

# “DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE RURAL SETTING: UNHEARD VOICES OF STUDENT VICTIMS”

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to give light and expose the reality behind the experiences of students who are victims or witnesses of domestic violence in the rural setting. Fifteen elementary students from Bansalan, Davao del Sur were carefully chosen through purposeful sampling. The results of the interviews were transcribed, translated and coded to produce and present major themes and core ideas. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion it was found out that dysfunctional family relationships, viciousness and cruelty, emotional and psychological trauma, disinterest and poor performance in school and detachment and denial were the issues which escalated as regards to the students' experiences on domestic violence. As to their insights for students who also experience the same circumstances: persevere, stay hopeful and positive, learn to respect, abandon pride and conceit and call on God. This study has significance in education as well as to the community as to how to address domestic violence and prevent its damaging effects to the lives of the students.

## Keywords:

**Domestic Violence.** In the context of this study, this refers to the children who have experienced physical or emotional directly as well as the children who sees or hears the physical, social, emotional or financial abuse of a person with whom he or she has a domestic relationship. In addition, the term domestic violence is also applied to depict aggressive and hostile behavior which occurs between partners or spouses and may involve children as witnesses or victims, or both.

**Academic performance.** The outcome of education and the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their aims in education

## INTRODUCTION

*“There is a large gap between what we know about violence against children and what we know should be done. We know that violence against children often causes lifelong physical and mental harm. We also know that violence erodes the potential for children to contribute to society by affecting their ability to learn and their social and emotional development. Given the importance of children to our future the current complacency cannot continue – we must place “preventing” violence against children among our highest priorities.”*

-James A. Mercy, Editorial Board of the UN Secretary

Domestic violence leaves a scar in the lives of many children. We are cognizant what this exposure means to the children involved as research in the previous years has pointed out on women and children as principal victims and men as perpetrators. Over the past 50 years, domestic violence has been identified as a severe social problem eventually affecting individuals worldwide and every year as many as 275 million children worldwide are caught in the crossfire of domestic violence and suffer the full consequences of unstable home life. Violence against children involves physical and psychological abuse and injury, neglect or negligent treatment, exploitation and sexual abuse. The perpetrator may consist of parents and other close family members (Cho & Wilke, 2010; UNICEF, 2006).

Similarly, there are broad range of possible consequences for children exposed to domestic violence including: increased emotional and behavioral issues, depression, anxiety, trauma and stress, desensitization to aggressive behavior, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, bullying and aggression toward peers, as well as physical complaints (Byrne & Taylor, 2007; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012; Humphreys et al., 2008; Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, 1990). Domestic violence may be exhibited by any member of the household. In the United Kingdom, it was noted that violence and abuse at home may not be reported for a number of reasons which comprise; allegations may be intimidating to parents, no action would be taken if a complaint is interfered, and the victim will be erroneously accused (Byrne & Taylor, 2007).

As the Philippine Republic Act No. 9262 section 2 declares that the State values the dignity of women and children and guarantees full respect for human rights. The State also recognizes the need to protect the family and its members particularly women and children from violence that jeopardizes their safety and security (Philippine Laws and Jurisprudence Databank, 2015). Domestic violence committed against women and children accelerates in the Philippines. From the record of the Women and Children Protection Center of the Philippine National Police (PNP), Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Juliano Soliman confirmed that in 2011, there were 15,104 cases of domestic violence reported. The 2011 figure is 5,619 cases more than the 2010 figure

of 9, 485 cases, adding that for 2012, 12,948 cases were recorded (The Philippine Star, 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the nature and scope of domestic violence experienced by the students and to gain a better understanding of the problem for effective prevention and response. To gain the trust and confidence from the participants we utilized the in-depth interview and focus group discussion to draw out essential information from the students who have experienced domestic violence within their family and community particularly in Bansalan, Davao del Sur. We were guarded regarding the reaction of the parents on asking permission to conduct an interview from their minor children who are victims of domestic violence inside their domicile but we were determined to crop information from the student victims which could help the parents understand the impact of domestic violence on their children and teachers can also gauge their initiative in handling their students who are victims of domestic violence.

Moreover, it could also be used by the law-making body to conduct a review of an existing model of provision for an organization which provides services for children who have been through domestic violence. Although some of our readings renowned the negative impact to the family where domestic violence was initiated but we confirmed the different research discussions to fill in the fissure by understanding the tormenting event on the lives of the student victims and how those experiences affected in them.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the experiences of students on domestic violence in rural homes?

