

Understanding the lived experiences of Filipino male victims of domestic violence



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Abstract

The public's understanding of domestic violence has considerably increased over time. Discussion on this social issue tends to focus on the experiences of women victims, particularly in patriarchal societies. For instance, in the Philippines, there is still little research on the experiences of male victims of domestic violence. This present study, conducted in the province of Palawan, Philippines, explored the lived experiences of five (5) male victims of domestic violence. It sought to explore their struggles, coping strategies, and disclosure through phenomenological inquiry. Thematic analysis of the participants' narratives revealed that their experiences involved more emotional (negative self-image, gaslighting, feelings of betrayal, and feelings of abandonment) and social abuse (social discomfort and coercive control) rather than physical violence (physical aggression). Participants also reported experiencing psychological abuse, which eventually led to self-destructive thoughts. They identified various forms of problem-focused coping (spiritual belief, optimism, family, responsibility, and seeking advice) and emotion-focused coping (disregard and avoidance, temperance, indifference, an egotistical attitude, and alcohol and leisure). It helped them deal with the struggles they identified. Confidentiality issues, shame and embarrassment, and financial constraints were the primary barriers to help-seeking. Meanwhile, the disclosure was driven by the desire for reconciliation, establishing evidence, and alleviating emotional burdens. The lived experiences of male victims gave a more comprehensive array of meaning to the concept of domestic violence, providing insights that promote inclusivity to the welfare of male victims.

Keywords

intimate partner violence, violence against men, female perpetrators, abused men

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1. Introduction

The United Nations (2021) defined domestic violence as any act committed within a relationship that aims to control or dominate the partner's welfare. It is an act of abuse that compromises the other person's



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physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of well-being. Domestic abuse can be experienced by everyone, regardless of their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, and culture (Sous Gant, 2002). However, when we speak of domestic violence in Filipino culture, the victims that come to mind are usually women. The existing cases of domestic violence having male victims have garnered little attention from the public as it was deemed unconventional. Actions such as slaps, punches, and pushes were assumed as shallow antics of their partner, not to be taken seriously (Morgan & Wells, 2016). Furthermore, men are referred to as "under the saya (skirt)," "*takusa*" – short for "*takot sa asawa*" (afraid of wife), or "*asthmatic*" ("*asma*" or ask my wife) if they must obtain permission from their wives first before doing what they want. Due to the Filipino culture's constrained ideas of gender, men are conditioned not to express their sentiments or consider themselves as victims. Men may hesitate to speak out about their problems for fear of dismissal (Morgan & Wells, 2016). Stereotypical insights into masculinity and recurrent cultural stigma associated with domestic violence negatively affect male victims' self-image and hinder help-seeking (Barkhuizen, 2015; Linder & Widh, 2014). Male victims frequently acquire negative and adverse reactions following victimization, with a sense of humiliation afterward (Javaid, 2017). They usually feel that no one will listen to them and that no treatment will help them understand the abuse they experienced (Woodyard, 2019). Due to the internalized stigma, male victims usually suffer in silence with reluctance to seek help.

These cases sparked the fascination of the researchers to study the lived experiences of male victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their female partners. Although there were very few reported cases nationwide, this does not necessarily convey the non-existent plight of the victims. Instead, this fact is a sufficient reason for pursuing studies like this. This study aimed to shed light on issues encountered by male victims that stereotypically lie in the shadows of society. The findings of this study can contribute to bridging the gap from previous literature about domestic violence, which heavily tackles the cases of women. Further, this study will substantially contribute to the dearth of studies about Palaweño male victims of domestic violence. Aside from understanding their experiences, this study hopes to strengthen the resiliency of the male victims and promote healthy coping strategies among them.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

This research study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach that is appropriate for describing and interpreting the lived experiences of male victims of domestic abuse. Qualitative research aims to investigate, understand, and analyze social phenomena. It is directed at understanding participants' experiences and perceptions of what worked and did not (Creswell, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Pope & Mays, 1995). Furthermore, a phenomenological study was used to define and decide the facets of a phenomenon to include the participants' thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Moreover, according to contemporary scientists, the term is now used more broadly to denote the study of an individual's perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This design is beneficial for gathering fuller evidence and a detailed picture of issues, instances, or experiences.

2.2. Participant Recruitment and Selection

Due to the unique nature of the experience explored in this study, the researchers used purposive sampling to select participants. This type of non-probability sampling is appropriate when looking for subjects that fit a specific set of criteria. This is necessary for a phenomenological study wherein all participants should have similar experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012). To qualify as a participant, the individual must be at least 25 years old, self-identified as a victim of domestic abuse, and experienced the abuse for at least a year, perpetrated by their current or former female partner (common-law union, girlfriend, spouse, or mother of their children). The basis of the age qualification is the capacity for reflective thinking necessary for this phenomenological study. According to John Dewey's theory on reflective thinking, individuals develop the capacity for reflective thinking at age 20-25. This pertains to logical thinking that involves active and careful evaluation of held beliefs and experiences.

This enabled the person to understand implications and draw inferences from previous experiences. The individual is expected to have already developed this capacity beyond 25. This criterion was based on a study conducted by Joseph-Edwards and Wallace (2020), which studied a similar phenomenon. A total of five male participants were gathered. This number was deemed sufficient for this study as Creswell (2012) stated that in a phenomenological study, the number of participants can be between two and 25.

To gather qualified participants for the study, the researchers primarily utilized social media to call for participants. The researchers also coordinated with agencies like the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) and Municipal Social Welfare and Department Office (MSWDO) to identify male victims of domestic violence. Prospects were initially reached through social messaging applications or the contact numbers they provided. Then, the participants affirmed their willingness to participate in the study via email, chat, or text message. Consent forms were sent through their emails for signing. Relevant information was also verbally discussed in the first virtual session.

