

Fears, Aspirations, and Hopes: A Springboard of Life for Domestically Abused Children

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ABSTRACT

The youth are the hope of the native land. Unfortunately, children in homes where there is domestic violence are more likely to be abused or neglected. This is one of the most prevalent and rampant quandaries in the society which requires critical attention of a victim. Thus, a study was conducted to determine the demographic profile, forge fears, aspirations and hopes as voices of domestically abused children and produce programs to possibly heal the victims. Guided by the qualitative research design and interpretative sociology orientation, the phenomenological approach was primarily used in the study. Information was generated by the researchers through in-depth interview, key informant interview, and focus group discussion utilizing self-made questionnaire. The

findings revealed that 90 percent of informants were minor age, all female victims and suffered domestic abuse. The results on the fears, aspirations, and hopes as springboard of their existence showed positive indication with the victims to fulfill their desires. However, government and other support groups were hunted. Hence, the study concludes that aspirations and hopes were constant goal of the victims and their fears were poignant blueprint to their opening or preference of destiny. Further, this study identified various programs needed by the victims to completely attain their aspirations of life.

Keywords - Social Sciences, domestic abuse, fears, aspirations, hopes, qualitative design, phenomenological approach, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The adage says that “home sweet home” but nowadays home can never be sweet. Internationally, researchers estimate that each year between 3.3 million and 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence. Further, between 50 percent and 75 percent of children living in homes where there is domestic violence are physically or sexually abused and/or neglected (Ocean Park Community Center, 2013). Further research is required to investigate precisely how violent relationships develop over time and how couples ‘at risk’ of violence may be helped by formal and informal systems of support, that is, the development of a secondary prevention response in the domestic violence sector (Tomison, 2000).

In the Philippines, the Philippine National Police recorded 3,228 cases on domestic violence during 1st Semester, 2008 excluding some victims remain anonymous and yet unreported (IRIN, 2013). With all of these circumstances, this qualitative research came into existence to investigate internally the reflections and refractions of the domestically abused children particularly in the City of Mati that determines the springboard of their own lives associating fears, aspirations, and hopes.

FRAMEWORK

A conceptualized (hypothesized) framework is drawn that would help to establish their springboard. Fears, aspirations, and hopes are identified voices of the informants that can lead to elucidate the research problem and later on guide on their existence.

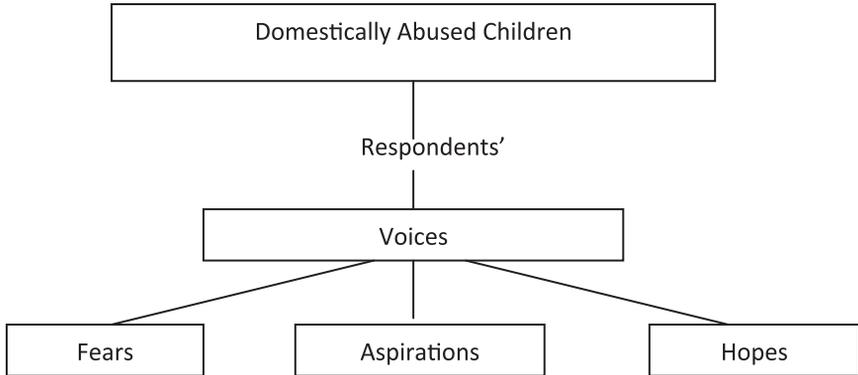


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this investigation, the researchers were determined to answer the following objectives: 1) to describe the profiles of domestically abused children when categorized according to age, gender, types of violence, and educational attainment; 2) to determine the voices of domestically abused children in terms of fears, aspirations, and hopes; and, 3) to design programs to heal and nurture the victims.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used qualitative research design. The research orientation of the study utilized interpretative sociology that sees reality as constructed by people in the course of their everyday lives (Gray, 2012). The phenomenological research method was particularly employed in this study. It is appropriate for the research since it identifies the phenomena through how they perceived its fears, aspirations, and hopes of the children suffered domestic abuse. This type of approach purposely describes the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines (Neil, 2006).

Research Locale

This research was conducted in Davao Oriental, Philippines particularly in City of Mati: Reception Study Diagnostic Center (RSDC).

