

Bruised but not Broken: Self-concept of Sexually Abused Female Children

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Abstract Sexual abuse is a social issue in the Philippines that affects the self-concept of victims. With the increasing number of cases, there is a need to explore this phenomenon and determine how it harmed the victim's self-concept. This qualitative research studied the lives of 13 female children under a government-operated residential institution using the narratives approach. Three components of self-concept were analyzed: self-esteem, self-image, and ideal self. Following the abuse, the participants had feelings of worthlessness, self-pity, self-blame and isolation. They perceived themselves as hateful, fearful, and helpless but this did not stop them from having dreams and being self-satisfied. Hence, the study suggests that psychological tests on self-concept be administered to the victims to provide an appropriate intervention for this type of population. Findings have implications to educational institutions with students who suffered from sexual abuse.

Keywords: *ideal self, self-concept, self-esteem, self-image, sexual abuse*

Introduction

Background of the Study

The phenomenon of sexual abuse continues as one of the persistent social problems faced by children nowadays. It is considered as a gross violation of human rights that brings about physical, emotional and psychological consequences to the victims. It is present in every country, society, and culture and has mainly become a subject of constant study throughout history. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) defines child sexual abuse as *the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that which violate the laws or social taboos of society (p.7).*

The estimated number of victims vary in every country. Lalor and McElvaney (2010) summarized some researches from around the world published in international peer-reviewed journals and found that among the 11 countries under study, all have high incidence of contact sexual abuse among females who are under eighteen years old. In the United Kingdom, the study of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) found that nearly a quarter of young adults (24.1%) had experienced sexual abuse (contact and non-contact), by an adult or by a peer during childhood (Radford et al., 2011). In the Philippines, the Department of Health (DOH) – Women and Children Protection Unit (2018) stated that sexual abuse cases (64%) are more commonly seen than physical abuse cases (17%), in which girls are typically the victims. Yap (2016) also reported that 2,147 cases of child abuse were forwarded to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in the first quarter of 2016, 539 of which were sexual in nature. Furthermore,

the reported cases of violence against women filed with the Philippine National Police (PNP) in 2015 was 86.3%, 4.4% was acts of lasciviousness while 4.3% was rape (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016).

With the escalating figures of children who are victimized by sexual abuse, the consequences of this phenomenon have received attention. Victims often suffer several adverse consequences in schools such as poor academic performance, difficulty maintaining social relationships, quieter than others and may cry for no valid reasons. Teachers and other school personnel may be the first persons in the identification and prevention of these consequences since students spend a lot of time in schools. As they come to know the underlying changes that victims experience, these teachers and school personnel may proceed with necessary actions to help the victims such as referring them to a guidance counselor or a social worker. These child care providers play an important role in responding to the needs of children who suffer from sexual abuse. A supportive initial response is crucial for the psychological well-being of these victims.

Apart from impacts in the victim's school performance, sexual victimization has been linked to deficits in self-processes and development of self-concept. Their experience of sexual abuse disrupted the cognitive and affective components of the self which resulted to having damaging thoughts about themselves, negative perceptions on how they look like, and change in their ambitions, goals and ideals. Thus, this study focuses on understanding the impacts of sexual abuse in the three components of self-concept: self-esteem, self-image, and ideal self. Figure 1 shows the framework of the study.

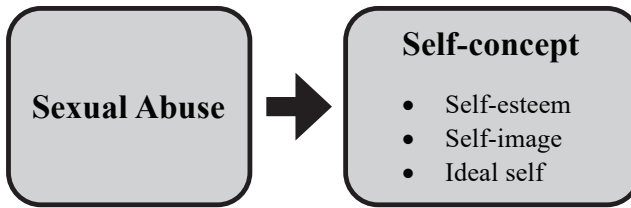


Figure 1.

Framework of the Study

Child Sexual Abuse and Self-concept

Filipino children are considered as valuable assets of the country. Dr. Jose P. Rizal, in his life and writings, always looked to Filipino youth as the fair hope of the Fatherland (Proclamation No. 75, s. 1948) because they have the power to reshape the country and make it a comfortable place to live in. In so far as the appreciation of children's imperative role in the transformation of the society is concerned, they should not be treated unfairly and that their best interest must be the primary concern of their respective families, schools and the government in general.

