

# STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### THE FACTS:

Globally, “at least one in three women and girls is beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries” (*UN Commission on the Status of Women 28/02/00*)

“An estimated 150 million girls under 18 suffered from some form of violence, in 2002 alone” (*UNIFEM*)

“Approximately, 100 to 140 million girls have experienced genital mutilation and cutting” (*UNIFEM*)

In India in 2010 alone, there were 8,391 dowry deaths, either by murder or driven to suicide, by torture and harassment for failure to meet the needs of the dowry.

“One woman is assaulted, beaten or killed by her husband or partner every 15 seconds in the United States.” *Uniform Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991*

In the Philippines, 1 out of 5 women, ages 15-49, has experienced physical violence, 14.4 % of married women have experienced physical abuse from their husbands; 1 in 6 pregnant women are abused during pregnancy. 37 % of separated or widowed women have experienced physical violence (*NSO survey*).

For 2012, some 12,948 cases were recorded by the Women and Children Protection Center of the Philippine National Police covering January to August. Approximately one woman is beaten by her partner or husband every 43 minutes while one child is being battered every hour and 20 minutes. An estimated 1 in 4 children and young people have witnessed violence against their mother or step-mother.

The Gabriela national office in 2012, received 567 cases of different forms of violence against women and children (VAWC), 52 cases of rape, four of the victims were children, and one child victim was murdered. In the first quarter of 2013, they already received 141 cases of VAWC. Eight were rape cases. Nine involved children victims of rape, attempted rape, gang rape, incest rape and molestation.

VAWC which previously was regarded as rare or non-existent, is in fact prevalent in all parts of the world. It is very local and also global. Neither are they isolated incidents, they happen everywhere, its incidence all over the world has become very alarming ... “a phenomenon cutting across the barriers of caste, race, ethnicity, language and religious affiliation.” (*Fiorenza*)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN (VAWC) is not just about bloody lips and black eyes. It also takes other forms like emotional abuse and financial control, street harassment and reproductive coercion, to mention a few.

Although at its root - power, control and patriarchy are explanatory factors, poverty, psychological vulnerabilities rooted in people's past experiences and the dynamics that play out between two people in a relationship are also very significant factors.

## II. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Old Testament, Genesis 1:26 tells that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore they possess a dignity that gives rise to a number of rights. This applies equally to all without distinction. Differentiated by God, women and men are accorded equal dignity and freedom.

Jesus in His teaching and actions transcended the established norms of his own culture. He insisted on the equal dignity of men and women. He treated women with openness, respect, and entrusted them with his mission. In this way he honored the dignity which women always possessed according to God's plan and in his love.

The Catholic Church is opposed to anything that offends human dignity. Violence against women offends human dignity, a sin against the whole of humanity and a sign of serious disrespect for the image of God.

In 2000, during the preparations for the Great Jubilee, Pope John Paul II issued several apologies on behalf of the Church. One was directed towards women, acknowledging that women have suffered offences against their dignity and have been humiliated and marginalized at the hands of members of the Church.

## III. WHAT THEN IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

*“...violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”* United Nations' General Assembly *Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (resolution 48/104 of December 1993)*

Gender-based violence can happen within the family or community or the state, and is perpetrated by persons in positions of power.

Abuse has to do with “power” and “powerlessness,” with physical and mental injury, with vulnerability and violation, with fear and silence. Gender-based abuse is endemic and affects women not only in the Third World but also women in every corner of the globe. Nor is abuse restricted to the rural, the poor and illiterate, but it is common among the urban, rich and educated. Sadly, it is also prevalent in the Church!

Physical violence is not the only kind of abuse. There are emotional, psychological, cultural, socio economic, sexual, financial and even spiritual abuses. The problem of abuse is gaining more attention; it is also getting worse!