Respondents of the Study

The children suffered domestic abuse in-housed at RSDC were chosen as informants of the study to obtain their voices such as fears, aspirations, and hopes. There were only 12 informants participated during the conduct of the study.

Instrument of the Study

The research used an interview schedule as guide questions. The fears, aspirations, and hopes are voices of the informants. There were seven open-ended questions for voice of fears, five for voice of aspirations and four for voice of hopes. These open-ended questions were not only limit as guide by the researchers but depending on the answers from the informants.

Sampling Technique

Since there were only 12 informants in-housed at RSDC, the researchers decided a complete enumeration of data to represent the totality of the study.

Data Collection Strategies

When the approval was granted by the Head Agency of Provincial Government Department Head – Provincial Social Worker and Development Office, the researchers immediately visited the site of study and thereby established appropriate rapport, measures and considerations from the gatekeepers and informants. Key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were strategies utilized by the researchers in order to elucidate the problem of the study. Prior to engagement, a written consent from each informant was sought. There were only 7 respondents for in-depth and key informant interviews and one separate group for focus discussion. Notes and sound recorders were employed to strengthen and validate the investigation since camera [photos and videos] were strictly prohibited by the agency. After the transcription, the voice records were deleted in order to avoid leak of information.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions were thoroughly analyzed and carefully interpreted through fishbone concept map for in-depth and key informant interviews and

thematic form for focus group discussion to establish the investigated output. All of the evidences (e.g. note interviews and voice records) were considered and treated as stringent confidential. The findings were presented and confirmed by the informants, RSDC personnel, and gatekeepers to establish the credibility and accuracy of the study and validated by the psychologist.

Ethical Consideration

The absolutist stance was particularly applied in this research. The absolutist stance holds that social scientists have no right to invade the privacy of others because the invasion of privacy may cause harm, only those behaviors and experiences that occur in the public sphere should be studied. The absolutist stance addresses four areas of ethical concern, namely: protection of participants from harm (physical and psychological), prevention of deception, protection of privacy and informed consent (Toit, 2013). In support to this ethical issue, the researchers honored the research sites with proper courtesy call and approval to engage research investigation from the Head of Agency including the personnel and gatekeepers of the site. The identification of researchers' institutional affiliation with contact numbers were also presented to the personnel, gatekeepers and informants to guarantee our pure intention and genuine work of research. The informants were asked to sign the informed consent voluntarily prior to accept their interviews. The researchers secured the confidentiality of their identity with full and honest reporting of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presented the demographic profiles of domestically abused children which categorized according to age, gender, types of domestic violence, and educational attainment.

The age of children who suffered domestic abuse started at 5 years to 18 years old. Sexually abused children started at 5 years old. The average age of sexually abused children was 10.60 years of age. The results of the study was contradicting to a study conducted in 1986, 2000, 2002, and 2005 found that 63 percent of women who had suffered sexual abuse by a family member also reported a rape or attempted rape after the age of 14 (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). This implied that domestic violence was more rampant and the younger the victims. All of the informants were all female. In terms of types of domestic violence, all informants were emotionally abused and majority of them experienced physical, sexual, and

verbal abuse by their parents, uncle, and step-parents and some were orphans. All of them were reported as victims of domestic violence. Their attainment in education was ranged from Kinder I to 3rd year high school.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the informants

Respondents	Present age (y/o)	Gender	Types of Domestic Violence	Educational Attainment
1	18	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	3 rd Year High School
2	18	Female	Emotionally, sexually, and verbally abused	3 rd Year High School
3	10	Female	Emotionally abused and orphan	Grade 1
4	16	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	Grade 6
5	11	Female	Emotionally, physically and sexually abused	Grade 1
6	15	Female	Emotionally, physically and sexually abused	Grade 6
7	13	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	Grade 4
8	14	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	Grade 6
9	15	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	Grade 6
10	17	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	Grade 8
11	6	Female	Emotionally abused and orphan	Kinder I
12	16	Female	Emotionally, physically, sexually and verbally abused	3 rd Year High School

Fears

Key informant and in-depth interviews were conducted with domestically abused children. This research revealed the insights on fears, aspirations, and hopes. The research indicated that the informants agreed on a majority of issues especially on fears. Figure 2 exhibited the fishbone analysis on fears.

