondents find that the victim isolates herself from her family and finds excessive social involvement to avoid the feeling of pity and discrimination. National Library of Medicine (2013) reported that societal norms and cultural expectations can play a significant role in influencing a victim's decision to remain silent. Some societies stigmatize individuals who expose family issues, especially domestic abuse, which can lead victims to suppress their pain and suffering to avoid being judged, ostracized, or isolated by their community. Victims of VAWC often experience isolation, either through physical seclusion or emotional detachment from support networks. This isolation can make it difficult for them to reach out for help, share their experiences, or gather the courage to take legal action (National Library of Medicine, 2013).

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

Variables	VAWC VICTIMS		BRGY VAWC		WCPD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Age21-25	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
26-30	10	18%	0	0%	0	0%
31-36	11	19%	5	9%	2	4%
37 and above	9	16%	14	25%	6	11%
Gender						
Female	30	53%	19	33%	8	14%
Marital Status						
Single	16	28%	4	7%	1	2%
Married	13	23%	14	25%	7	12%
Annulled	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%
Educational Attainment						
Elementary Level	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
High School Level	3	5%	0	0%	0	0%
College Level	10	18%	5	9%	0	0%
High School Graduate	11	19%	0	0%	0	0%
SHS Graduate	3	5%	0	0%	0	0%
Bachelor's Degree	2	4%	12	21%	8	14%
Vocational Degree	0	0%	2	4%	0	0%
Length of Service						
1-4 years	0	0%	6	11%	0	0%
5-9 years	0	0%	8	14%	3	5%
10-14 years	0	0%	3	5%	5	9%
15-19 years	0	0%	2	4%	0	0%

Table 3. Physical Aspects

	VAWC Victims	Brgy. VAWC	WCPD	MEAN	Interpretation
The victim may have somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach aches.	3.40	3.26	3.13	3.32	Strongly Agree
The victim may have bruising and or scarring on her body parts.	3.60	3.68	3.38	3.60	Strongly Agree
The abuser locked in the victim to avoid from escaping.	3.77	3.05	3.13	3.44	Strongly Agree
The abuser attempts to cause physical harm to the woman or her child.	3.57	3.16	3.13	3.37	Strongly Agree
The abuser places the woman or child in fear of imminent physical harm.	3.83	3.26	.00	3.53	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.63	3.28	3.15	3.45	Strongly Agree

Table 4. Emotional Aspects

	VAWC VICTIMS	BRGY VAWC	WCPD	MEAN	INTERPRETATION
The abuser threatened the victim.	3.80	3.47	3.75	3.68	Strongly Agree
The victim is afraid that her partner will go to jail.	3.53	3.63	3.13	3.51	Strongly Agree
The victim felt worried that her family would be destroyed.	3.73	3.68	3.50	3.68	Strongly Agree
The victim is nervous that the abuser will not tell the truth.	3.63	3.32	3.25	3.47	Strongly Agree
The victim is no longer willing to spend either time or effort in prosecuting the abuser.	3.70	3.63	3.13	3.60	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.68	3.55	3.35	3.59	Strongly Agree

Table 5. Financial Aspects

	VAWC VICTIMS	BRGY VAWC	WCPD	MEAN	INTERPRETATION
The victim does not have enough money to file the case.	3.80	3.63	3.63	3.72	Strongly Agree
The abuser offered to pay the victim to withdraw the case.	3.97	3.47	3.00	3.67	Strongly Agree
The abuser offered to pay the victim to withdraw the case.	3.77	3.63	3.50	3.68	Strongly Agree
The victim experienced financial stress in dealing with filing the case.	3.63	3.53	3.13	3.51	Strongly Agree
The victim finds pursuing the case is financially burdensome.	3.67	3.53	3.25	3.56	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Mean	3.77	3.56	3.30	3.63	Strongly Agree

Summarized Data on the Common Reasons Encountered by the Group of Respondents during the Process of Filing VAWC Complaints: This section shows the data of the assessment of the significant difference between the ratings by the different group of respondents. The relationship between these variables is vital in our findings and presented.