Oppression and violence against women is one of the most ignored human rights issue and often receives little social support. Neighbors, authorities and even the police hesitate to intervene because they feel abuse is a private domain. As a result, women are vulnerable to acts of violence in the family and in the community. Feticide, infanticide, female genital mutilation, marital cruelty, dowry, murders, child abuse, incest and battering are forms of violence that women face in the family. At the community level women face the violence of rape, sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. Women also become the innocent victims of HIV/AIDS infection. Widow immolation, witch hunts, stripping and shaming of women, particularly those from the lower castes, often are used as punishment for their community's transgressions.

Abuse takes shape in the psyche of a human being. Abusers (often a man) believe that he is capable of doing harm to a person while being assured that he will receive social acceptance, that the family will remain intact, that the abuser will not be punished and that his share in the worldly affairs will remain intact. Institutions like the family, society and the Church, judicial systems and police are all responsible for cultivating and supporting this psyche. The abuser subjects the victim to repeated accusations of provocation and destroys the battered woman's self-esteem causing a deep sense of shame and guilt. Abusive behavior can be learned from one generation to the next.

A system of education can be male dominated. Education transmits traditional values and culture. Our traditional cultural values have subjected women to torture in the name of religious and cultural systems like widow burning and girl-child prostitution, female genital mutilation, etc.

#### **IV. WHY DOES VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN OCCUR?**

- Unequal power relations between men and women

Domestic violence has its roots in the subordinate role women have traditionally held in private and public life in many societies. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women describes violence against women as "*a manifestation of historically unequal power relationships between men and women.*" At the same time, men enact violence against their female partners in order to perpetuate and enforce women's subordinate role.

- Rigid Gender Stereotypes of men and women. Sandra Bem (1993) has identified three common beliefs about women and men in western society which have led to rigid stereotypes :
  1. Women and men have basically different psychological and sexual natures;
  2. Men, are the superior, dominant gender;
  3. Gender differences and male superiority are natural;

Men enact violence against women largely because they have been socialized by patriarchal influences in society which teach them that they are superior to women, and deserve to be in control and have special privileges. Women are understood to remain in abusive relationships. (Beyond violence)

- Tolerance of Violence in Popular Culture
- Media and information advancement as New sources of Oppression against women

Technology has created widespread impacts but has not served all people particularly women. In fact, media have projected women in de-meaning and damaging ways:

- In many advertisements, women are usually portrayed as objects to be consumed sexually; they are employed as effective marketing tools where lust and consumer wants are banded together.
- The Pornography business offers the most extreme example of gender exploitation: films made to suit a male audience rely on sexual violence and endorse a power dynamic which favors the man, inducing and legitimizing violence against women such as, rape.
- In medical science, the use of ultrasound technology has allowed families to determine the sex of the fetus in the mother's womb. This advancement has become a curse for the mothers, because using this technology has allowed for the quick termination of girl fetuses to avoid "extra" responsibilities.
- "The UN estimates that 95% of aggressive behavior, harassment, abusive language and denigrating images in online spaces are aimed at women and come from partners or former male partners. Both men and women are affected by cyber stalking, but a survey in India found that victims aged between 18-32 were predominantly female" (Source: www.apc.org).

## **V. EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### ***Violence against Women as a Human Rights Violation.***

Violence against women (VAW) was not recognized as a human rights issue until 1993 at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights. In the conference, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Declaration clearly identified that VAW is based on gender inequality; hence, all governments are expected to recognize VAW as a violation of human rights and address it. The Declaration explicitly states that:

*"violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women and impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms, and concerned about the long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women...violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations*

*between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”*

Violence against women occurs when the human rights of women are violated, e.g., when women are physically injured, raped, beaten, held captive, or forced to work or provide services against their will. When women are trapped in violent marriages or homes, repeatedly battered, verbally abused and completely under the control of their husbands or partners, that is violence against women.

The physical, mental and the emotional abuse that women are subjected to are more likely to result in depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems, sexual dysfunction and reproductive health complications. The reproductive health of women can also be affected through the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Unplanned pregnancies may sometimes become risk factors and lead to more aggression and abuse. Effects of violence may be fatal as a result of severe injury, homicide or suicide.