Fear is a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger,evil,pain,etceter a,whether the threat is real or imagined (fear, n.d.). They worried most about the time what would happen in the future. Their worry led to depression that is always with them all the time.

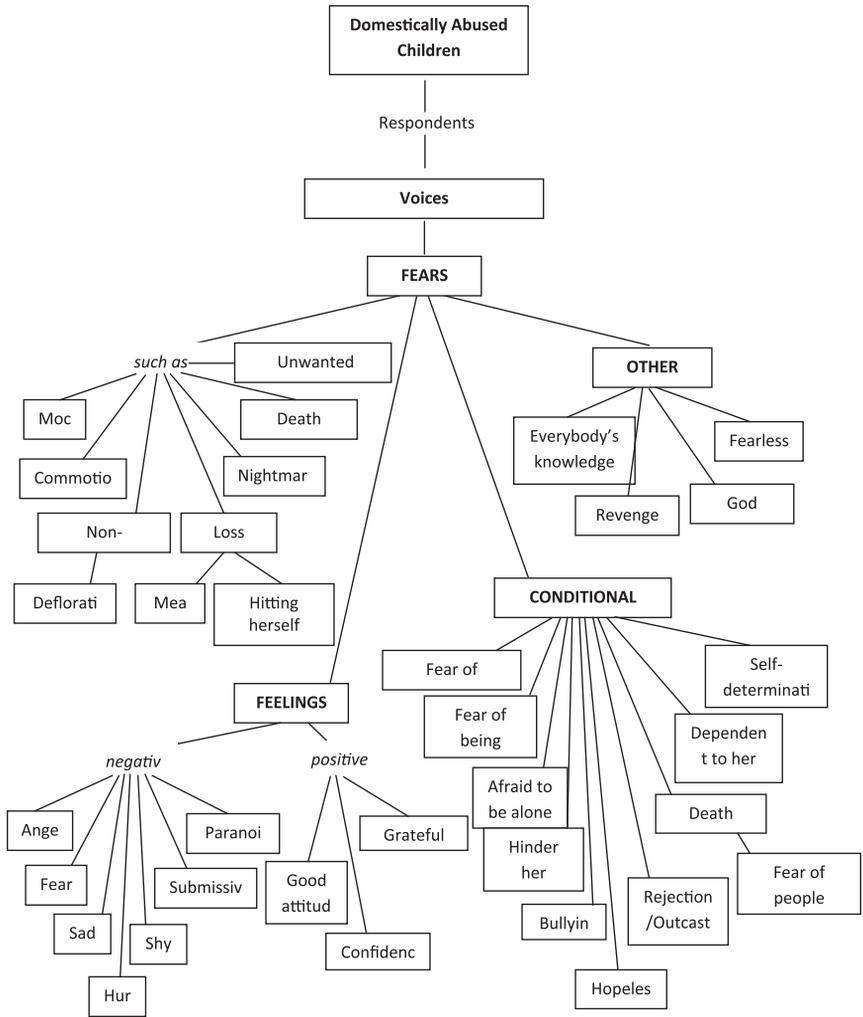


Figure 2. Fishbone analysis on fears

The findings of fishbone analysis showed domestically abused children were all aware of their condition. They had evident signs of stigma: fear of being mocked, followed by fear of commotion, non-acceptance to the community or friends since they were not virgin anymore and losing their hope for they believe that in the eyes of the public they are mean and masochist. The result was comparable to the study of Wilson (2011) pointed out that children who

have been abused have no sense of ownership or protection of their own bodies as they assume that their bodies were for public use. All informants showed like symptoms of trauma, fear of death threats and even unwanted pregnancy.

Because of these fears, similar results to the study of Herrenkohl et al. (2008) revealed that isolation, shame, fear, guilt and low self-esteem are emotional consequences of child abuse and children's exposure to domestic violence aside from psychological, behavioral and relational consequences. Wilson (2011) added that victims of sexual abuse damages their emotions leaving them with feelings of helplessness, shame, betrayal, fear, guilt, anger, and grief.