2.3. Data Collection

Data was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic (September to November 2021). Because of this, several considerations had to be made about the health-related protocols. Although researchers recognize the value of face-to-face interactions, they put the utmost importance on the participants' health and welfare. Participants were informed that they could decide whether the interview session would be conducted face-to-face or virtually. The limitations and possible hindrances with virtual setup were also discussed with them as part of the informed consent process. Overall, four to six sessions (a combination of face-to-face interactions and virtual meetings) were conducted for each participant.

The participants were interviewed based on the validated semi-structured interview guide questionnaire divided into five parts. The validators were composed of registered psychometricians and psychologists. The flexible semi-structured design allowed researchers to ask follow-up questions depending on the participants' narration. The first part explored the participants' profiles, which were used to describe the characteristics of the participants. The second part inquired about the struggles they experienced and their impact on their physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The third part contains questions about their coping strategies, mainly how they handled the impacts of the abuse they experienced. Finally, the last part investigated the factors affecting the disclosure of their experiences. All the questions were written in English with translations in Filipino.

The schedule and duration of the interview entirely relied on the participants' availability. Each session lasted about 45 to 60 minutes. During face-to-face sessions, only two researchers were present in the interview room to avoid overcrowding the participants. One researcher was responsible for notetaking and asking the participants; the other was responsible for recording the interview. The researchers also took turns asking questions and taking notes, considering the natural flow of the conversation.

The participants answered in a language they were comfortable with – English or Filipino. After that, the researchers elaborated on their answers by asking them follow-up questions. In instances wherein the participant continued to share his experiences, the duration ran continuously longer than expected. After each interview, the researchers asked the participants if they had further questions or clarifications for their interviewers.

For additional information, the researchers also consulted Law Enforcement Agencies, such as Barangay Halls, Police Departments, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and City Social Welfare and Development (CSWD), for any documents or reported cases filed by the participants. In



addition, the researchers also visited other family members and neighbors of the participants to ask questions about the participants and validate their narratives. All these supplemental processes were consented to by the participants.

By the end of each interview, the researchers asked the participants if there was any information that they had not yet disclosed. This gave the participant a chance to reflect on the interview sessions and decide whether to provide material that he believed was significant but was not fully addressed by the interview questions. Then, the researchers informed the participants of the subsequent phases in the research process. The participants also underwent a debriefing session to ensure that any emotional distress, if present, was reconciled after the interview. Subsequently, after the data analysis, the researchers conducted post-validation to verify the participants' statements and confirm whether the researchers' interpretation of their answers reflected their authentic experiences.

Sample interview questions for the research question "What are the struggles encountered by the male victims of domestic violence perpetrated by females?" are: Can you tell us something about your experiences with domestic violence? How long have you experienced the abuse? How often do you experience the abuse? What are the effects of the abuse on you? What are the possible reasons or situations that may have caused the abuse? How did you react/respond to the abuse? How did you handle/deal with the abuse? What are your thoughts whenever you are subjected to the abuse?

For the research question "How do men cope with their lived experiences of domestic violence perpetrated by females?" the interview questions are: After the abuse happened, what do you usually do? What did you feel about the abuse? How did you respond to that feeling? How did you handle the aftermath of the abuse?

For the research question "What are the factors affecting the process of disclosure among male victims of domestic violence in terms of (a) barriers in help-seeking and (b) interventions and support?" the interview questions are: Have you decided to seek help from other people outside your relationship? If yes, whom and how did you share your experience? If it is your family or friends, how did they react to your experience? What encouraged you to seek help? If not, why? If not, how would they react to you being the victim instead of the female party involved? What are the reasons why you did not disclose it to anyone? Did you report your victimization to any law enforcement agencies? If yes, what is the reason why you decided to seek help or support? If yes, how did you experience their reaction? If not, why?

2.4. Data Analysis

The initial step in data analysis involved extracting transcriptions of participants' narratives from the audio recordings. The data was transcribed in a document format. The analytical process was divided into two phases: thematic analysis and narrative analysis. First, narratives discussing the same topic are organized in a table. This process revealed the initial subthemes that emerged from the data. Researchers then developed shorthand labels or codes to describe each emerging subtheme. Subthemes were organized under the major themes of the study through deductive-oriented thematic analysis. This thematic analysis approach allows researchers to dissect data according to the research problems or theoretical interests being investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was suitable for organizing data corresponding to the participants' struggles, coping, and factors affecting disclosure. Since this study utilized a phenomenological approach, narrative analysis was valuable in uncovering the underlying ideologies embedded in the participants' narratives. The combination of thematic and narrative analysis was valuable in seeking out the reality from the participants' narratives of their experiences and feelings and producing an in-depth description of the phenomenon under inquiry. In presenting the data, researchers used verbatim statements of the participants to support the findings. The narratives that give the best picture of the discussed subtheme were chosen accordingly. Also, the researchers considered choosing narratives from different participants – not to use one participant's statements repeatedly – to ensure representation. The statements were also translated into English.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of the Participants

Table 1 shows the profile of the participants, concealing their real names to ensure confidentiality. The participants were identified with code names they had chosen for themselves, their age, sex, and a brief narrative about their lives.

Table 1.
Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant	Age	Employment Situation	Housing Loc.	Civil Status (with the perpetrator)	Relationship Length	Number of Children
Bhoe Thae Khao (BTK)	38	Employed	City	Married	17 years	2
June	47	Employed	City	Cohabitation	17 years	5
Piolo	58	Employed	Taytay	Married	18 years	5
Kris	48	Employed	Taytay	Married	22 years	4
Rawi	68	Employed	City	Married	24 years	5

The table above lists relevant information regarding the five male participants of the study. Their identities are concealed through a codename. Their age ranges from 38-68 years old. All of them are currently employed. Three of the five participants reside in the city proper of Puerto Princesa, while two others live in Taytay, three to four hours away from the city. Only one among the participants is not married. Their relationships with their respective partners range from 17-24 years. All of them are fathers to several children.

