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SILENT SUFFERING: EXPLORING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS' RELUCTANCE TO REPORT ABUSE

Michael Sanchez[1], Van Ryan I. Alipoyo[2], Nancy E. Aranjuez[3],
[1]*Philippine National Police Officer*
[2]*JRMSU, CCJE,*
[3]*JRMSU, CCJE,*
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7944-9633

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the experiences of domestic violence victims and their reasons for not reporting abuse, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was collected from 15 respondents in three barangays of Pagadian City, where domestic violence is prevalent but often underreported. The research identified various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic, and analyzed factors such as age and family income, which influenced victims' responses. Findings revealed that fear of retaliation, shame, cultural barriers, and financial dependence were key reasons for non-reporting. The study recommends that the Local Government Unit (LGU) enhance public education on domestic violence, strengthen legal protections, and promote economic empowerment programs to support victims. Collaborations with faith-based, academe, and cultural organizations are also suggested to challenge harmful societal norms and foster a supportive environment for victims seeking help.

KEYWORDS: *Domestic Violence, Physical, Sexual, Psychological, Emotional, & Economic.*

1.0. INTRODUCTION
Domestic violence stands as a pervasive societal issue, often shrouded in silence and suffering. Despite increasing awareness campaigns and legal reforms, a significant portion of these incidents remain unreported. This research aimed to delve into the intricate web of factors contributing to the underreporting of domestic violence, thereby shedding light on this distressing phenomenon. Domestic violence, a pervasive and deeply rooted social issue, continues to cast a long and troubling shadow over households worldwide. Despite growing awareness and efforts to combat this menace, recent years have witnessed a concerning persistence of such incidents (Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021).

At its core, domestic violence encompasses a spectrum of abusive behaviors, spanning physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and economic realms, inflicted upon individuals within intimate relationships as emphasized by Buzawa and Buzawa (2017) in their study. It knows no bounds of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status, affecting millions worldwide. However, while the impacts reverberate deeply within the lives of victims, many choose not to disclose their experiences to authorities or seek assistance from support services (Sanchez, 2019).

According to Semahegn and Mengistie (2015) the lifetime prevalence of domestic violence against women by husband or intimate partner among 10 studies ranged from 20 to 78 %. The lifetime domestic physical violence by a husband or intimate partner against women ranged from 31 to 76.5 %. The lifetime domestic sexual violence against women by husband or intimate partner ranged from 19.2 to 59 %. The mean lifetime prevalence of domestic emotional violence was 51.7 %. A significant number of women experienced violence during their pregnancy period. Domestic violence against women is significantly associated with alcohol consumption, chat chewing, family history of violence, occupation, religion, educational status, residence, and decision-making power.

According to the data from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Region IX, the reported cases of abuse against women and children have shown fluctuations over the past seven years. In 2016, there were 2,340 reported cases, which increased steadily to 3,214 in 2019, before dropping to 1,741 in 2020 and further to 1,291 in 2021. However, in 2022, there was a significant decrease to 973 reported cases. Specifically focusing on abuse cases against women, there were 1,285 reported cases in 2016, which rose to 1,737 in 2019 before declining to 368 in 2022. These statistics indicate a concerning trend, highlighting the need for continued efforts in prevention, intervention, and support for victims of abuse in the region.
Recent data analysis reveals an increasing number of domestic violence cases being reported within the barangays of Pagadian City. However, despite the severity of these incidents, a substantial proportion remains unreported to the police. This underreporting trend is particularly pronounced in the barangays of Lumbia, San Pedro, and Sta. Lucia, where a significant number of cases are documented at the community level but fail to be reported to law enforcement authorities.

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In essence, this research endeavors to illuminate the shadows where domestic violence festers in silence, amplifying the voices of those who have endured its horrors. By elucidating the barriers of unreported cases, we aspire to pave the way for a more compassionate and responsive society, where survivors feel empowered to seek help without fear or shame.

2.0. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the demographic profile of domestic violence victims in Zamboanga del Sur for the calendar year 2023-2024, focusing on their age, marital status, educational attainment, and family monthly income.
- To identify the various forms of domestic violence experienced by victims, including physical violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, and economic abuse.
- To analyze the responses of the victims and determine if there are significant differences based on their demographic profile.
- To explore the reasons behind the non-reporting of domestic violence cases by victims to the police.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey using both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the experiences of domestic violence victims and their reasons for not reporting the abuse. Quantitative data was collected through surveys administered to 15 respondents from three barangays in Pagadian City, while qualitative data was gathered via key informant interviews with selected victims who did not report the abuse to the police. The research was conducted in Barangays Lumbia, San Pedro, and Santa Lucia, areas known for high rates of domestic violence cases at the barangay level but underreporting to the police. The survey instrument, validated by experts, addressed the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents and the forms of abuse they experienced. Data were analyzed using frequency counting, percentages, and chi-square tests to identify significant differences in responses based on various characteristics such as age, income, and education level. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

4.0. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 provides a detailed analysis of the demographic profile and experiences of domestic violence victims. The majority of victims are women in their prime years of adulthood, with 60% being married. Education does not significantly alter their likelihood of reporting abuse, suggesting cultural and emotional barriers may outweigh educational factors. Economic vulnerability is a critical theme, with 73.3% earning a meager family income. Physical abuse is universally experienced, while psychological abuse and emotional abuse are prevalent. The study underscores the silent suffering of domestic violence victims, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Table 1. Demographic Profile and Forms of Abuse Experienced by Domestic Violence Victims