One informant also told us that she was 'paranoid' which made her not comfortable during our interview. Another informant also revealed her negative feeling that when someone or people around would ask her, she would just obey and submit herself for no further question. This was parallel to the study of Wilson (2011) who mentioned that they often become eroticized and act out on themselves or others what was been done to them.

On the contrary, few of the informants had their three major ingredients they hold such as good attitude, confidence and gratefulness. With their simple thoughts of view and little background, we were so touch to their drives in spite of their ill memories.

Their fears left no choice but to live and face tomorrow. Their condition of living was full of fear of the unknown, fear of being mocked, afraid to be alone, bullied, hopeless, and rejection. Some of their parents, relatives, and step-parents hindered their aspirations and the worst predicament was death threat that caused them to fear the people. On one hand, a six-year old girl told us so that she was dependent to her sister considering that she still a minor. On the other hand, a sixteen-year old girl stressed that she stands now on her self-determination.

Other fears that researchers noted were their situations would be known by everybody and revenge from perpetrators. Other informants relied on the providence of God to help them stand again. Wilson (2011) stated that regardless of what has happened to us, whether our sexuality was robbed from us, whether we were abused, used, or willingly gave our virginity away, only God determines our worth. Meantime, one informant strongly replied that she has nothing to fear.

Table 2 showed the focus group discussion on fears. In spite of the positive outlook of these children who were victims of domestic violence, they inevitably felt the feeling of fear and uncertainty of what has stored outside once they leave their temporary home - the Research Center.

Table 2. Focus group discussion on fears

Respondents	Fears (such as)	Feelings	Conditional Status	Other fears
1	Threat	Trauma; ashamed	Trauma; shocked; profuse crying; losing hope; insecure	Bad people
2	Threat; bullying	Fear; sad; hurt	Trauma; loss of appetite	Bad people
3	(No response)	Sad	Dependent; fear	Bad people
4	Threat	Fear; worrisome	Fear; crying alone	Bad people; God
5	Threat; losing hope	Nervous	Nervous	Bad people
6	Threat	Ashamed; hurt	Dependent	Bad people
7	Threat	Shaking; worried	Trauma; ashamed	Bad people
8	Threat	Callous	Fighting back; ashamed; confused	Bad people
9	Threat	Ashamed; sad	Fear; difficulty; self-anger	Bad people
10	Threat	Unstable	Bored; suicidal	Bad people
11	(No response)	(no response)	Dependent; fear	Bad people
12	Threat	Hatred; Anger	Dependent; ashamed; feeling guilt	Bad people

These children shared the same feeling of what was it being threatened and bullied. They harbored the mix feeling of shame, pain, sadness, worrisome, trauma and hatred to the worst that one of them becomes callous and void of emotion while one of these girls felt unstable and always resolved her problems by committing suicide.

They were still striving to be freed from their unpleasant memories which they uttered in unison as their “nightmare”. Most of them were experiencing the same dilemma: traumatized; loss of appetite; fear; feeling of shame and guilt; and dependency. Others seek their comfort through crying. Feeling of boredom and self-anger were also among the conditions they were suffering which were analogous to the study of Bragg (2003), Dickason (2004) and Wilson (2011) that domestically abused children suffered from behavioral, social, and emotional problem which were categorize to higher levels of aggression, anger, hostility, oppositional behavior, and disobedience; fear, anxiety, withdrawal, and depression; poor peer, sibling, and social relationships; low -esteem. Aside from

fears to people with bad intentions, only one answered that she feared God.

Aspirations

Figure 3 displayed the fishbone analysis on aspirations of domestically abused children. Results of fishbone analysis divulged that four informants aimed to finish study such as to become hotel and restaurant manager, police officer, social worker, and teacher. One informant chose to have her case closed, one informant wanted for good future family and another informant wished a whole happy family.

Their plans to achieve their aspirations were to study well and finish their selected courses. After they would finish their study, one wanted to land a job immediately, one wanted to build a house, other wanted to become a teacher, and the other one longed to support her younger brothers and sisters in sending school. Other informants chose good life and persevere what they have had but one informant desired to seek her younger siblings. As a study leader, I felt bad her feelings on longing how to rescue her siblings which she did not have financial amount and did not know where to start to find.