Bhoe Thae Khao (BTK) is a 38-year-old married man. He is a resident of Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, and is currently working as a police officer. He is married to his partner, but they have been separated for almost two years and three months after living together for 17 years. His two children are all now in the custody of his partner. BTK experienced repeated and persistent verbal abuse from her wife when they were still living together. He also reported being hit or slapped at least once a year.

June is 47 years old, unmarried, and a resident of Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. June has been cohabiting with his live-in partner for 17 years. They have five children. He worked for almost 12 years and eventually ventured into a food-cart business. His partner and their children now manage their small business. He experienced being hit, slapped, or kicked once a year and endured verbal abuse from his partner.

Piolo is a 58-year-old converted Muslim and a resident of Taytay, Palawan. Piolo was with his abusive wife for 18 years and had five children. He married his wife through a civil wedding. Still, the Registrar's Office of the Municipality of Taytay did not formally recognize it because of the conflict with his wife's former marriage. Piolo experienced two years of emotional violence and later ended his relationship with his wife because of the psychological abuse he experienced from her and his friend in the form of adultery. He is an ambulance driver in a public hospital and is happily married to his second wife in Islam.



Kris is 48 years old, married, and a resident of Taytay, Palawan. He lived together with his wife for 22 years. He experienced emotional and psychological violence from his wife for two years before she ended their relationship to “find herself.” His wife eventually found a new partner, leaving Kris a single parent to his three children, his grandchild, and his wife’s child with another man.

Rawi is 68 years old, married, and a resident of Puerto Princesa City. He lived together with his former wife for 24 years. They have five children. He endured two years of emotional abuse before marking an end to their marriage due to his wife’s infidelity. He struggled with his vices after their separation but later found another partner in life with whom he currently lives with. He now works in Aborlan, Palawan, without any connection with his children and former wife.

3.2. Theme 1: Struggles Experienced

Physical violence is a common issue in domestic violence. In this study, male victims also reported experiencing physical aggression perpetrated by their female partners. This included striking them with objects in the household, such as scissors. These experiences of physical abuse undermined not only their physical but also their emotional well-being, leading them to experience a negative self-image characterized by feelings of humiliation, low self-esteem, emotional pain, betrayal, and gaslighting, as shown by the findings of this study. This is congruent with the study of Javaid (2017), which stated that male victims frequently acquire negative and adverse reactions following victimization of physical and emotional abuse. Those experiences cause them to feel alienated and ashamed in society. They eventually degrade themselves, questioning the purpose of their lives. However, unlike women, males who have been through traumatic situations tend to limit their emotionality (Levant & Wong, 2017). This means that the impacts of domestic violence on their well-being are usually covert. Lysova et al. (2010) also found that male victims experience domestic violence in varied ways. Apart from the physical violence, they also suffer mentally due to victim-blaming, financial exploitation, seclusion, and intimidation by their partners. Being threatened with losing contact with their children is also a common experience among them. This study presented the struggles encountered by the male victims in the physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects.

Table 2.
Struggles Experienced by the Participants

Struggles Experienced	
Physical	Physical aggression
Emotional	Negative self-image Gaslighting Feelings of betrayal Feelings of abandonment
Social	Social discomfort Coercive control behavior
Psychological	Self-destructive thoughts

Table 2 shows the emergent themes from the participants’ narratives. This is based on the theoretical premise that domestic violence has physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects. According to the participants’ narratives, emotional struggles were the most prevalent among these aspects.

Subtheme 1.1: Physical Struggles

Male victims suffered from physical violence in the form of physical aggression perpetrated by their female partners.

Physical aggression

Participants in this study revealed they were slapped, punched, kicked, and thrown with scissors. Some instances resulted in minor injuries that needed medical treatment.

Tapos 'pag nag-away kami, kalmot ng likod, kalmot ng leeg, palo ang likod... Mag-inom ako papaluin nang biglaan. [Then 'when we fight, she would scrape my back, my neck, and strike my back ... If I drink, she will beat me suddenly.] – June

Actually, *marami eh. Nandoon yung, pinaka-worst na lang siguro yung binato ako ng gunting at natusok ako sa likod. Maliban sa mga pasimpleng sampal, mga suntok, yun (pagbato sa akin ng gunting) na yung pinaka-worst.* [Actually, there were a lot of those. Aside from slaps, punches, the worst was when she threw scissors at me, which wounded my back.] – BTK

These narratives reveal that men also experience physical violence within the home. However, most of them tend to endure and deflate these experiences. Participants focused more on the emotional aspect of the abuse they experienced.

Subtheme 1.2: Emotional Struggles

Male victims typically experience unfavorable emotional reactions due to their experience of being a victim of domestic violence. Results show that negative self-image, feelings of betrayal, gaslighting, and feelings of abandonment contribute to the emotional abuse experienced by male victims.

Negative self-image

The domestic violence committed by their female partners made them feel explicitly humiliated. It affected the way they view themselves as a man and a professional. Some of the participants shared how shameful those experiences were for them.

Nakaka-degrade siya ('yung pang-aabuso) ng propesyon. [It is degrading (the domestic violence) towards my profession.] – BTK

Minsan tingin ko sa sarili ko, iniisip ko sa sarili ko, 'Ano ba tong nag-asawa ako para saktan ako? Nanay ko parang hindi ako nasaktan nung maliit pa ako ha.' [Sometimes I think 'Did I get married just to get trounced like that?' I never experienced that from my mom when I was a kid.] - June

Una, parang nawalan ako ng pag-asa sa buhay kasi siya ang inaasahan kong katuwang ng aking mga anak kapag wala ako diba? [First of all, it was like I lost my hope in life, because I trust that I could rely on her in helping my children if I am not around.] - Kris

Sasabihan nya ako na wala akong pakinabang. Ano daw klaseng ama ako. [She told me that I am worthless and questioned my father role.] – Rawi



Gaslighting

Participants also shared how difficult it was to express their feelings about the situation. They felt voiceless during arguments because their partners claimed to be more rational. Their pleas were often blocked, and they were blamed for their reactions.