### ***VAW is a development issue***

It is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, security, liberty, integrity, and dignity of all human beings. It constrains human development, economic growth, and productive capacity. It is also a drain on financial resources. The direct costs include medical care; treatment programs for survivors and perpetrators; shelters; courts and legal services to prosecute perpetrators; loss of productivity; increased mortality; training costs for personnel in the service provider system such as police, judges, nurses, medical doctors, social workers, and counselors; and other indirect social costs to family members of survivors and perpetrators. These costs have an impact on the economic growth of the country. In the USA, the costs of intimate partner violence are estimated at US \$5.8 billion per year. In the Philippines, the government spends an estimated 6 billion pesos for the medical and psychological interventions for VAW.

Furthermore, the productivity of *working women who suffer physical, psychological or sexual violence at the hands of their partners* is affected due to the high absenteeism caused by domestic violence.

## **VI. Some Initiatives towards the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Philippines**

### ***Significant Legislation, Policies and Action programs***

- Republic Act No. 7877, "Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995.
- Republic Act No. 8353, "Anti-Rape Law of 1997.”
- Republic Act No. 8369, “Family Courts Act of 1997”

- RA No. 8505, “Rape Victims Assistance and Protection Act of 1998”
- Republic Act No. 9208, "Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.“ establishes necessary institutional mechanisms to protect and support trafficked persons, and sets sanctions and penalties to traffickers, those who facilitate trafficking, and those who buy or engage the services of trafficked persons for prostitution.
- Republic Act No. 9262, "Anti- VAWC Act of 2004. It penalizes all forms of abuse and violence within the family and intimate relationships..“ Additionally, it provides for penalties for violence committed against his child whether legitimate or illegitimate, within or without the family abode, which results in (or is likely to result in) physical or psychological harm or suffering.
- RA 9710, Magna Carta of Women of 2009
- The Department of Justice Memorandum No. 9 series of 1998 on the Guidelines on the Handling of Rape Cases Involving Adult Victims was adopted.

Local governments of City and Provinces can use their power of legislation to address domestic violence:

- The “Barangay Protection Order” (BPO) usually issued by the barangay chair upon petition of the victim, makes it possible for local officials to “remove and exclude (the abuser) from the residence of the abused person temporarily for the purpose of protecting the victim regardless of the ownership of the residence.”

As part of its advocacy to mainstream gender and development principles (GAD) and violence against women (VAW) in education curriculum, the National Commission on the Role of the Filipino Women (NCRFW) initiated a project in partnership with the Department of Education (DepED) on the integration of GAD and VAW core messages in basic education curriculum.

### ***Integrated Approach to Violence Against Women***

A Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee composed of 15 government agencies with VAW-related mandates namely, National commission on the Role of Filipino Women, Department of Justice, the Department of Local Government, the Philippine National Police, and the Department of Social Work and Development in the executive branch, has forged a Memorandum of Agreement committed to providing programs and services along four areas of concern: addressing the needs of survivors, response to offenders, understanding the nature and causes of gender-based violence, and changing societal values and attitudes. A national action plan has been drafted and performance standards have been developed. The Committee’s task is to systematize and synchronize all efforts on VAW including the standardization of documentation and the protocols and procedures in the fast delivery of the justice system as well as social and material assistance to survivors of violence.

### ***Government Facilities and Programs on Violence Against Women***

1. Haven, a temporary care and shelter for Women in Especially Difficult Circumstances,
2. Crisis Intervention Unit of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.
3. The Department of Health (DOH) institutionalized the Women and Children Protection Units in all its 39 hospitals nationwide, a 24-hour quick-response approach that delivers a personalized and comprehensive health care to survivors.
4. Women's Desk of the Philippine General Hospital, UP, DOH developed a training program for the WCPU doctors to respond with competence and sensitivity to the needs of women and children survivors of violence.
5. The Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA) conducts gender-awareness seminars for prosecutors and judges as well as to the five pillars of the justice system.
6. The National Youth Commission organized "Youthspeak" to reach a covenant with media practitioners to develop a more responsive media environment reflective of the youth's visions and aspirations and supportive of their well-being.
7. *Bantay* Cinema Youth Network to serve as monitoring team in various localities. NCRFW convened policy dialogues and coordinated information campaigns like the "16 days of activism on violence against women."