As regards to their preparation, two of seven informants revealed to study and focus their lessons so that in the future they have education as weapon to battle in the future. Another strong informant used prayer as her foundation and guidance to achieve her path of success. One would carry her own destiny, one would wait for tomorrow come and one would look for part-time job to earn income and find her way back home.

Other reasons to fulfill their aspirations were depending their own destiny, putting their means of living to the will of God, and aspiring a better life. However, four informants were seeking support any from government, private entities or philanthropic person such as scholarship or sponsorship assistance just to finish their study.

Reality is hatched out of aspirations. Table 3 revealed the focus group discussion on aspirations. Just like everyone, these children are no exception. They aspired to be someone else too. Be an artist or businesswoman, police officer or soldier, doctor of medicine, registered nurse, HRM, caregiver, social worker and professional teachers. To achieve these aspirations, studying well accompanied with prayers along with self-trust was their mechanism. To land a good job was their ultimate aspiration. They were seeking for assistance to help them achieve what they have envisioned but if they fail, they charge their painful experience as destiny for this was not their choice but fate.

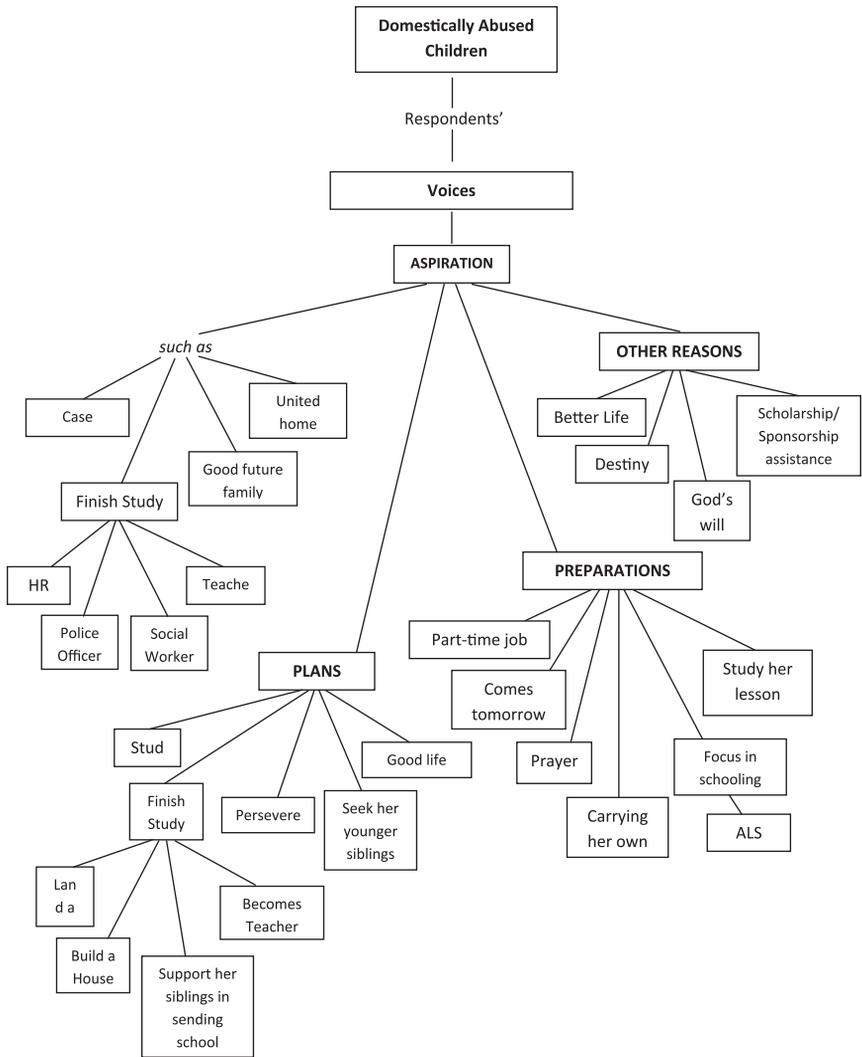


Figure 3. Fishbone analysis on aspirations

Table 3. Focus group discussion on aspirations

Respondents	Dreams (such as)	Plans	Preparations	Other Reasons
1	Artist or businesswoman	Study	Pray and avoid temptations	Needs assistance vs destiny
2	Police Officer	Study	Study well	Needs assistance vs destiny
3	Registered Nurse	Study	Study well	Needs assistance vs destiny
4	HRM or Model	Study	Pray and finish study	Needs assistance vs destiny
5	Doctor of Medicine	Study	Study well and have vision	Needs assistance vs destiny
6	Professional Teacher	Study	Pray and study well	Needs assistance vs destiny
7	Soldier	Study	Pray, study well and self-trust	Needs assistance vs destiny
8	Police Officer	Study	Pray, study well and work part-time job	Needs assistance vs destiny
9	Professional Teacher or Social Worker	Study	Study well and to rise	Needs assistance vs destiny
10	Professional Teacher	Study	Self-trust	Needs assistance vs destiny
11	Professional Teacher	Study	Pray and study well	Needs assistance vs destiny
12	HRM or Caregiver	Study	Self-trust and study well	Needs assistance vs destiny

Hopes

As transcendence of the study, domestically abused children expressed their hopes related to their experiences from the past. Figure 4 displayed the fishbone analysis on hopes.