Yung 'pag tinutuwid ko ba sya, parang galit pa sya sa'yo. Kasi hindi sya magpatalo eh. Kung kanya, kanya. Kahit mali sya, sya pa rin ang tama. [She gets mad every time I correct her. She does not want to lose an argument. She is quite persistent even if she's wrong, she still believes she's right.] – Kris

Feelings of betrayal

Some of the participants also discovered that their partners were having an affair with another man. Despite this, they opted to avoid any confrontation regarding the matter. This experience of betrayal led to their difficulty trusting new partners and forming new relationships later on.

Kasi masakit din sa sarili ko na parang niloloko na lang ako. Hindi ko na pinaalam kasi nahiya ako kasi kwan...Eh kaibigan ko rin yon, yung lalaki, yung lalaki nya, kaya napakasakit. [It really hurt that I was being deceived. And I didn't tell anyone because I was embarrassed; because he (wife's other man) was a friend. It was very painful.] – Piolo

Feeling of abandonment

Participants of this study also felt abandoned by their partners. This led them to worry about their parental responsibilities with their children.

Painful because in that certain circumstance, we have to live apart. Solo ko na lang. Ako na yung nanay, ako na yung tatay. Minsan nagigising na lang ako 'paano na lang kaya itong mga anak ko?' [Being a solo parent, I carry all the responsibilities. I am a mother and a father to my children. Sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and think about my kids.] – Kris

Pero, sa ganong pagkakataon nararamdaman ko talaga na wala na sya. Kumbaga sabihin na natin, straight-in na natin, wala na syang pagmamahal sa akin. [But, at that time I really feel that she's gone. Let's just say straightaway that she doesn't love me anymore] – Rawi

Going through all these emotional struggles is challenging enough for the participants. However, facing their social world while covertly dealing with the emotional tolls of domestic violence aggravates their predicament.

Subtheme 1.3: Social Struggles

Existing social constructs complicate adaptation to new notions, such as the idea that a male can be a victim of domestic violence. Participants of this study shared their shameful experiences when other people learned about their situation since it opposed the more socially accepted concept of hegemonic masculinity. It also affected their interactions and performance in their workplace. Social impacts of domestic violence include social discomfort and coercive control behavior.

Social discomfort

Some of the participants felt ashamed of the fact that they experienced domestic violence from their female partners. They viewed it as a shameful situation in a society where males are regarded as the dominant partners in the relationship. They became subjects of gossip within their neighborhood and workplace.

De napapahiya ka na lang sa kasama mo naga-inom, diba? Mahirap yun. Mahirap yung pinagdaanan ko sa mga ganong bagay. [It's so embarrassing with my drinking partner, right? It was hard for me to go through such things.] – June

Yung pakikipagsalamuha mo sa tao. Kasi, unang-una marami kang kaibigan, mga kakilala. Para kang nagkakaroon ng, 'yung nahihiya ka diba?' Kasi ganoon ang nangyari sa buhay mo. [The way you interact with people. You have a lot of friends, acquaintances, and it's like you feel embarrassed, right? Because that is what happened in your life]. – Kris

Coercive control behavior

Participants revealed that their female partners actively controlled their interpersonal relationships to the point that it was intimidating. Various aspects of their social lives became more constrained, causing them to be isolated from their society.

Malaki kasi (naging) pigil na pigil ang kilos mo. Dahil natatakot ka nga na kung gawin mo yung ganoon, sasaktan ka or may mararanasan kang, syempre pisikal na pananakit, maliban (pa) sa mga salita. [It's too much because it limits me. Because you are afraid that if you do that, you will be hurt or you will experience, of course physical violence, not only verbal.] – BTK

Verbal, emotional, and mental abuse has affected me. In fact, *nakakasira ng diskarte sa buhay*. [In fact, it is ruining my approach to life.] – Kris

The statements of BTK and Kris reveal that the experience of domestic violence affected their social behavior. Apart from this, it also affected them psychologically.

Subtheme 1.4: Psychological Struggles

Some studies provided varying evidence and outcomes on how male victims of domestic violence accepted or dealt with their predicament. In this research, the researchers examined how male victims perceived their situation. It was found that most of them developed self-destructive thoughts. The following statements shared by the participants demonstrated how their experiences affected them psychologically.

Self-destructive thoughts

The participants' experiences led to depressive and suicidal thoughts. For BTK, thoughts of ending his life came up when he felt too distressed about his situation. Despite this, his children were his primary motivation to continue his life.



Parang kung hindi mo iniisip na meron kang anak, meron kang mga kaibigan, talagang worse na maisip mo (ko) ay magpakamatay. [It's like if you do not think about your children and that you have friends, the worst thing you'll think is wanting to die.] – BTK

It gives (me) anxiety and depression. I always think it is serious and depressing.
-Kris

Domestic violence affected the participants in physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects. Despite this, participants also shared what helped them deal with their struggles. It is noteworthy how they dealt with their difficulties using different coping strategies.

3.3. Theme 2: Coping Strategies

Faith and spiritual belief primarily helped male victims of domestic violence deal with their experiences. They also received valuable advice from their family and friends. Having a positive outlook was also instrumental in dealing with their situation. They focused on their fatherly responsibilities, diverting more focus toward their children.