Significant difference between VAWC Victims Ratings: This analysis implies that there is a significant difference between the VAWC victims ratings with having the highest average rating of 3.62 which means they strongly agree on the mentioned common reasons why most victims will not pursue filing vawc cases since they are victims of VAWC.

Significant difference between Brgy VAWC ratings: This analysis implies that there is a significant difference between the Brgy VAWC ratings which means they agree on the mentioned common reasons why most victims will not pursue filing VAWC cases since they just encountered or handles a vawc case but not one of the victims of abuse.

Significant difference between WCPD ratings: This analysis implies that there is a significant difference between the WCPD ratings which means they agree on the mentioned common reasons why most victims will not pursue filing VAWC cases since they handled VAWC cases and

Table 6. Social Aspects

	VAWC VICTIMS	BRGY VAWC	WCPD	MEAN	INTERPRETATION
The victim felt ashamed to file a case due to her experiences with the abuse.	3.80	3.26	2.88	3.49	Strongly Agree
The victim finds that pursuing to file a case can lower their social status.	3.36	3.47	3.13	3.47	Strongly Agree
The victim isolates herself from her family and friends or excessive social involvement to avoid the feeling of pity and discrimination.	3.83	3.37	3.50	3.63	Strongly Agree
The victim is aware that society is most likely to blame the victim, especially in domestic violence cases.	3.57	3.11	3.13	3.35	Strongly Agree
The victims find that the WCPD in charge is not trained enough to provide comprehensive services in responding to their needs holistically and empathetically.	3.17	2.26	1.00	2.04	Disagree
Aggregate Mean	3.60	3.07	2.73	3.20	Agree

Table 7. Summarized Data on the Common Reasons Encountered by the Group of Respondents during the Process of Filing VAWC Complaints

Variables	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
A. Physical Aspects	3.45	Strongly Agree
B. Emotional Aspects	3.59	Strongly Agree
C. Financial Aspects	3.63	Strongly Agree
D. Social Aspects	3.20	Agree

Table 8. Significant difference between VAWC Victims Ratings

ANOVA RESULT		P-Value		Interpretation
Difference between the Rating of the different groups of respondents		0.000141968		Significant
Anova: Single Factor				
Summary				
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
VAWC Victims	30	108.6	3.62	0.040793103
BRGY VAWC	19	63.95	3.365789474	0.144459064
WCPD	8	25	3.125	0.133571429

encountered some of the victims’ reasons for not pursuing to file the case.

CONCLUSION

Violence against women and children has negative effects on society at all levels and is a serious public health concern. Everyone is at risk from violence, but women and children are highly vulnerable because they commonly have fewer rights or less protection. The VAWC victims did not pursue in filing cases in some aspects including physical, emotional, financial, and social. The variables help the researchers to understand or determined on common reasons why most victims did not pursue in filing a case. Based on the findings of this study, in relation to physical aspect the respondents finds that the victim may have bruising and or scarring on her body parts the reason why they did not pursue in filing a case. However, in emotional aspects the victims cannot file a case because of the abuser threatened them. In relation to financial aspects the respondents strongly agree that the victims do not have enough money while in social aspects the victims isolate herself from her family and friends or excessive social involvement to avoid the feeling of pity and discrimination their reasons why they did not pursue in filing a case. Therefore, all the variables used in this study help the researcher to determine the prevailing reasons why most victims will not pursue in filing VAWC cases. In line with this, the researcher recommends the proposed action plan as a movement to support the VAWC victims to pursue in filing the case. Addressing the reasons why most victims do not pursue filing Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) cases is crucial for ensuring justice and support for survivors.

Developing an action plan to address this issue involves a multi-faceted approach that focuses on awareness, legal support, victim empowerment, and community involvement. Here is the following proposed action plan; Public Awareness and Education, Strengthening Legal Support, Enhancing Victim Support Services, Empowerment Programs, Community Involvement and Support, Data Collection and Research, Government Policies and Legislation, Partnerships and Collaboration. Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be incorporated into this action plan to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and adapt strategies to effectively address the reasons preventing victims from pursuing VAWC cases.

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