Hope is a feeling of expectation and desire of informants for a certain thing to happen. With the daily struggles both physiologically and psychologically, informants were still hopeful to survive and overcome their problems. Most of the victims were hoping that they can finish their studies, have a good future and someday become professionals and land a job. One of the victims was hopeful to receive good health and love from her family, win friends like other normal

children and to have a whole family back. One informant also resolves her hope to have a peaceful living.

With the current situation of children endured domestic abuse, they believe that to strive hard and study well were their provisions to live independently. Aside from that, some informants learned to move-on and be wary in mingling people especially men. There was one informant who said that her provision was to listen from good advices and socialize with others so that she could forget her past experience. The results of the investigation clearly established that there is still hope from them as what Vaporetta (2013) stressed that children exposed to domestic violence may have their trust broken and their spirits wounded yet they also have resiliency.

Meantime, these children who were domestically abused and some were orphans and physically maltreated were doing their best to alleviate their hindrances of life. Past experiences were sought as the worst hindrance to continue their living which turns them to lose their hopes. Their past experiences engraved in their minds and remember all over again when they saw themselves in the mirror. They have tough times in struggling the past and the worst was a fear of revenge or a death threat coming from perpetrators and their family. During our interview, most informants poured out their tears, full of fears and shame on their part.

With the right kind of help, children can recover completely and live normal and happy lives (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2007). Vaporetta (2013) added that their healing process began in a safe and structured environment with large doses of love and affection, respect, encouragement, positivity, and empowerment. Trauma-focused therapy can treat these children with domestically and sexually abused (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2007; Vaporetta, 2013).

Health, education, protection and foster parent were most of their perceived needs. One of the victims stressed the need of support from police security and protection. Other victims opted to stay at RSDC and ask education support through Alternative Learning System (ALS) from Department of Education (DepEd). Support group such as women's group, friends and acquaintances were regarded by majority of informants as very important element to live as normal person. Thus, the informants were knocking from Government, other agencies and the public to immediately support any to address their dilemmas.