In addition, participants also disregarded their experiences and avoided confrontations mainly because they thought about their children's welfare. They viewed their experience as typical among married couples, thereby denying that they experienced domestic violence at first. Surprisingly, most participants became more patient and understanding towards their partners because they wanted to prevent the situation from worsening. On the other hand, some of them counter their partners by posing an egotistical attitude towards them. This refers to expressing more dominance and self-centered attitude towards their female partners. This study also found that men rely on heavy drinking and leisure to ease their burden from the abuse. Those who previously turned away from their vices due to family duties returned to their unhealthy lifestyles after the abuse they experienced. Under the coping strategies of male victims, two sub-themes are recognized: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Table 3.
Coping Strategies

Coping Strategies	
Problem-focused coping	Spiritual belief Family and responsibility Optimism Seeking advice
Emotion-focused coping	Disregard and avoidance Temperance Indifference and egotistical attitude Alcohol and leisure

Table 3 lists the subthemes under the main theme of coping strategies. This is based on the theoretical premise that coping strategies may be problem-focused or emotion-focused. The findings of this study reveal that participants tend to utilize problem-focused rather than emotion-focused coping strategies.

Subtheme 2.1: Problem-Focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is a method that entails confronting stress directly and taking steps to address the root cause. This coping strategy makes the victims feel they can handle the stress and has long-term positive effects on the individual (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). This sub-theme includes spiritual belief, family and responsibility, optimism, and seeking advice from family and friends.

Spiritual belief

In this study, two participants who admitted they experienced physical violence emphasized the importance of clinging to their faith in God. This is aligned with the study of Goldberg-Looney et al. (2016), suggesting that men who suffered intimate partner abuse that resulted in injury were more inclined to use adaptive coping, notably religious coping. Moreover, participants believed trusting their problems with God was much better than sharing them with others.

Doon (kay Lord) ako lumalapit. Oo kung saan, sabi ko, 'Lord, kung anong pagsubok ito malalampasan ko rin.' Uh awa ng Diyos nalampasan ko rin. Nakalaya rin nang maayos. Yung magahingi ako sa ibang tao? Ng sa problema? Ay hindi ako naga-ano. Ang (...) ko lang sa sarili ko, tingin ka sa taas. manalangin ka kung anong dapat gawin. [I don't share my struggles to other people. I instead look up and pray to God to ask Him what to do and how to overcome them. Eventually, with the grace of God I was able to surpass all those challenges.]
- June

Through prayer. - Kris

Syempre dasal. [With prayer, of course.] - BTK

Family and responsibility

Participants who were separated from their former spouses because of infidelity were left with their children. They had to carry the responsibility of raising them alone. It may appear challenging to undertake all the responsibilities of being a single parent. However, participants stated that focusing on their work and their children's future saved them. Focusing on fatherly responsibilities significantly helped them endure the adverse effects of the abuse. This was aligned with the findings of O'Leary and Gould (2010), stating that reframing the abuse tends to be associated with more positive outcomes. Participants felt that dealing with the abuse was considered endurable if it was for the sake of the children's future. Hence, they saw that redirecting their focus and working hard to provide for their family was significantly beneficial. This was also consistent with the study of Andre-Petersson et al. (2006), stating that the ability to cope with stress effectively can help prevent severe psychological illnesses triggered by abuse.

Nag-alaga ng mga bata. Tapos nag-focus lang talaga ako sa trabaho. Buti na lang may trabaho ako nung mga panahon na yon. Kung wala, baka kung napaano rin ako. [I only focused on my work and in taking care of my children. It was a good thing that I had work that time. Otherwise, I would not know what will happen to me.] - Piolo

Ahh nag-focus lang ako sa trabaho para sa mga problemang naranasan ko. [When I encountered that problem, I just focused on my work.] - Kris

Pero naaawa ako sa mga anak ko eh. Sa isip-isip ko, 'hiwalayan ko na lang kayo to', pero (kawawa ang mga anak). [Whenever I think of separation, I feel sorry for my children. The children will suffer.] - June

Kibit-balikat. Tinitii alang-alang sa mga bata. [I just shrug it off, for my kids.]
- BTK



Optimism

Optimism refers to participants staying positive despite all the hardships they experienced in the relationship. Participants claimed that optimism in difficulties had made them more productive and less likely to overthink. This was in contrast with Gentry et al. (2007), who claimed that men only use maladaptive coping strategies. One of the participants revealed that he strived to stay optimistic by firmly believing that his situation was only a temporary phase in his life.

I cope by always looking at the positive side of the situation, and despite everything, I know we can make it through. Moreover, having a positive mindset *sabi ko 'kaya ko pa.' Sabi ko ma... 'lilipas din ito eh. Wala mang problema na walang solusyon eh.'* [I told myself that I could still do it and that it too shall pass. There is no problem without a solution.] - Kris

Seeking advice

Relying on friends and family was also a valuable means of coping with domestic violence. Most participants emphasized how social support from friends and family helped them during their most challenging times. Their genuine care and understanding of the situation remarkably uplifted the participants' spirits. This was strongly correlated to the survey of Andre-Petersson et al. (2006), recognizing the adaptive coping strategy of men, including talking with friends and family, exercising, praying, or actively addressing the causes of stress that may enhance their overall well-being.

It (the whole experience) teaches me to be more connected to my family. *Dito mo talaga ma-rerealize kung gaano ka-importante ang pamilya (mga anak) at mga tunay na kaibigan.* [During those circumstances, I realized the importance of my family and true friends.] - Kris

Ah wala, naga (hingi lang ako ng payo) kay Ma'am Taj kung ano ang dapat gawin. [I only ask Ma'am Taj as to what to do.] - June

Payo ng kapamilya at saka mga kaibigan. Kinakausap ko mga pinaka-close ko sa pamilya. Tsaka yung mga kaibigan ko na nakakaintindi rin. [I only rely on my family and friends. I talk to my closest relatives and those friends who truly understands.] - BTK

Data revealed that participants recognized the problem and actively dealt with the aftermath. They diverted their focus to other things and held on to social support. Aside from this, other means of coping also helped them manage their emotions.