Category	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Age		
21 – 25 years old	2	13.3
26 – 30 years old	4	26.7
31 – 35 years old	5	33.3
36 – 40 years old	4	26.7
Total	**15**	**100.0**
Marital Status		
Married	9	60.0
Single	6	40.0
Total	**15**	**100.0**
Educational Attainment		
Grade School	1	6.7
High School	10	66.6
College Level	4	26.7
Total	**15**	**100.0**
Family Monthly Income		
1000 – 3000 a month	11	73.3
3000 – 5000 a month	4	26.7

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Category	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Total	**15**	**100.0**
Forms of Domestic Violence: Physical Violence		
Hitting	15	100.0
Shoving	15	100.0
Grabbing	15	100.0
Biting	2	13.3
Restraining	10	66.7
Choking	7	46.7
Burning	-	-
Assault with Weapon	2	13.3
Forms of Domestic Violence: Sexual Violence		
Coercing sexual contact	8	53.3
Make you engaged in Prostitution	-	-
Forcing abortion	-	-
Forms of Domestic Violence: Psychological Abuse		
Intimidation	15	100.0
Threat of harm	15	100.0
Isolation	-	-
Forms of Domestic Violence: Emotional Abuse		
Constant criticism	12	80.0
Humiliating	11	73.3
Yelling at you, insulting you or swearing at you	12	80.0
Forms of Domestic Violence: Economic Abuse		
Preventing or forbidding an intimate partner from working or gaining education	12	80.0
Withholding access to financial resources	9	60.0

Age

The respondents are largely in the age range of 26 to 35 years old, with 33.3% falling in the 31-35 age group. This shows that the majority of participants in the poll are within the prime working age group. There is a pretty balanced distribution among the other age groups as well, with 26-30 and 36-40-year-olds each constituting 26.7% of the responses. This variance in age groups shows that the data obtained is indicative of a wide range of opinions and experiences.

The table shows a breakdown of the age distribution of the victims of domestic abuse. It reveals that there is no notable concentration in any one age group, with victims distributed across several age categories. The distribution is well equal across the age categories, with no single age group dominating significantly. This balanced distribution illustrated by Johnson (2017) that domestic violence can harm persons of all ages, refuting the assumption that it primarily affects a single population. Rana et al. (2023) also underscores the significance of addressing the issue across all age groups and offering assistance and resources for victims of domestic abuse, regardless of their age. By including a varied range of ages in the sample, researchers can acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of the numerous causes and experiences that lead to domestic violence. This data can then be utilized to inform policies and initiatives that cater to the needs of victims across different age categories.

Marital Status

The data suggests that a substantial proportion, specifically 60%, of the victims are married. In addition, 40% of the victims are unmarried. The research indicates that domestic violence is widespread among individuals of different marital circumstances, affecting both those who are married and those who are single. This emphasizes the reality that domestic violence can happen in any kind of relationship, irrespective of the victim's marital status as discussed by Mahoney (2013). To safeguard the safety and welfare of all persons, it is imperative for society to actively confront and take measures to avoid domestic violence in all forms of relationships.

This indicates that the study incorporates viewpoints from both married and unmarried women, offering valuable insights into how marital status may impact the factors being examined. By

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comparing the experiences of both married and single persons, researchers can acquire a more thorough knowledge of the factors contributing to domestic violence (Tenkorang, 2013). This can aid in identifying prevalent patterns and risk factors that may extend beyond marital status. By recognizing the widespread occurrence of domestic violence in various forms of relationships, society can strive to develop efficient ways for preventing and intervening in such cases, taking into account the distinct requirements of each person, regardless of their marital status. In order to achieve a society devoid of domestic abuse for everyone, our primary goal should be to raise awareness and provide education.

Educational Background

The majority of victims, 66.6%, have finished high school education. A smaller portion, 26.7%, have some college-level education. Only a minority, 6.7%, have educational attainment at the grade school level. Overall, the research suggests that a higher degree of education may be connected with a lower likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. This could be attributed to variables such as increased awareness of resources, better communication skills, and a stronger support network. Educational institutions need to continue to educate students on healthy relationships and empower individuals to recognize and prevent domestic violence. Additionally, offering accessible tools and assistance for victims of domestic violence, regardless of their educational background, is vital to combating this prevalent issue (Niolon & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017).

This is supported by Lloyd (2018) who implies that domestic violence impacts individuals across different levels of educational attainment, underlining the need for awareness and support services that cater to diverse educational backgrounds. By focusing on education and support services, educational institutions may play a significant role in breaking the cycle of domestic abuse. By reaching out to students of various backgrounds, these institutions may help promote a culture of awareness and prevention. Through collaboration with community organizations and advocacy groups, schools can ensure that victims of domestic abuse receive the aid and resources they need to escape violent relationships and rebuild their lives (Wilson et al., 2015). Ultimately, by taking a proactive and inclusive approach, educational institutions may make a huge effect in the battle against domestic abuse.

Family Monthly Income

The majority of victims, 73.3%, come from families with a monthly income ranging from 1000 to 3000. A smaller share, 26.7%, belongs to households with a monthly income between 3000 and 5000. Interestingly, there were no victims of domestic violence recorded from families with a monthly income above 5000. This data is supported by Anderson (2017) who implies that there may be a correlation between lower income levels and an increased chance of experiencing domestic violence. Further research is needed to examine the socio-economic elements that contribute to this trend and to develop targeted interventions to support families at risk.

Artz et al. (2014) suggests that domestic violence affects individuals from mostly moderate to lower-income homes, showing the interconnectedness of socioeconomic issues with experiences of abuse. Understanding the association between economic levels and domestic violence is vital in designing effective preventative and intervention measures. By identifying the precise characteristics inside lower-income households that contribute to an increased risk of abuse, social service providers and legislators can better address the fundamental causes of domestic violence. Additionally, offering help and resources to families in need, regardless of their income level, is crucial in breaking the cycle of violence and establishing safer communities for all persons.