What are the coping mechanisms adopted by students who are victims of domestic violence?

What insights the children who are victims of domestic violence have developed through their experiences?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains how the research was conducted. It reviewed the design of this study that includes the presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical statements, role of the researcher, research participants, trustworthiness which involves the following: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability. It also entailed a detailed description of the ethical issues associated with this study and the steps taken to maintain high ethical standards.

### **Research Design**

We used the qualitative phenomenological approach in this study to explore and describe the students' experiences as victims of domestic violence. This study was

designed to be exploratory and descriptive and thus no attempts are made to establish fundamental relationships. In a broad sense, the purpose of phenomenology is to describe particular phenomena, or the appearance of things, as lived experience (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Lived experiences involve the immediate consciousness of life's events prior to reflection and without interpretation, and are influenced by those things that are internal or external to them. It is the lived experience that gives meaning to each individual's perception of a particular phenomenon and thus presents to the individual what is true or real in his or her life (Heise, 2006; Halloway, 2005). In the human sphere this normally translates into gathering deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participants' observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participants. With this view, phenomenological inquiry approach provided us with clear understanding on the method of the present study which was anchored involving the data collection techniques, data processing, and analysis of the student victims of domestic violence in the rural area.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This qualitative research study captured the phenomenon of students who were victims of domestic violence. I am a classroom teacher for twenty-one years and was convinced by my co-author who is a professor and a human rights advocate, to conduct this study because of the personal confession of my students who experienced turbulent domestic violence. Thus, this provided us with the opportunity to understand and respect the feelings and individual views of the student victims.

As a teacher with my co-author, we continue our role to know and adopt the different kinds of behavior of the students experiencing domestic violence. We felt the importance of knowing their stories because this can affect the quality of school life of the victims. Despite the existence of the *Law on Violence Against Women and Children*, we felt that it is lacking if the unheard stories of the victims were out of the picture in solving the scenario, most especially when a student of mine has become delinquent in my class but then I knew that she was physically abused by her stepfather at home and kept the incident unknown to others because of shame and fear that no one will believe her.

### **Research Participants**

The key informants of our study were the students in the different schools of Bansalan, Davao del Sur, Philippines. Participants were chosen using a purposive sampling because it is the best method in order to identify focal participants (Krueger, 2000) especially when the researcher's purpose was to look for those who have had experienced connecting to the phenomenon to be researched. The choice of participants was based on the type of violence they have experienced.

## Data Collection

In the conduct of qualitative research, careful planning and preparations are critical in order to collect data. In short, good data collection takes time (Silverman, 2000) quick interviews or short observations are improbable in gaining more understanding. We utilized interview guide questions to gather experiences, views, concepts of participants towards domestic violence that occur in their home and in the community as well. The primary methods we used in gathering the data needed for this study were interview and focus group discussion. This interview guide was forwarded to the panelists for content validation prior to conduct the interviews. A good process to gather the data is through an interview. It could provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews reveal histories, emotions, events, personality traits, desires, dislikes, disputes and more. In-depth interview is a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time, while focus group interviews with group of people typically four to six (Creswell, 2003; National Crime Prevention, 2001).

## Analysis of data

Analysis of data in a research study involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hegarty et al., 2006). Data were analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007), adding that qualitative content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

This study also used data reduction from which transcriptions were utilized and deleted unnecessary information. Data display or the organization of data in an arranged and orderly manner, clearly showing the interrelationships of bits of information. Conclusion involves going back to consider what the analyzed data mean and to assess their aftermaths for the questions at hand while verification, integrally linked to conclusion drawing, required revisiting the data as many times as necessary to cross-check or verify these emergent conclusions. The conceptual framework was then interpreted with reference to the related literature on the subject in an attempt to explain, with a theory, the phenomenon being studied, by the researcher with the assistance of two independent readers and analysts who are experts in the field of study to form a triangulation team wherein each examined the data and compared individual findings to obtain a deeper and broader understanding of how each investigator viewed the issue. Triangulation is used to ensure the validity of the data by using more than one person to collect the data, thereby increases its reliability.

## **Trustworthiness**

It is necessary for scholarly work must be done with the inclusion of trustworthiness. We utilized the four criteria espoused by (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) such as: credibility, confirm ability, transferability and dependability.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Since our research study involved students, they were uncertain to reveal information out of fear and withhold some data. However, as part of research rigor, several safeguards were applied that wiped out their fears and promoted trust. I assured that my study was guided by ethical principles as described by (Mack et al., 2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality.