Subtheme 2.2: Emotion-Focused Coping

Coping with domestic violence also involved managing one's feelings and emotional response rather than dealing directly with the problem. This coping approach delays the person's response but may not offer a long-term solution (Penley et al., 2012). This includes disregard, avoidance, temperance, indifference, egotistical attitude, and alcohol and leisure.

Disregard and avoidance

As much as the participants did not want to prolong disagreements with their female partners, they tended to disregard and avoid confrontations. This was congruent with O'Leary and Gould's (2010) study, stating that suppression and denial were part of men's coping strategies when confronted with stressful circumstances. Another reason found as to why they ignored the situation was that participants did not

want to aggravate the conflict further because it was deemed embarrassing. According to the participants, they wanted to avoid further misunderstandings and unfavorable outcomes. This was consistent with another study done by Kumar in 2012, stating that men who ignore or tolerate the abuse also fear losing social respect.

Yung sinasabi nilang nagkibit-balikat. Yung tiniis mo na (lang) alang-alang sa mga bata ganoon. [I just shrugged it off. I endured it for my children's sake.]
- BTK

Kung minsan tumatalikod na lang ako. Pag sobra nang maingay takpan ko na lang tainga ko ng ano headphone. [When she gets too loud, sometimes I just turned my back from her and cover my ears with headphone.] - June

Temperance

Despite the unfortunate experience, participants reported they opted to extend patience and understanding regarding their situation. This is driven by their desire to prevent the situation from worsening. Another participant also revealed that his wife repeatedly threatened to commit suicide when confronted about his extramarital affair. This would make him feel bad, so he would remain quiet and avoid talking back. A study by Kumar (2012) supports this, stating that most males cope by keeping silent. Unfortunately, men who could not express their thoughts and emotions ended up with depression and high feelings of loneliness, sadness, and distress (Bryant-Bedell & Waite, 2010).

Parang every time na nag-aaway o nag-diskusyon kami, hindi mo sya, hindi mo sya ma-confront na halimbawa yung ginawa nya, hindi mo sya mapagsabihan. Kasi alam nya sa sarili nya na mali sya. Tapos yung way nya na para daw maging masaya na daw kami, kasi daw nagkasala sya, magpapakamatay na lang daw sya. Ganon. So, ang tendency, ako minsan hindi na lang kumikibo. Kasi nga syempre, yan si Jia (not her real name), panganay nya na anak, na-witness nya yang mama nya kung papano nag-laslas. So, ayaw naman namin ng ganon. Nagkahiwalay na nga, tapos may magkakasakitan pa. Kaya ako naging mapagpasensya talaga ako. [Every time we had fights or arguments; I could not confront her about her cheating. She knew about her mistakes, but she would threaten to kill herself. Her child Jia (not her real name) once witnessed her slashing her wrist. We never wanted that to happen again. So, I tend to be silent and patient, because I am frightened that she might hurt herself again.] - Kris

Pahabain mo ang... kung sa nylon, pahabain mo pa yung nylon doon ka kung saan ka makarating. Ganun, adjustment. [You must adjust. Like a nylon, lengthen your patience if you can.] - June

Indifference and egotistical attitude

Indifference and egotistical attitudes refer to men caring less about their partners. They turned passive towards their partners and diverted their focus on building their self-worth. Participants believed they could avenge what their wives did to them since they were males. This is strongly correlated with the findings of Ridge et al. in 2011, stating that men's coping strategy is highly constrained around masculinity. Participants who got separated due to the incident said they did not bother checking on their former



partners after their separation.

Kung sasabihan nya na papalitan nya ako, kaya ko rin syang palitan. Kung sa isip nya hindi lang ako ang lalaki, iisipin ko din na hindi lang sya ang babae. Ganoon. [If she is telling me that she can replace me with another man, I can also replace her with another woman.] - Rawi

Ang banta nya sa akin, hiwalay, hindi kami kasal, wala raw ako pakialam sa kanya. Hindi kami kasal. wala raw ako karapatan pumigil sa kanya pag naghanap sya ng iba. Sabi ko sa kanya, 'bahala ka.' [She threatens me that she will leave me. She said, 'after all, we're not married.' She said that I have no right to stop her. I told her that it's up to her.] - June

Sabi ko sa kanya, 'wala mang problema kung maghanap ka ng ibang lalaki, hindi ko na rin kwan yan... hindi ko na yan saklaw yang buhay mo. Bahala ka na sa buhay mo kung mag-aasawa ka ulit.' [I told her that I got no problem if she ever goes and finds another man. That's out of my control. It's up to her if she will remarry.] - Piolo

Alcohol and leisure

Alcohol and leisure were known to be a temporary aid for forgetting painful circumstances. Males frequently use alcohol and other drugs as a kind of self-medication to dull the agony of current or previous domestic violence (O'Leary & Gould, 2010). Participants in this study revealed they resorted to drinking alcohol and doing other leisure activities to help them cope with their struggles. This confirms the claims of Misigo (2015), who argued that male victims of domestic violence utilized negative coping strategies.

Inom-inum nang konti para maalis ang kwan, yung kalungkutan, pagod, ganyan. Wala lang, minsan naga-punta ako ng sing along, kanta-kanta, sabay uwi. Para ma ano lang ba, maalis lang yung sakit ng kalooban. Yun lang. [I drink alcohol to get rid of loneliness and fatigue from work. Sometimes, I also go to the KTV bars to entertain myself and ease the pain I feel inside.] - Piolo

Nililibang ko lang sarili ko. Inom ako isang gin. Patugtog ka dyan, o nood ng TV. [I entertain myself by drinking a bottle of gin, listening to music, and watching TV.] - June

Dati hindi na ako umiinom, pero nagbalik ako sa ganyan. [I already stopped drinking before. But after experiencing domestic violence, I returned to it.] - Rawi

Coping with domestic violence entails a lot of active efforts and external support. The participants' narratives picture a transition from covert efforts to more overt ones, such as seeking advice from family and friends. Hence, the need to cope sometimes pushed them to disclose their experiences. However, the complicated disclosure process is influenced by several factors, as discussed in the following section.