Forms of Domestic Violence

Physical Violence

The most prominent kinds of physical violence encountered by victims were hitting, shoving, and grasping, with 100% frequency. Other types such as biting, restraint, choking, and attack with a weapon also occur, albeit at variable rates. The results from the study also revealed that a considerable percentage of women reported suffering more extreme types of physical violence, such as choking and attacking with a weapon. It is disturbing to see the high prevalence of these aggressive behaviors, which underscores the urgent need for intervention and support for victims of domestic abuse. Policies and initiatives must address these specific forms of violence to protect the safety and well-being of women who are in danger.

Alvarez and Bachman (2024) supported this result that physical violence emerges in numerous ways, ranging from less severe actions like hitting to more serious crimes like choking or attacking with a weapon. These findings underline the significance of offering comprehensive services and assistance to victims of domestic violence. By addressing the specific forms of abuse that women are facing, we can better protect them from harm and assist them break out from abusive circumstances. Society as a whole must take a position against domestic violence and work towards building a safer environment for all individuals (Michau et al., 2015). Together, we can work towards breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring the safety and well-being of all those affected.

Sexual Abuse

The most reported form of sexual violence is coercing sexual contact, with 53.3% frequency. Other kinds like forcing abortion and engaging in prostitution show no reported frequency in this group. It is disconcerting to discover that over half of the woman victims reported coercion for sexual intercourse as emphasized by Epstein and Goodman (2018). This report underscores the need for more awareness and resources to support victims of sexual abuse. The absence of stated frequency for forced abortion and

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engaging in prostitution may reflect underreporting or lack of acknowledgment of these forms of violence (Houghton, 2022). Further research and education are needed to address all forms of domestic abuse and provide complete care for victims.

This shows that while sexual violence is present, it may not contain all conceivable forms and particular types of sexual violence may be underreported or less prevalent in this environment (Khan et al., 2020). It is vital to acknowledge and address all forms of domestic violence to give victims the necessary resources and support. Through enhanced education and awareness, individuals can better detect and report incidents of sexual violence, as well as other forms of abuse such as forced abortion and engaging in prostitution as stated by Basile et al. (2014). By focusing light on these less recognized types of violence, we can work towards building a safer and more supportive environment for all persons affected by domestic violence. Ultimately, it is vital to continue investigating and fighting for comprehensive solutions that address the full spectrum of domestic abuse.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is particularly widespread among victims, with 100% reporting instances of intimidation and threats of harm. However, no reported frequency is revealed for isolation, which could imply either that it's not present in this sample or is not recognized or reported by the sufferers (Oram et al., 2017). Further research is needed to understand the causes behind the absence of reported frequency of isolation in this study. It is likely that victims may not have recognized certain acts as isolating or may have been afraid to report such encounters. Additionally, cultural and societal factors may have a role in determining views and reporting patterns of different forms of abuse.

Further, the data implies that psychological abuse is a persistent issue in this group, with many forms of abuse being experienced by a majority of persons. Interventions and support services must address these distinct forms of abuse to successfully aid victims in their recovery and healing process. Future research should seek to study these nuances to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge of the occurrence and consequences of psychological abuse.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is widespread, with continual criticism and verbal insults being reported by 80% or more of the victims, while humiliation got 73.3%. As mentioned by Matheson et al. (2015) this sort of emotional abuse can have long-lasting impacts on a victim's mental health and well-being. Society must acknowledge and combat emotional abuse in intimate relationships to ensure the safety and empowerment of all persons.

This shows that emotional abuse, particularly verbal hostility and insulting behavior, is a substantial aspect of the domestic violence experienced by these victims (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Society needs to give assistance and resources to persons who are enduring emotional abuse in intimate relationships. By raising awareness and supporting good communication and respect in relationships, we may work towards preventing emotional abuse and establishing a safer environment for all persons. Victims must know that they are not alone and that there are services available to help them break free from abusive situations. Together, we can work towards establishing a society where emotional abuse is not allowed and all individuals can feel safe and empowered in their relationships.

Economic Abuse

Economic abuse is ubiquitous, with the most common forms being limiting or forbidding an intimate partner from working or receiving schooling, as reported by 80% of victims. Withholding access to financial resources is also mentioned by 60% of victims. Furthermore, approximately half of the victims reported experiencing controlling behavior when it comes to their spending or access to money. This sort of economic abuse can have long-lasting impacts on a victim's financial independence and overall well-being. Support services and resources must be available for persons experiencing economic abuse in intimate relationships (Christy et al., 2022).

Postmus et al. (2020) supported the result that implies that economic control and manipulation are key parts of domestic violence experienced by these victims, undermining their financial independence and security. Victims need to have access to resources such as financial counseling, legal aid, and safe housing options to break away from the cycle of economic abuse. By offering support and knowledge, we can allow survivors to regain control over their finances and ultimately their lives. Society needs to understand the ubiquitous nature of economic abuse and take steps to avoid and handle it effectively. Only then can we properly help and protect people who are most vulnerable in personal relationships.

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Test of Difference in the Responses on the Aspects of Domestic Violence and Respondents' Profile

Table 2. Test of difference in the responses on the aspects of domestic violence experienced among women victims when analyzed according to their age

Forms of Violence	*Age*		
	Chi- Square value	*p-value @ 0.05**	*Interpretation*
Physical Violence	3.750	0.290	Not Significant
Sexual	3.147	0.369	Not Significant
Psychological Abuse	10.313*	0.016	Significant
Emotional Abuse	0.625	0.891	Not Significant
Economic Abuse	0.644	0.886	Not Significant

**p-value < 0.05 level of significance = significant; Reject H_o*
***p-value > 0.05 level of significance = not significant; Fail to Reject H_o*

As noted in Table 2, physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and economic abuse do not exhibit substantial differences in reactions based on age. However, there is a substantial variation in responses to psychological maltreatment dependent on age (p = 0.016). Individuals in the younger age group were more likely to report experiencing psychological abuse compared to those in the older age group. This study implies that age may have a role in how individuals perceive and respond to different forms of maltreatment as supported by Teicher et al. (2016). Further research is needed to understand the underlying variables that lead to this differential in responses to psychological maltreatment dependent on age.