## **RESULTS**

This chapter presents the participants' experiences associated with domestic violence in rural homes. This also includes their perceptions and insights as well as conclusions founded from the information gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The following research questions produced data results from the informants.

What are the experiences of students on domestic violence in rural homes?

What are the coping mechanisms adopted by students who are victims of domestic violence?

What insights the children who are victims of domestic violence have developed through their experiences?

**Table 2. Essential Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of Students on Domestic Violence in Rural Homes**

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Dysfunctional Family Relationships	My parents separated when I was young; I stayed with mother.
	Father is a mama's boy and a womanizer..
	I did not grow up with my parents; when they separated they left us to the care of our grandmother.
	When mother comes home (from work abroad), she doesn't stay long because they always argue
	My siblings and I don't have the same father.
	There is lack of respect and misunderstanding;
	They fight over petty issues.
	Parents fight because father became jobless.
	Parents fight almost every night since I was a kid.
	Stepmom is cruel to me; gives me a lot of work to do.
	Father suspects that mother has another man.
	They usually fight over debts and lack of money.
	They fight during payday when father goes home with all his money spent on drinking sprees
Viciousness and Cruelty	When parents argue, they end up in violent beating
	My father always beats my mother physically
	My father hit my mother; uses forceful and hurting words
	Mother would nag father and father would beat her up
	I saw them using knife when they fought.
	When brother talked back, father punched him.
	Uncle hits me with a bamboo stick.
Emotional and Psychological Trauma	I live with fear; I feel afraid when they start to argue.
	I'm afraid to commit mistakes ; I tremble even with the mere whistle of uncle
	When they quarrel, I hurt so much.
	I am afraid of their loud voices when they fight.
	I'm scared when mother moves out of our house and we are left to our grandmother.
	I feel miserable; my siblings and I are affected.
	When mother leaves the house after a fight, I'm left with the responsibility of looking younger siblings.
	I lost self-confidence because of our broken family.
	I don't know where to go – I'm afraid and confused.
I lost interest in going to school	
I don't want to go to school anymore – I'm affected by their	

Disinterest and Poor Performance in school	fight
	I still continue my studies but my mind is not focused on my teacher and the lessons.
	My studies are affected because when they quarrel they would scold us for no reason
	I keep transferring from one school to another because of our family problems
Detachment and Denial	I just don't mind their arguments
	I'm not affected by my parents even if they keep on bickering
	I'm tired of listening to their fights and talking about the past – I don't care anymore

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**Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on Insights that Victims of Domestic Violence can Share to Other Children Having Similar Experiences**

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Persevere	Even if there are problems, just continue going to school.
	It is still important to go to school and control our emotions.
	We should maintain our good grades in school.
	Just do not lose hope and continue with our studies despite our family problems.
	There is no perfect family but we must not make it an excuse just to drop out of school.
Stay hopeful and positive	I hope my children will not experience what I have experienced,
	I hope to finish my studies and have a good job someday,
	I wish that there is love for all so that there will be no violence at home,
	I wish I'm with my parents because I know they love me,
	I really hope that my mother is with us so that my stepfather will not abuse us..
	I hope that separated parents will still plan for their children's welfare.
Learn to Respect	Respect and understanding are important to achieve harmony at home,
	There'll be no abuse if there's respect,
	A peaceful family must have understanding and respect for each other,
	If there's respect, no trouble and no domestic violence will happen,
	Family must respect and understand each other,
Abandon pride and conceit	I learned that pride can cause troubles,
	Let go of pride
	Do not let pride prevail because this is the cause of domestic violence
Call on God	Pray without ceasing and have faith.
	God must be at the center of each family
	Family must go to church together and pray together
	Every member of the family must be God-fearing

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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, implications for practice and for future research based from the themes which were formulated from the data analysis. This study has distinctly indicated its purpose that is to recall the experiences of students on domestic violence. It intends to be deliberative in bringing out diverse emotions and insights of the participants to define what concepts must be collected from the findings.

The results of this study were based on the prevalence of domestic violence in the mentioned location. There are five major themes which emerged that include: Dysfunctional Family Relationships, Viciousness and Cruelty, Emotional and Psychological Trauma, Disinterest and Poor Performance in school and Detachment and Denial.