### ***NGO Programs in Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC)***

The NGO community should be credited both for raising violence against women as a public issue and for providing services even before government systems were set up.

1. Community-based Approach to Violence Against Women (COMBAT-VAW) pioneered by the Women's Legal Bureau and the HASIK.
2. The Lihok Pilipina's *Bantay Banay* or "community watch" is the backbone of Cebu City's anti-domestic violence program.
3. The Women's Crisis Center (WCC), the first crisis center for victims/survivors of VAW. An average of P/6,083.30 per month per survivor budget for food and transportation subsidy, medical assistance, therapies, utilities, and other personal needs like toiletries, towels and slippers, among others.
4. SALIGAN (a legal group),
5. KALAKASAN (Women Against Violence is another NGO providing shelter and counseling)
6. Women's Legal Bureau (legal group). These women's groups maintain a network of services dedicated to helping women survivors of violence and cooperated in the implementation of research projects dealing with violence.
7. Coalition Against Trafficking in Women focus on issue of prostitution and trafficking locally and internationally. They hold preventive education seminars and training in communities, among NGOs and with selected youth groups.

8. Kanlungan, (Philippine Migrants Rights Network) assists women who are victims of violence in the context of migration.
9. *National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW)* the national machinery for the advancement of women and the policy-advisory body on women and gender concerns, is committed to eliminate Violence Against Women and its strategies and interventions are translated in the Framework Plan of Women, specifically in one of its core areas of concern, which is **upholding women's human rights**.

## VII. Issues and Challenges

### *Obstacles towards the eradication of VAWC:*

- Legal, social and cultural factors impede the women's access to justice and social services
- At the local level, there is a need to establish an integrated, multidisciplinary approach and standard procedures of work with VAW victims
- MOVE Philippines members need to continuously build their capacities in the provision of technical assistance
- Need to have a harmonized system of documenting VAW cases
- Indecision/withdrawal of victims in filing cases
- Financial difficulties/economic dependence
- Long and tedious legal system process/settlement of cases and half hearted help from lawyers
- Limited number of temporary shelters
- Insufficient/lack of provision of community-based (psychosocial/economic) support systems in local government units for both victims and perpetrators
- "Ningas Cogon" system
- Insufficient social services

### *Best Practices to Eradicate VAW Collaborative efforts:*

- PNP: coordination with DSWD (for temporary shelter, for legal fees of victims to be waived) and the Visayan Forum Foundation Inter- agency activities:
  - Fora, Symposia, Round Table Discussion and 18-day campaign on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children (Nov 25 – Dec 12)
  - Women's Month advocacy activities
  - Training using Rights-Based Approach (Based on Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW); Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), Human Rights, etc.
  - Information Dissemination
  - film showing

## VII. NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

In recent years, numerous "pedophile Roman Catholic priests" have been identified. Sadly, however, instead of removing them from the priesthood, the Catholic Church has in most instances attempted to cover up the sexual abuse by transferring the offending priest(s) to different parishes. The scandal and attempted cover-up continued to expand, reaching all the way to the papacy itself.

When priests, take advantage of vulnerable people, children, youth, or adults, that is abusive. It is first an abuse of the power they have as clergy. Whether it manifests as sexual abuse, physical abuse, or spiritual abuse, it needs to be addressed directly and the victims need support, empowerment, and healing...

In 2001, a year before the pedophilia crisis hit the news, the *National Catholic Reporter* analyzed internal church reports written by two Catholic nuns—a physician who was a Medical Missionary of Mary and the AIDS coordinator for the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development—documenting the sexual exploitation of nuns by priests in 23 countries on five continents.