This shows that victims of different age groups may perceive and behave differently to psychological abuse, highlighting a need for specialized interventions and support services targeting certain age demographics (Arroyo et al., 2017). By knowing how age affects the perception and response to psychological abuse, we may build more effective interventions and support systems that respond to the distinct needs of individuals in different age groups. This research underlines the need to consider age when addressing cases of abuse and providing appropriate resources for individuals impacted. By adapting our efforts to the individual needs of victims based on their age, we can better support them in overcoming the psychological impact of abuse and encouraging healing and recovery.

Cruz et al. (2022) examined the psychological effects of domestic abuse, focusing on the long-term effects on survivors' mental health. The results demonstrated the importance of including mental health services in domestic abuse intervention programs, which is consistent with a victim recovery strategy that is all-encompassing. When taken as a whole, these studies deepen our understanding of domestic violence in the Philippines and provide tailored prevention, intervention, and victim care measures that are appropriate for the particular sociocultural setting of the nation. Furthering the exploration, Rodriguez and Fernandez (2018) contribute valuable insights into the long-term consequences of psychological abuse. Their research delves into the enduring psychological impact on survivors, emphasizing the lingering trauma that often persists even after physical wounds have healed.

Table 3. Test of difference in the responses on the aspects of domestic violence experienced among women victims when analyzed according to their marital status

Forms of Violence	*Marital Status*		
	Chi- Square value	*p-value @ 0.05**	*Interpretation*
Physical Violence	0.714	0.390	Not Significant
Sexual	1.607	0.205	Not Significant
Psychological Abuse	1.111	0.292	Not Significant
Emotional Abuse	0.069	0.792	Not Significant
Economic Abuse	0.185	0.667	Not Significant

**p-value < 0.05 level of significance = significant; Reject H_o*
***p-value > 0.05 level of significance = not significant; Fail to Reject H_o*

Table 3 depicts the test of difference in the replies on the features of domestic abuse experienced among women victims when assessed according to their marital status. Responses to all forms of domestic violence do not exhibit substantial differences based on marital status. Anderson (2017) supports the result that shows that women, regardless of their marital status, are equally prone to encounter various forms of domestic violence. Governments and groups need to address this issue holistically, taking into account the experiences of all women, regardless of whether they are married or single. By offering support and services to all victims of domestic violence, we can work towards creating a safer and more equal society for everyone.

Saunders et al. (2016) show that marital status may not be a determining factor in how victims perceive or respond to various forms of domestic abuse in this study. This shows that the impact

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of domestic abuse is not restricted to individuals in typical marriage relationships, but extends to all women regardless of their relationship status. By recognizing and addressing the unique problems faced by single women who experience domestic violence, we may better support and protect all persons who are affected by this prevalent issue. It is vital to confront societal norms and preconceptions that may overlook or underestimate the experiences of unmarried women to establish a more inclusive and effective response to domestic violence.

Table 4. Test of difference in the responses on the aspects of domestic violence experienced among women victims when analyzed according to their educational attainment

Forms of Violence	*Educational Attainment*		
	Chi- Square value	*p-value @ 0.05**	*Interpretation*
Physical Violence	2.344	0.310	Not Significant
Sexual	1.942	0.379	Not Significant
Psychological Abuse	4.688	0.096	Not Significant
Emotional Abuse	0.313	0.855	Not Significant
Economic Abuse	2.083	0.353	Not Significant

**p-value < 0.05 level of significance = significant; Reject H_o*
***p-value > 0.05 level of significance = not significant; Fail to Reject H_o*

Table 4 displayed the test of difference in the replies on the features of domestic abuse experienced among women victims when assessed according to their educational attainment. Responses to physical violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, and economic abuse do not indicate significant differences based on educational attainment. However, there was a noteworthy variation in the level of support sought by women with greater levels of education compared to those with lower levels. Women with higher educational attainment were more likely to seek help from experts or support groups, whereas those with lower levels of education tended to resort to family or friends for assistance (Stolper & Walter, 2017). This data implies that education may have a role in changing how women respond to and seek help for domestic violence events.

This result is supported by Zhou et al. (2021) that educational attainment may not have a substantial impact on how victims perceive or respond to different forms of domestic violence in this environment. However, it is crucial to highlight that education is just one element that may influence a person's response to domestic abuse. Other factors, such as cultural beliefs, socio-economic status, and access to resources, may also play a key role in defining how individuals seek aid and support in cases of abuse. Therefore, it is vital for support services and interventions to take into mind the particular circumstances and needs of each individual, regardless of their level of education. By offering individualized and comprehensive help, we can better address the complex and diverse nature of domestic abuse and work towards building a safer and more supportive environment for all victims.

Table 5. Test of difference in the responses on the aspects of domestic violence experienced among women victims when analyzed according to their family monthly income

Forms of Violence	*Family Monthly Income*		
	Chi- Square value	*p-value @ 0.05**	*Interpretation*
Physical Violence	6.234*	0.013	Significant
Sexual	1.759	0.185	Not Significant
Psychological Abuse	0.085	0.770	Not Significant
Emotional Abuse	10.313*	0.001	Significant
Economic Abuse	3.636	0.057	Not Significant

**p-value < 0.05 level of significance = significant; Reject H_o*
***p-value > 0.05 level of significance = not significant; Fail to Reject H_o*

As indicated in Table 5, there are significant differences in responses to physical violence (p = 0.013) and emotional abuse (p = 0.001) based on family monthly income. Further research found that participants from lower-income families were more likely to report experiencing physical violence than those from higher-income families.