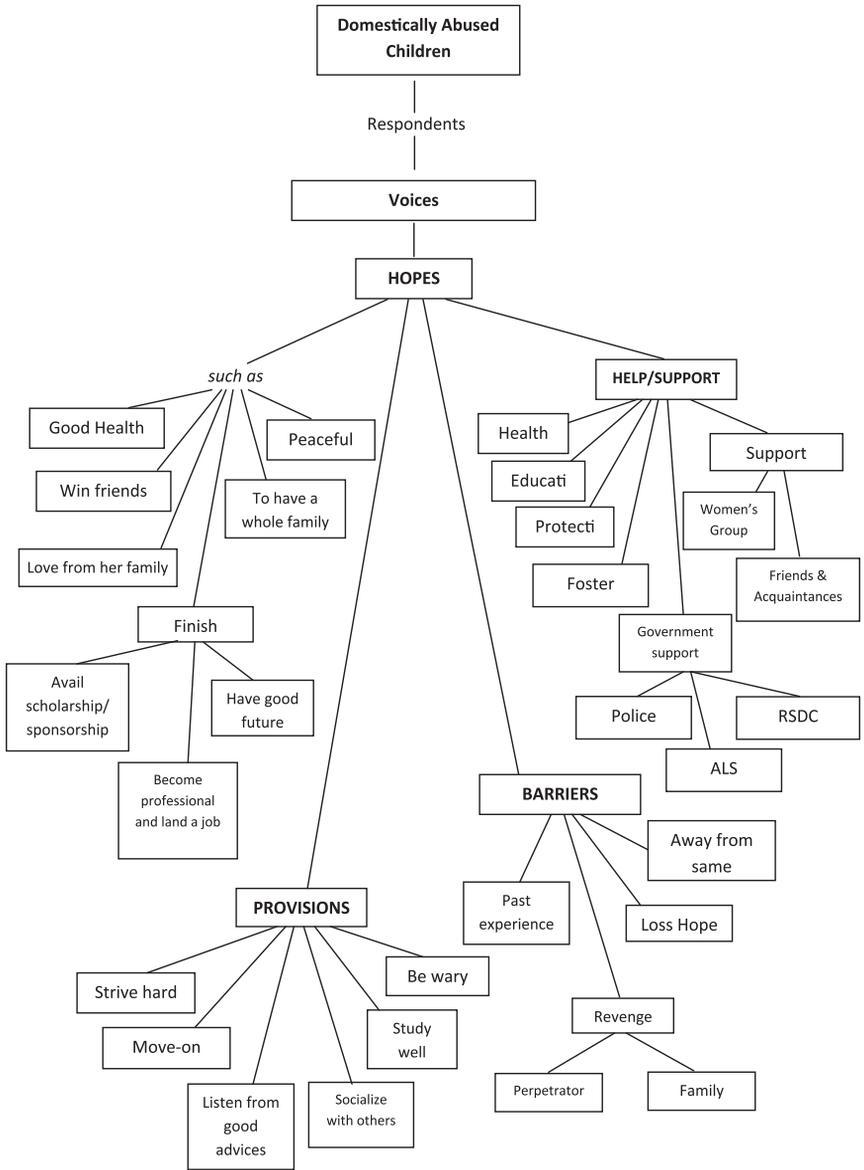


Figure 4. Fishbone analysis on hopes

Reflected in Table 4 is the focus group discussion on hopes of the informants. Majority of them wanted to finish their studies, to forget the past and move forward. They sought schooling as their weapon to survive and the good escape to forget the past once they are already professionals and be accepted by the community as normal individuals.

Table 4. Focusgroup discussion on hopes

Respondents	Hopes (such as)	Provisions	Barriers	Help/ support
1	Finish study	Stand her hope	Past experience	3 rd Year High School
2	Finish study; forget the past	Hope to finish study	Family	3 rd Year High School
3	Finish study	Finish study	No response	Grade 1
4	Finish study; forget the past; move-on	Overcome her trials	Family	Grade 6
5	Move-on	Strive hard	Family; uncle	Grade 1
6	Forget the past; move-on	Stand her hope; pray	Family	Grade 6
7	Finish study	Pray	Ashamed	Grade 4
8	Finish study; forget the past	Pray	Mother	Grade 6
9	Be wary; forget the past	Pray	Family	Grade 6
10	Forget the past	Finish study	Family	Grade 8
11	Finish study	Finish study	No response	Kinder I
12	Forget the past	Finish study	Family	3 rd Year High School

To stand their hopes ardently and believe prayers as a tool to overcome trials, give them courage to fight back against the course of the lives they have had even at times they are confronted and threatened by their unhealthy past experiences and their own family who betrayed them. One of the informants told the group that she prayed every night and longed to see her mother but at the same time she hesitated to do so because every time her mother come to see her, she would only begged to the informant to withdraw the rape case she filed against her own father and or most of the time threatened the informant that her half-siblings on

paternal side would take revenge on the informant if she would not pull out that so-called case.

Another one from this group of informants was ashamed what might other people say about her when they would know her story. She just relied on her belief that there is a God would listen to her prayers and guide her to finish her studies.