Among the allegations concerned

- a nun impregnated by a priest who forced her to have an abortion; she died from complications, and he officiated at her funeral;
- priests were also alleged to have raped young nuns who approached them for the required certificates to enter religious orders;
- priests to have told nuns that oral contraceptives would protect them from AIDS; and have used nuns as “safe” alternatives to prostitutes in countries plagued by AIDS—
- with some priests going so far as to demand that heads of convents make the nuns sexually available to them.

And it is not just nuns, of course. As in the recently reported case of a priest who allegedly molested a 14-year-old Minnesota girl and was not de-frocked but simply transferred to a parish in India (*after* the Vatican supposedly toughened up its policies); thousands of girls, from infants to adolescents, have been molested by priests. Adult Catholic women have been subject to clerical transgressions that range from sexual exploitation to harassment to rape to beatings to potentially negligent homicide. Many sexually active priests have left a trail of wounded women and fatherless progeny in their wake—testament to the hypocrisy of a “celibate” priesthood.

Whatever the cause of the sexual abuse in the church, pedophile and abusive priests should be arrested and punished just as any other pedophile would be. Anyone covering up or, by negligence, enabling pedophilia in the church should be prosecuted. A priest who has sexually abused anyone should never be allowed back into church leadership, as he could most definitely not be considered "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2).

Reverend Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM. Cap, an Italian priest, in his Good Friday homily addressed the need to end violence against women. He did so without any acknowledgment of the church's own culpability in the abuse, endangerment and intimidation of women.

Cantalamessa expressed great concern about domestic violence, praising the "many associations and institutions" that provide women with support. Yet the founders of those associations and institutions were not Catholic clergy but secular feminists, whom the church regularly condemn.

### *How Can the Churches Respond*

Congregations and religious groups can make unique contributions to the healing process of those suffering the aftermath of violence by providing a safe place where "for-giving" can be experienced.

*"To help women who have been victimized, pastoral workers and church members must first believe them. Then they can respond with a "for-giving" attitude—giving themselves for the other in a way that allows a new start."*

We need first to recognize that violence against women and children continues and transpires not only in the wider culture but within "church families," generally in silence.

We need to name the problem in our churches and then to listen with tact. Our unique contribution can be to become communities where "forgiveness" is a possibility for those who have been victimized but **not** necessarily forgiveness in a traditional theological sense of the word.

*Forgiveness:* Tact as a "for-giving" attitude is important in any care giving relationship; The pastor, counselor, or sister who listens with tact provides "a gift of understanding and judgment...to the other.

Marie Fortune suggests that forgiveness should be a woman's last step as she journeys toward wholeness. Forgiveness is a valuable resource, but it is not the same thing as reconciliation. A restoration of relationship between the one who has been victimized and the one who perpetrates the abuse may never occur, even though that might be our Christian ideal. If the woman who has experienced violence is able to reach the point of forgiving the perpetrator, that may well facilitate her healing process, providing her with significant psychological benefits.

"For-giveness" in the context of a loving, caring relationship allows the woman who has experienced abuse to begin to define new possibilities of creative growth in this world.

## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

Concretely, what can we do as individuals and as community?

- Educate ourselves about the gender-based violence most prevalent in our community.
- Support an organization working to eradicate gender-based violence such as sex trafficking, domestic violence, and prostitution, etc.
- Donate regularly or hold a fundraiser.
- Encourage local law enforcement agencies to receive specialized training for dealing with domestic abuse, and to devote resources to prevention of gender-based violence.
- Pray for victims of abuse, gender-based violence, and exploitation. Pray for a change in the hearts of their abusers.
- Host a prayer group or book study group on some aspect of gender-based violence
- Volunteer time and talents to a group/ ministry serving victims of violence or abuse.

### **Community Reflection/ Action**

*October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Suggest and agree on a concrete action our community can do in solidarity with the many abused women victims of violence.*

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