This implies that victims from households with varied financial levels may perceive and respond differently to physical violence and emotional abuse (Katz, 2016). Moreover, Gillum (2019) supported the result that victims from lower-income households might encounter more hurdles in seeking treatment or coping with the effects of physical violence and emotional abuse compared to those from higher-income households. For example, persons from lower-income homes may have restricted access to resources such as therapy, support groups, or legal aid, making it difficult for them to address and recover from the trauma of abuse. Additionally, financial restraints may prohibit victims from fleeing abusive circumstances or seeking new living arrangements. On the other side, victims from higher-income

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homes may have more options accessible to them, such as the capacity to employ a lawyer or move to a different place to escape the abuse. Overall, these discrepancies in resources and support systems underline the necessity of addressing socio-economic issues in attempts to reduce domestic violence and give aid to victims (Adams et al., 2021).

Reasons for Reluctance to Report to Police

Fifty (50) significant statements were extracted from the informants' transcripts referring directly to the research phenomena. Formulated meanings were constructed from the significant statements and arranged into cluster themes, resulting in six emergent themes with ten (10) subthemes. The emergent themes and subthemes are presented in Table 6:

Table 6. Emergent Themes and Subthemes

Emergent Themes		Subthemes
I.	Fear of Retaliation	* Physical Safety Concerns
		* Emotional or Psychological Retaliation
II.	Shame and Stigma	* Internalized Shame
		* Isolation
III.	Cultural or Religious Factors	* Traditional Gender Roles
		* Religious Doctrine
IV.	Financial Dependence	* Limited Financial Resources
V.	Minimization and Normalization	* Gaslighting
VI.	Lack of Awareness	* Misconceptions and Lack of Education
		* *Normalization* of Abuse

I. Fear of Retaliation. The first theme delves into the victims' fear that reporting the abuse could lead to further violence or retaliation from their abuser, particularly if they are financially dependent on the abuser or have children together.

a. Physical Safety Concerns: Victims may fear for their physical safety if they report the abuse, especially if the abuser has threatened violence or has a history of violent behavior. Informant 1 stated that:

> Mahadlok man ko moreport sir kay basin musamot ang iyang pagkaviolente (SS1:P1). *I'm afraid to report sir because his violence may worsen.*

The statement of Informant 1 was supported by the statement of Informant 2 which stated that:

> Mahadlok man ko anang sumbong2 sir kay ka ng makulatahan ko, dili lang sa akong bana pati sa iyang pamilya (SS8:P2). *I'm afraid to complain, sir, because I'll be beaten by my husband, not only him, but also his family.*

b. Emotional or Psychological Retaliation: Fear of emotional or psychological retaliation, such as threats to harm loved ones or manipulation tactics, can also prevent victims from reporting.

> Mahadlok ko musumbong sir kay mahadlok ko ug pasakitan niya akong mga anak (SS35:P7). *I am afraid to report sir because I am afraid that he will hurt my children*

The responses from the informants shed light on the intricate dynamics of fear of retaliation within abusive relationships, particularly highlighting concerns regarding physical safety and emotional well-being.

In the physical safety concerns, both informants express a deep-seated fear regarding the potential escalation of violence if they were to report the abuse. Informant 1 explicitly mentions the fear that reporting could worsen the abuser's violent tendencies. This fear is rational and rooted in the reality that many abusers retaliate when their control is challenged. Similarly, Informant 2 shares the apprehension of facing physical harm not only from her husband but also from his family. This illustrates the pervasive nature of fear within abusive dynamics, where the threat of violence extends beyond the immediate abuser to their social circle.

Moreover, in the emotional or psychological retaliation, informant 3's response delves into the emotional and psychological repercussions of reporting abuse. Her fear stems from concerns about her children's safety, indicating a broader scope of vulnerability beyond herself. This fear is common among victims, as abusers often use children as leverage to maintain control or inflict emotional harm. By targeting the well-being of loved ones, abusers instill a sense of helplessness and isolation in their victims, making it even more challenging to seek help.

Overall, these responses underscore the multifaceted nature of fear of retaliation within abusive relationships. Victims face not only the immediate threat of physical harm but also the complex dynamics of emotional manipulation and coercion. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing effective interventions and support systems that prioritize victim safety and empowerment. By addressing the systemic barriers that perpetuate fear and silence, communities can create a safer environment for victims to seek help and break free from the cycle of abuse. Furthermore, studies by Davis et al. (2020) delve into the intersectionality of factors contributing to physical abuse, including the role of substance abuse, economic stressors, and societal norms.

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II. Shame and Stigma: There's a societal stigma attached to being a victim of domestic violence, which can lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment, or self-blame. Victims may worry about being judged or not being believed if they come forward.

a. Internalized Shame: Victims may internalize societal stigma and blame themselves for the abuse, feeling ashamed or unworthy of help. Informant 15 stressed out that:

> Dayon maulaw pud ko sir, sala ni nako sir, huyang mangud ko kaayo, wala koy gamit kay baye raman, dali ra pasakitan. (SS49:P15). *Then I'm also ashamed sir, it's my fault sir, I'm very weak, I'm useless because I'm a woman, I'm easily hurt.*

The idea that the victim internalizes the societal stigma is supported by the statement of Informant 1 that stated:

> Maulaw pud ko kay mao to libakon dayon ka kay ginakulata ka sa imong bana. (SS2:P1). *I am also humiliated. After all, you'll be backbite immediately because your husband hits you.*

b. Isolation: Fear of being ostracized by friends, family, or the community can lead to feelings of isolation and further reluctance to seek help. The statement of the informant 7 stated that:

> Maulaw pud ko sir basin ang akong mga amigo, family ug ang community dili kadawat sa akoa nga gisumbong akong bana sa pulis (SS36:P7). *I am also ashamed sir, maybe my friends, family and the community will not accept me that I reported my husband to the police.*

Another informant shared her experience of being isolated herself because of her husband that stated:

> Kana ra sir, mahadlok dayon maulaw ana rajud, dayon maulaw man ka sa palibot ug moreport ka (SS24:P4). *That's all, sir; you'll be afraid, embarrassed, and ashamed of the community if you report him.*

The responses from the informants provide poignant insights into the pervasive shame and stigma experienced by victims of domestic violence, which often act as significant barriers to seeking help and support.

In internalized shame, both informants articulate a profound sense of shame and self-blame, reflecting the internalization of the societal stigma associated with being a victim of domestic violence. Informant 15's statement vividly captures this internal struggle, where she blames herself for the abuse, feeling inadequate and unworthy of assistance due to her gender. This internalized shame is reinforced by Informant 1, who highlights the additional humiliation and judgment faced by victims when their experiences are belittled or gossiped about within their social circles. These responses underscore the complex interplay between individual perceptions and societal attitudes, which contribute to victims' reluctance to disclose their experiences.

Furthermore, informants 7 and the other informant share their apprehension of being isolated or ostracized by friends, family, or the broader community if they were to seek help or report the abuse. This fear of rejection exacerbates feelings of shame and reinforces the reluctance to disclose their experiences. Informant 7's concern about potential rejection from her social support network highlights the profound impact of societal attitudes on victims' sense of belonging and safety. Similarly, the other informant's fear of community judgment and ostracization further emphasizes the isolating effect of domestic violence, where victims feel trapped between the fear of abuse and the fear of societal condemnation.

These responses concluded by underscoring the profound and pervasive impact of shame and stigma on victims of domestic violence. By recognizing and addressing these systemic barriers, communities can create more supportive and empathetic environments that empower victims to seek help, challenge societal norms, and break free from the cycle of abuse. It's essential to foster a culture of empathy, understanding, and accountability to dismantle the stigma associated with domestic violence and promote healing and resilience among survivors.

III. Cultural or Religious Factors: In some cultures or communities, there may be strong social or religious norms that discourage women from speaking out against their husbands or partners, even in cases of abuse.

a. Traditional Gender Roles: Expectations tied to traditional gender roles may discourage victims, particularly women, from challenging their husbands' authority or speaking out against abuse. The statement of informant 10 depicted that:

> Mahadlok ko musumbong sir baye biya ko sir, walay igong kusog (SS40:P10). *I'm afraid to report sir, since I'm only a woman, I don't have enough strength.*

The experiences of Informant 15 was still tied to the traditional gender roles, which stated:

> Naa mangud pud sa kultura namo sir nga dili maayo musupak ta sa atong bana labi na gyud ang pagsumbong sa pulis (SS50:P15). *There is also something in our culture, sir, that it is not good to disobey our husband, especially to report to the police.*

b. Religious Doctrine: Interpretations of religious texts or teachings may reinforce beliefs that submission to a spouse's authority is a moral duty, even in the face of abuse. Informant 10 further stated that:

> Naa mangud pud sa bible sir nga mupaubos rajud ta sa atong bana nga bisan ug gi-abuso naka, paubos ra gihapon kaysa mkasala ka sa sugo sa Ginoo (SS41:P10). *There is also a word in the bible, sir, that we should always humble ourselves to our husbands, even if he has been abused us, we should still humble ourselves rather than commit sin against God's commandment.*

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The experiences of informant 3 supported the idea of religious doctrine that restrained the informant from reporting to the police, she stated that:

> Makasab-an pud ko sa akong pamilya kay kasal naman gud dili maayo tan-awon sa palibot ug sa Ginoo nga ngbuwag kay gisumbong ang bana (SS16:P3). *My family will become enraged because we are already married, which does not bring a good image to the community or God that we have broken our vows, as I have reported him to the police.*

The responses from the informants shed light on the significant influence of cultural and religious factors in perpetuating silence and submission among victims of domestic violence. In traditional gender roles, informants 10 and 15 both highlight the impact of traditional gender roles on their reluctance to speak out against their husbands' abuse. The expectation of female subservience and the perception of women as lacking in strength contribute to a sense of powerlessness and fear among victims. Informant 10's statement reflects the internalization of societal norms that prioritize male authority and diminish women's agency, leading to a profound fear of challenging this dynamic. In her work, Moraga (2018) highlights how traditional gender norms contribute to the normalization of abuse in Filipino households by sustaining domestic violence.

Similarly, Informant 15's reference to cultural expectations underscores the pervasive influence of social norms that dictate women's obedience and submission within marital relationships. This is supported by the study of Santos (2018) conducted a thorough analysis that concentrated on the sociocultural elements affecting domestic violence in the Philippines, stressing the influence of deeply embedded patriarchal norms on power dynamics in homes. This study emphasized the significance of cultural sensitivity in creating successful preventative and intervention plans.

Moreover, religious doctrine discusses the response of Informants 10 and 3 articulating how interpretations of religious teachings reinforce beliefs about marital submission, even in the face of abuse. The reference to biblical principles emphasizes the moral duty perceived by some to prioritize obedience to a spouse over personal safety or well-being. Informant 10's assertion that humility towards one's husband is paramount, regardless of the abuse suffered, illustrates the profound influence of religious beliefs on victims' decision-making processes. Likewise, Informant 3's fear of familial and religious repercussions highlights the internal conflict faced by victims torn between their religious obligations and the imperative to seek help and protection from abuse.