The results of this study have shown that dysfunctional family relationships that are experienced by the participants who witness and went through domestic violence. As domestic violence is most often perpetrated by men against a female partner or ex-partner, the review focuses on the impact of violence perpetrated by parents, guardians and caretakers against the students. Children are exposed to or experience domestic violence in many ways. They may hear one parent/caregiver threatens the other, observe a parent who is out of control or careless with anger, see one parent assault the other, or live with the aftermath of a violent assault. Many children fall as witnesses to abuse and violence by hearing threats resulting to actual physical injury.

### *Implications for Practice*

A coordinated effort to deal with domestic experiences of students is necessary and timely to address their needs in the light of the findings of this study. I believe that to counter domestic violence and its negative effects to school children a concerted effort of the school community, the government and even the religious sector can be of great help.

This indicates that school officials may devise a strategic plan and action to assist the students who are victims of domestic violence and at the same time, provide the students counseling and therapeutic sessions for those who went through traumas and stress. Likewise, intensify the campaign within the school community on domestic violence awareness and encourage them to speak and share their experiences to their teachers as well as to their School Guidance Counselor. In addition, parents may undergo seminars and trainings on good parenting to be conducted by professional counselors and advisers supported by school officials.

To build a harmonious relationship between the school, the family members and the whole community, a special event or symposium for domestic violence prevention may be conducted to emphasize its hazardous effects to the students' physical, social, mental and emotional well-being.

Family activities inside the school premises such as family day, sports fest, intramural, and family fun day may be organized to improve quality relationship between family members and school officials.

School administrators, Guidance Counselor and classroom advisers will identify students who are disturbed and affected by domestic violence and who are at risk of

dropping out due to the adverse effects of violence being experienced at home. School and teacher intervention can prevent further negative effect of domestic violence that will lead to worst scenarios such as rape, child abuse and even mental disorder due to stress and trauma.

In partnership with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Guidance Counselors a regular session for students who have stressful and traumatic experiences on domestic violence may be set up inside the school premises that can be scheduled on weekly or monthly basis. There are some developments and an increased awareness on the effects of children's exposure to domestic violence and the growing use of mandatory reports and interventions with families where adults or children are exposed to domestic violence. These reports help in the careful evaluation of domestic violence cases.

### ***Implication for Future Research***

This study is limited to the public elementary school of Bansalan, Davao del Sur, the following future researches are recommended: The findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the 15 participants, future research may be done on the experiences of children on domestic violence in rural setting with another group of participants to fortify and validate the findings of this study. Future research may be conducted on domestic violence experiences of students in other regions in the country to add to the research by gathering more significant information and insights from the other children victims and witnesses of violence at home. Additional research may consider the role of school officials in planning, implementing activities and campaigns that can assist, monitor and help students who are victims of domestic violence with the assistance of other government agencies and set-up regular counseling sessions for identified children with traumatic experiences on domestic violence. Majority of domestic violence involve the parents and guardians of the students. Thus, their roles are essential in counseling the students to be focused with their studies and avoid trauma and stress. The findings of this study were viewed from the lens of the experiences of elementary students who experience domestic violence in rural setting to support the findings of this study.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Based on the results of the study, as a classroom adviser and a professor, we can say that domestic violence is still a rampant issue in the society that greatly affects the whole being of a student. In the rural area where economy is not yet stable to provide opportunities for parents to earn and support their children, most of the fights and arguments spring from financial constraints and need. From the findings of the study, we have determined how domestic violence grossly affected the participants' physical, emotional, social and mental aspects. This is congruent with the traditional practice that what happens inside a family's home is not a concern for their neighbors, and what happens in a student's house is no longer a problem for a teacher. The society's passiveness as well as the school community's lack of interest with the students' home life can adversely affect the value of education for students.

This investigation brought us into conclusion that domestic violence is not only a simple family problem that happens inside their house, but it is also a problem within the whole community involving the education system as the main focus and the heart beat of the Department of Education are the students. Based on this study's findings, we agree that domestic violence in the rural setting must be given enough deliberation and action to establish a meaningful community where children and parents live in harmony and economic stability. Since financial dilemma cause a lot of arguments inside household, livelihood opportunities can be opened for parents. Thus, the basic family needs would be provided. Based on this study's findings, we agree that domestic violence in the rural setting must be given enough deliberation and action to establish a meaningful community where children and parents live in harmony and economic stability. Since financial dilemma cause a lot of arguments inside household, livelihood opportunities can be opened for parents. Thus, the basic family needs would be provided.

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