3.4 Theme 3: Factors Affecting Disclosure

Barriers to help-seeking experiences of male victims may look complex but overlap with each other, shame and embarrassment being the focal point. Men were ashamed of disclosing their experiences. They wanted to deal with it privately, worried that other people may demean their inability to manage or fix their problem. Several factors surround male victims' disclosure because they are usually unwilling to share their experiences (Joseph-Edwards & Wallace, 2020). As mentioned in an article by HelpGuide (2021), men are hesitant to disclose the violence because it makes them feel humiliated. Because of this, they instead keep their experience in secrecy. This would cause the problem to be underreported because they hide their victimization (Carmo et al., 2011).

This study also found that financial constraints contributed to their reluctance to report the incident to authorities or seek legal help. Meanwhile, some deliberately chose to report to authorities to establish a record or evidence in case their partners reported them instead. This study discovered that men are reporting their experiences to formal institutions because they are afraid that their partner will someday reverse the situation and sue them, knowing that there is an anti-VAWC law that protects women. This concern relates to research findings that gender bias influences legal response to domestic violence. There are differences in the treatment of men and women regarding the help provided by the legal system (Machado et al., 2016). The said study also mentioned that men claimed to only seek help because of their children's predilections. Their children urged them to reconcile with their partners for the sake of their families. This also led them to snub the abuse. Finally, disclosure was also compelled by their desire to alleviate their emotional burden. Participants reported their experiences because they felt it was beyond their emotional control.

Their emotional state was compromised, and they sought professional help to alleviate it. Seeking help resulted in a positive response. This contrasts with what most of the studies say that men were further victimized from reporting their incidents (Campbell, 2005; Hine et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2011). This study yielded two sub-themes in exploring the factors affecting the disclosure of male victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their female partners: barriers in help-seeking experiences and experiences of intervention and support.

Table 4.
Factors Affecting Disclosure

Factors Affecting Disclosure	
Barriers to help-seeking	Confidentiality Shame and Embarrassment Financial Constraints
Experiences of intervention and support	Desire for reconciliation Establishing evidence Alleviating emotional burden

Table 4 shows two subthemes that explore factors affecting disclosure. As part of the goals of this study, factors that prevent male victims from help-seeking were investigated. Since some participants had already disclosed their experiences to authorities, the study also outlined their experiences of intervention or support.

Subtheme 3.1: Barriers to Help-Seeking

Male victims are usually reluctant to share their experiences as they are not familiar with expressing their emotions and feelings. A study revealed that men are less likely to seek care for issues that their community considers odd or for problems that they believe they should be able to handle or control independently (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Results of this study revealed that they were reluctant to share their experiences due to concerns regarding confidentiality, shame and embarrassment, and financial constraints.

Confidentiality

Participants shared that they initially wanted to keep their experiences private. They did not want to report



it publicly as they were concerned for the welfare of their children and their family's privacy. They were worried about how it would affect their children if it were ever disclosed. Also, they were hopeful that the situation would eventually become better.

I want my family matters or issues to stay in private. I want privacy. *Ako, hindi pa agad nagdesisyon. Kasi, kung sa akin (lang), kung kaya pa bang ayusin, pag-uusapan namin*, [I did not decide immediately because for me, if it can still be fixed, we can still work on it.] - Kris

Ayaw ko rin mabulgar sa lahat 'yung problema namin. Baka maapektuhan 'yung mga bata. [I don't want our problem to go public. It will affect the children.] - Rawi

Shame and embarrassment

Two participants reasoned they would feel embarrassed if other people knew their experiences. They were ashamed if it had gone out in public. They also wanted to protect their established name and their family.

Wala po kasi, unang-una, nahihiya ako eh. Kasi kasiraan din ng pamilya namin'yun eh. Ayaw ko rin na (ipagbigay-alam) kasi kilalang-kilala rin ako (dito) eh. Ayaw ko rin sana masira 'yung pangalan ko. Sabi ko, 'hindi na, sakit lang sa ulo 'yan eh'. Kasi isipin mo, kung magrereport ka diba, wala rin eh. Problema lang 'yan. Pero ayaw ko talaga. Ayaw ko na kasi kakahiya talaga na kung makakarating pa kung kanino. [No, because, first, I am ashamed. It will ruin our family. I don't want that because I am quite known in our municipality. I don't want my name to be tarnished. So, I told them no (referring to reporting the abuse). It will just be a pain in the neck. Because think of this, if I report it, nothing will happen. It will just be another problem. Still, I don't want to do it, I am ashamed if other people will know.] - Kris

Kasi ('yung) problema ng mag-asawa (ay) hindi nila problema 'yun. Nakakahiya pa. Kahit ganito ako, may hiya pa rin ako. [Because it is the couple's problem and not theirs. It's an embarrassment. Even if I am like this, I have still my shame.] - June

Financial constraints

Another reason why they did not report their experience was their lack of finances to fund their reporting. They thought it would cost them much money; hence, they chose to endure their struggles.

Oo. Kasi, ganoon na lang, kasi kung magpapa-annul ka, pera din 'yung kailangan. [Yes, I just let it be. Because it would be costly to have an annulment.] - Kris

Walang annulment kasi. Kuhanan (sana) namin 'yan ng annulment (pero) mahal man. (Nasa) P150,000.00 pa noon eh. Sabi nung DSWD, 'wala tayong pambayad dyan sir.' [No annulment. Before we wanted to annul our marriage. But, according to the DSWD, it would cost us P150,000.00. They also said that we do not have the money to proceed with the annulment.] - Piolo

Several studies have already established that disclosing experiences of domestic violence is hindered by many factors. The participants' statements confirm the complicated nature of disclosure also experienced by male victims.