The two orphans were just quiet when they were asked what they would think a hindrance to obtain their hopes in life. Their silence speaks aloud – the once smiling Nora and Jean (not real name) suddenly became timid and gloomy while just looking each other. They were deprived to enjoy being child that is free from problems and worries.

Every one of them was seeking for police protection for the fear that the perpetrator would take vengeance or any from her relatives would kill her for the shame she brought to the family. Another one they sought for was a support for their education may it came from their own family, philanthropic individuals or from the government. Only one of them clung to her belief that she has no family to turn to except for RSDC-DSWD.

Generated Programs of the Study

Police Protection Program, Health Care Program, Psychiatric Program, Guidance and Counseling Program, Sports, Exercise, Recreational and Socio-cultural Program, Spiritual Program, Education and Scholarship Program, Legal Counsel and Litigation Program, Social Media Advocacy Program, and Adopt-A-Child Program are generated programs of the study to possibly heal and nurture needed by the victims.

CONCLUSIONS

Domestic violence is a crippling social disease and it does not choose gender, class, race and education. Anybody is a potential victim of domestic violence. In this study, all of the victims are female because they are only among of the victims who seek assistance to the RSDC which is just a scant numbers of reported domestic violent cases.

The prime unit of social institution is morally corrupted and disintegrated. The important others in one's life whom she has trusted is the very person who breach such trust. Victims are often judged and seen as the provocateurs to their perpetrator.

This kind of violence must be dealt with a gamut of professionals that include among others: judges and police for prevention and protection. Victims are helpless for they are socially, emotionally, physically and psychologically hostage. Their silence does not mean they agreed being molested or abused but they are just quiet to save their lives and much more to their love ones.

Domestically abused children will become victims again in their later lives. They hold feelings of guilt, shame, fear and low self-esteem. They believed they were to blame because they allowed it to happen. They are reluctant to try to change their lives for they defined themselves that they are just good for nothing since their virginity or dignity has been taken away from them. There is a great impact of this kind of violence to their personality as well as in relating with others. Indeed their development as a total person is much affected.

This phenomenon has to awaken the role of education in raising the awareness of the public to understand that this kind of violence silences the victim. The school as the other form of institution must take its part to provide a friendly and wholesome environment for this victim where their case be kept confidential yet they are given an equal opportunity to grow as normal children in all aspect of human development.

Domestically abused children need mental health professionals, child welfare, social provider and recreation to help them heal their wounds. Like everyone else, they have their aspirations yet only hampered by their fears. They believe they are alone and nobody cares. They need a venue where their fears be abridged and given address; be given a chance to achieve and gather their once shattered aspirations; and their little voices of hopes be heard through reaching them with all the services and programs they need to help them rewire themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing implications, the researchers proposed the following recommendations: a) The National Government may take as findings as reference to provide funding and further intensify the programs against domestic violence and provide psychologists and guidance counselors in every local government units to overcome their stigma; b) The Department of Social and Welfare Development (DSWD) may draw insights from the study to strengthen multi-agency involvement in child protection, child sexual exploitation, missing and neglected children. The DSWD also may provide funding to create more Reception Centers like RSDC in very local government units to address the

victims and put up facilities for sports, exercise, recreational and socio-cultural activities to develop social skills; c) The Philippine National Police may utilize the results of the study to give immediate attention and response to the needs of the victims; d) The Department of Health may acquire free special health care and trauma-focused therapy to help the victims out of their unpleasant experiences; e) The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and Department of Education (DepED) may take as challenge to take their part in providing educational scholarship in order to attain the victims' aspiration. These three educational systems may employ and campaign regular awareness program on domestic violence and implement strict policy to prevent if possible eliminate bullying in every institution; f) The Hall of Justice may continue to provide free legal advice and litigation assistance; g) The Spiritual Leaders may provide spiritual healing program, life spirit activities and other spiritual encounter interventions; h) The Mass Media will help to intensify the advocacy program on protecting women and children against violence; i) The non-government entities and individuals may take action in supporting the government activities and initiate fostering programs; j) The community may take the output of the investigation as information on how to treat victims to live as normal person which free from biases and any discrimination; k) The victims on domestic violence and sexual abuse may utilize the outcome of the study as direction to achieve their aspirations and better life; and l) The researchers may take findings to investigate further the study and to come up policy program.

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