These responses highlight the complex interplay between cultural norms, religious beliefs, and individual agency within the context of domestic violence. Victims navigate a web of societal expectations and moral obligations that often reinforce silence and submission, making it challenging to break free from abusive relationships. Addressing these cultural and religious factors requires a nuanced approach that respects diverse belief systems while advocating for the rights and safety of victims. By challenging harmful ideologies and promoting empowerment, communities can create more supportive environments where victims feel empowered to seek help and assert their rights without fear of judgment or condemnation. In examining the cultural dynamics of psychological abuse, the work by Martinez and Santos (2018) uncovers the intersectionality of this form of abuse. The study recognizes how cultural factors and societal norms contribute to the manifestation and perception of psychological abuse within diverse demographic contexts

IV. Financial Dependence: Many victims of domestic violence are economically dependent on their abusers, which can make it difficult for them to leave or report the abuse without risking their financial security.

a. Limited Financial Resources: Victims may lack access to financial resources of their own, making it difficult to leave or report the abuse without facing economic hardship. Informant 2 stated that:

> Nagsalig raman gud pud ko sa iyaa sir, wala mn pud koy trabaho (SS12:P2). *I also rely financially to him sir, I don't have a job either.*

The response is also supported by informant 5 when she said that:

> Dayon nagsalig raka sa imong bana, ana (SS26:P5). *I rely on my husband for financial support.*

The responses from the informants highlight the significant impact of financial dependence on victims of domestic violence, which often acts as a barrier to seeking help or leaving abusive situations. In limited financial resources, both informants 2 and 5 express reliance on their abusers for financial support, reflecting a common scenario where victims lack independent means of financial stability. Informant 2's acknowledgment of relying solely on her abuser for financial sustenance underscores the precarious position many victims find themselves in, where economic dependence becomes a means of control for the abuser. Without access to alternative sources of income or employment, victims face heightened vulnerability and limited options for escaping abusive situations. Similarly, Informant 5's statement emphasizes the pervasive nature of financial dependence within abusive dynamics, where victims may feel trapped or unable to assert their autonomy due to economic constraints. A pivotal study by Gomez and Rivera (2018) delves into the nuanced forms of psychological abuse, unraveling the covert tactics employed by perpetrators. From gaslighting and manipulation to isolation, the study sheds light on the insidious methods that erode victims' mental well-being, emphasizing the need to recognize and address these covert aspects of abuse.

The response accentuates the intersectionality of domestic violence and economic insecurity, highlighting the systemic barriers that victims face in seeking help or leaving abusive

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relationships. Addressing financial dependence requires comprehensive support systems that provide victims with access to resources, employment opportunities, and financial empowerment initiatives. By advocating for economic independence and breaking down financial barriers, communities can empower victims to reclaim their agency and break free from the cycle of abuse. This is explained by Reyes and Castillo (2021) which explored how economic factors contribute to the continuation of domestic violence. Their research addressed financial dependence and economic inequality because these issues significantly increase victims' susceptibility.

V. Minimization and Normalization: Victims may minimize the severity of the abuse or rationalize their abuser's behavior, believing that it's not "that bad" or that they somehow deserve the treatment they're receiving.

a. Gaslighting: Abusers may manipulate victims into doubting their own perceptions of reality, leading them to believe that the abuse is not as severe as it truly is. Informant 12 expressed in her statement that:

> Naanad nako sir, kaya raman pud nako sir, bun-og raman, dayon wla mangud koy trabaho mao masuko siya nako, nagasalig rko pirmi sir (SS44:P12). I'm used to it sir, I can handle it *too*, sir, It's just bruises, then I don't have a job so he gets angry with me, I always rely on him, sir.

Informant 9 added and expressed her statement about doubting herself that she can't do anything without her husband because she is dependent:

> Dili nako kaya sir kay nagsalig ra ko sa iyaa (SS39:P9). *I can't do it sir because I only* depend *him*

The responses from the informants shed light on the insidious nature of minimization and normalization within abusive relationships, where victims downplay the severity of the abuse and rationalize their abuser's behavior. As for gaslighting, informants 12 and 9 both illustrate how victims may internalize and normalize abuse, influenced by manipulative tactics such as gaslighting. Informant 12's statement reflects a disturbing acceptance of abuse, where she minimizes the severity of physical harm by rationalizing it as mere bruises. This normalization of violence is compounded by her financial dependence on her abuser, which further undermines her sense of agency and reinforces her reliance on him. Similarly, Informant 9 expresses a sense of helplessness and self-doubt, attributing her inability to take action to her dependency on her husband. This internalization of dependency reflects the psychological manipulation often employed by abusers to maintain control over their victims, leaving them feeling powerless and unable to break free from the cycle of abuse.

The responses of the informants emphasize the complex dynamics of psychological manipulation and self-blame experienced by victims of domestic violence. Gaslighting tactics undermine victims' perceptions of reality, leading them to question their own experiences and diminish the severity of the abuse they endure. Addressing minimization and normalization requires not only providing victims with support and validation but also challenging societal attitudes that perpetuate victim-blaming and minimize the impact of abuse. By empowering victims to recognize and confront abusive behavior, communities can foster environments of empathy, understanding, and accountability, where survivors feel validated and supported in seeking help and reclaiming their autonomy. Cruz et al. (2022) examined the psychological effects of domestic abuse, focusing on the long-term effects on survivors' mental health. The results demonstrated the importance of including mental health services in domestic abuse intervention programs, which is consistent with a victim recovery strategy that is all-encompassing. When taken as a whole, these studies deepen our understanding of domestic violence in the Philippines and provide tailored prevention, intervention, and victim care measures that are appropriate for the particular sociocultural setting of the nation.