The participants' experiences reflect the discrepancy strain, dysfunction strain, and trauma strain described in Pleck's Gender Role Strain Paradigm. The discrepancy strain is the idea of failing to live up to masculinity. This strain expresses the experiences of male victims being abused by their female partners as a failure of the concept of masculinity. Consequently, the dysfunction strain led the male victims to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves, unlike most women victims (Levant & Wong, 2017). Instead, victims usually suppress their emotions, which is identified as the trauma strain (Levant & Wong, 2017). Nonetheless, three out of five participants in this study had disclosed their experience to other parties. It is equally interesting to know why they decided to seek intervention and support.

Subtheme 3.2: Experiences of Intervention and Support

Participants shared that they were initially reluctant to report their experiences because their children opposed it. Eventually, their decision to report was affected by several factors, including a desire for reconciliation, establishing evidence, and alleviating emotional burdens.

Desire for reconciliation

Participants shared how they prioritized their children's welfare despite their situation. They valued their opinion as much as possible, including their desire to keep their family intact. This led the participants to seek help reconciling with their partners for the sake of their children. They eventually sought intervention and support on how to settle their relationship.

My love for my children is what encouraged me to seek help. - Kris

Gusto ko nga makipagbalikan sana kay nakiusap ang mga bata na ayaw kami magkahiwalay nang tuluyan. Sigeng, kuwan yang mga bata sa akin, paalala na gusto pa nila kami magkabalikan. [I want us to be together again because the children begged us not to separate. Our children always tell me that they want us to be together again.] – Piolo

Establishing evidence

FGAD reported in 2012 that male victims choose to be silent because they are afraid to be sued by their partners. In contrast, this study revealed that their fear of being sued compelled them to report their experience. They feared their partner or her family would take revenge against them. The participants admitted that reporting their experience was, for them, a cautionary step to record their side of the story. They were worried that their partner's family would later file a case against them, and they would not have sufficient evidence to defend themselves.

Kumbaga para hindi ako balikan ng mga magulang ng babae. [So that her parents would not take revenge on me.] - Piolo

Para kung sakaling hablahin niya ako o ako naman ang hablahin niya, may pangtapat ako sa kanya. [I have evidence in case she would confront me.] - Rawi



Oo. Sa opisina namin. Nakablotter 'yan actually. Ayun, sinuportahan nila ako. Hindi naman sa kinampihan nila ako pero dahil sinabi ko rin sa kanila. Alam naman nila na ganoon 'yung attitude nung babae, so binigyan nila ako ng proteksyon. [Yes, there is a police blotter about it in our office. They (colleagues) had supported me. They sided with me because I told them my situation. They know about her attitude, so they had given me protection against her.] - BTK

Alleviating emotional burden

Like women, men also experience a wide variety of emotions. They usually try to endure it initially by denying and ignoring the emotion. Until such time, they cannot control it anymore and decide to seek intervention. Two participants disclosed their experiences because they wanted to be relieved from their emotional burden after enduring it for so long.

Para mabawasan 'yung bigat na nararamdaman ko. Kapag nabigyan ka ng advice, medyo nababawasan 'yung iniisip mo na hindi maganda. Kumbaga naliliwanagan ka na instead na ganoon ang gawin mo, iba na lang. [To ease my pain which weighs a lot. If you were given some advice, it lessens your negative thinking. It's like you are enlightened to do the positive, instead of the negative one.] - BTK

Nakakagaan ng pakiramdam [It soothes my feelings.] knowing that someone is living to help you. - Kris

Contrary to the popular belief that males deal with disharmonious relationships by forming new relationships with another partner, the participants' narratives revealed otherwise. They exerted efforts to reconcile with their partners for the sake of their children. They desired to fix their relationship to avoid ruining their family. Interestingly, the participants sought intervention and support for record purposes. They wanted evidence that they did not maltreat their partners in any way in case their partners filed a case against them. They also received appropriate action when they sought help. Furthermore, male victims sought help to alleviate their emotional burden. These factors were the reason behind the intention of the male victims to report their circumstances.

4. Conclusion

The fundamental aim of this research was to describe the experiences of male victims of domestic violence in Palawan. The researchers used the descriptive phenomenological inquiry and obtained sufficient data to answer the research questions. It was revealed in this study that participants mainly reported emotional, psychological, and social violence. Only two participants disclosed having experienced physical violence. This finding may be associated with how participants interpret physical violence. They tend to be more passive and tolerant towards physicality, unlike female victims. This study supported the premise that the experiences of male victims of domestic violence, whether physical, emotional, psychological, or social, had a substantial influence on their well-being.

In addition, the researchers acquired detailed information on the participants' coping strategies. This study discovered eight emergent themes about coping mechanisms: spiritual belief, temperance, disregard and avoidance, indifference and egotistical attitude, seeking advice, optimism, alcohol and leisure, and family and responsibility. Lazarus' Cognitive Motivational Rational Theory of Coping was utilized to explain male victims' coping techniques. It was found that male victims employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Furthermore, factors influencing the barriers to help-seeking behaviors were also identified. The researchers concluded that most men refused to report the abuse due to confidentiality issues, shame and embarrassment, and lack of finances to fund the annulment.

Help-seeking was also hindered by factors associated with the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity. Participants felt that they did not fit the character of a socially dominant gender. Due to this internalized stigma, they kept their experiences in secrecy instead. Nevertheless, some men deliberately chose to disclose or seek intervention due to three significant factors: desire for reconciliation, establishing evidence, and alleviating emotional burden.

The results of this study provide a wider perspective on the lived experiences of male victims of domestic violence. Although our participants do not represent the entire population of male victims of domestic violence, the findings speak of their existent plight, which may be further explored in future studies.

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