VI. Lack of Awareness: Some victims may not recognize that what they're experiencing is domestic violence, especially if it doesn't involve physical abuse. They may not realize that emotional, psychological, or financial abuse is just as harmful and constitutes domestic violence.

a. Misconceptions and Lack of Education. Victims may have misconceptions about what constitutes domestic violence, believing that it only involves physical violence and not recognizing other forms such as emotional or financial abuse. Limited education or awareness about healthy relationships and the dynamics of abuse may prevent victims from identifying their experiences as domestic violence. Informant 13 expressed that:

> Makuyawan ko pirmi sir pero dili nako sya isumbong kay wala ko kabalo ug asa sir dayon kaya raman pud nako iyang panakit (SS45:P13). *I'm always scared sir but I don't report him because I don't know where to report, then, I can handle all the pain sir.*

Informant 6 supported the misconception and lack of education as the reason why she failed to report such incidents to the police and said:

> Wala pud ko nasayod nga domestic violence na siya sir kay naanad naman ko nga ug mutingog singkahan ko niya dayon sampalungon maong maghilom nalang ko sir (SS32:P6). *I didn't even know that it was domestic violence, sir, because I'm used to be scolded and got slap, so I'll just keep quiet, sir.*

b. Normalization of Abuse. Victims may have grown up in environments where abuse was normalized, making it difficult for them to recognize abusive behavior in their relationships. Informant 14 stated that:

> Naanad na ko ana sir kay in-ana mangud ang among mga silingan, ako pong mama ginakulata pud sa akong papa sauna (SS47:P14). *I'm used to that, sir, because my*

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neighbors were the same, and my mom is also beaten by my father.

The responses from the informants highlight the pervasive lack of awareness surrounding domestic violence, which often leads to victims failing to recognize and report abuse. In misconceptions and lack of education, both informants 13 and 6 express a lack of understanding about what constitutes domestic violence, attributing their reluctance to report to a lack of awareness and education. Informant 13's statement reflects a common misconception that domestic violence only involves physical harm, overlooking the equally damaging effects of emotional and psychological abuse. This lack of knowledge about available resources and support services further compounds her sense of isolation and helplessness. Similarly, Informant 6's assertion that she didn't recognize the abusive nature of her relationship due to normalization underscores the need for comprehensive education and awareness initiatives that challenge misconceptions and empower individuals to identify and address abusive behavior. Advocates and scholars alike have focused on the urgent social issue of domestic abuse in the Philippines. The frequency of domestic abuse in the nation is shown by a study by Rodriguez (2015), which also highlights the difficulties victims have in obtaining assistance because of societal and cultural barriers.

On top of that, as for the normalization of abuse, informant 14's response highlights the normalization of abuse within certain cultural or familial contexts, where violence is accepted as a norm rather than recognized as a form of domestic violence. Growing up in an environment where abuse was prevalent, she may have internalized these normalized behaviors, making it difficult for her to recognize the abusive dynamics in her relationships. This normalization perpetuates a cycle of violence, where victims may minimize or justify their experiences, further hindering their ability to seek help and break free from abusive situations.

I concluded that the responses underscore the critical importance of education and awareness in addressing domestic violence. By challenging misconceptions, providing accurate information, and fostering a culture of empathy and support, communities can empower individuals to recognize and respond to abusive behavior effectively. Additionally, efforts to address the normalization of abuse within cultural or familial contexts are essential for breaking the cycle of violence and promoting healthy relationships based on mutual respect and dignity.

5.0. CONCLUSION

The study's findings highlight the extensive occurrence of several types of domestic violence, including physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and economic control. Victims frequently abstain from reporting owing to apprehension of vengeance, internalized guilt, cultural obstacles, and financial dependence, which intensifies their vulnerability and sustains cycles of abuse. Although age and wealth affect victims' responses, educational attainment and marital status do not exhibit notable variations in the perception or handling of domestic abuse. These findings underscore the pressing necessity for comprehensive interventions to eliminate the cultural, psychological, and economic obstacles hindering victims from obtaining assistance and protection.

6.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The LGU should enhance public education on domestic violence, focusing on physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Awareness campaigns should include workshops, seminars, and collaborations with schools, workplaces, and local organizations.
2. The LGU should enhance protection mechanisms and legal assistance for victims of domestic violence, including strengthening VAW desks, providing specialized training for local law enforcement, and offering legal assistance programs to help victims navigate the judicial system and obtain protection.
3. The LGU should develop programs supporting women's livelihood and economic empowerment, including skills training, job placement services, and financial literacy workshops, and establish partnerships with local businesses to create job opportunities for victims.
4. The LGU should collaborate with faith-based organizations, academe, and cultural leaders to challenge harmful narratives of domestic violence, promote community programs, and develop interventions to educate families and religious groups on the dangers of domestic violence.
5. Use Technology-based (Smart) crime reporting programs/Applications
    a. **Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Systems**:
    CAD systems help law enforcement agencies manage calls, dispatch officers, and track incidents in real time. Many CAD systems are integrated with GPS to help track the location of officers and provide a quick response to incidents.
    b. **Crime Mapping and Analysis Software**:
    allow agencies to visualize crime data geographically. These tools help in identifying crime hotspots, predicting trends, and developing targeted policing strategies.
    c. **Mobile Crime Reporting Apps**:
    mobile apps that allow citizens to report crimes anonymously, submit tips, and receive updates.
    d. **Next Generation of Hotlines (Computer-aided Local Hotline 911)**
    This upgraded system allows the public to send texts, images, and videos to emergency services, improving the ability of law enforcement to assess situations remotely.

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