One of the best interests of children that needs to be nourished is the formation of positive self-concept. Self-concept is defined as an organized set of perceptions, cognitions, or evaluations that one holds about their abilities and characteristics (Anderson, 2011). However, when children are victimized by sexual abuse, they have greater potential of having lower self-concept (Meydan, 2020). It creates harmful changes in their self-conceptions and exhibit negative cognitive distortions about the self (Turner, Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2010). Negative self-concept and vulnerable general health was further observed in rape victims (Alboebadi, Afshari, Jamshidi, Poor & Cheraghi, 2015). Also importantly,

the victimization has a presumed damage to the normal psychosocial processes responsible for the development of positive self-esteem, one of the components of self-concept. Several studies show that victims of child sexual abuse have lower self-esteem than those who are not (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2012; Dukett, 2015; and Kim, Park & Park, 2017). In the study of Hall and Hall (2011), feelings of depression, guilt, shame and self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problems, and relationship problems are commonly reported by victims who have been sexually abused.

The effects of sexual abuse may not be limited to self-concept but may also extend to other areas wherein self-concept is important. Children who suffer from sexual abuse have greater chances of experiencing mental health problems and increased intimate partner violence or IPV (Fry, McCoy & Swales, 2012). As victims experience these problems, the manner in which they feel about themselves and their abilities may be distressed. Moreover, sexually abused females showed deleterious sequelae across a host of biopsychosocial domains including earlier onsets of puberty, cognitive deficits, depression, dissociative symptoms, maladaptive sexual development, hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal attenuation, asymmetrical stress responses, high rates of obesity, more major illnesses and healthcare utilization, dropping out of high school, persistent posttraumatic stress disorder and even self-mutilation (Trickett, Noll & Putnam, 2013). Experiencing these difficulties will not only create detrimental effects on the victim’s self-esteem but also their self-image may be affected due to the negative physical changes that may happen in their body (e.g. obesity and illnesses). In addition, adverse effects in their studies (e.g. dropping out of school) may post concerns to their ideal self.

Given the enormity of child sexual abuse cases in the Philippines, there is a great demand to understand how the abuse harmed the self-concept of the victims. Such understanding will greatly facilitate in improving their psychological well-being. Hence, this study provided a picture of Filipino children's self-concept after victimization especially that there are limited studies conducted in the Philippines which dealt with victims who are still admitted or taken cared of at government-owned child care facilities. Most participants in previous studies are victims who were already out of institutions or were interviewed several years after their victimization.

Purposes of the Research

This study sought to answer the question "How does sexual abuse impact the self-concept (self-esteem, self-image, and ideal self) of sexually abused female children?"

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a "qualitative methodology specifically the narratives research design." In this approach, the life stories of the sexually abused children were elicited. According to McAdams and McLean (2013), life narratives allow individuals to share their identity, explain how it has changed over time, and what they believe the future holds. Narratives provide a means of remembering and reflecting upon life events, sharing experiences with others, and understanding the course of one's life. In this study, the participants narrated their sexual abuse experience while providing reflections of what happened to them. In-depth interviews facilitated the gathering of their life stories.

Storytelling was encouraged because it was a good venue for them to freely share their experiences of sexual abuse.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at a government-operated residential institution which is under the supervision of a government agency in the Philippines. This institution provides protection, care, treatment, and rehabilitation to sexually abused girls below 18 years old. The victims were being cared by houseparents while social workers provide psychosocial services such as interviews, preparation of treatment plans, and monitoring of progress. A registered psychometrician was in-charge of the testing services and provides individual or group dynamics activities for the development of the victims' well-being.

Participants

Thirteen female victims of sexual abuse with penetrative contact, 14 to 18 years old, and who were at the institution for at least one year or more, participated in the study. Ten of them had intrafamilial abuse cases committed by their fathers, stepfathers, adoptive father, and uncle while two were victims of extrafamilial abuse whose perpetrators were their co-worker and neighbor. The other participant was a victim of both intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse perpetrated by her brother-in-law and ex-boyfriend. All the participants were candidates for reintegration to their respective families of origin as certified by the multidisciplinary team composed of the social worker, houseparents, and psychometrician.

The participants were purposively selected. Predetermined criteria for their recruitment were identified. An initial meeting with the supervising social worker and

the registered psychometrician was held to discuss the inclusion criteria. The residents' individual records and treatment plan served as bases in identifying the final participants of the study.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide, was used to collect the data. The questions were based on the researchers' thorough review of the literature as well as thoughts about the phenomenon of sexual abuse. It was composed of six (6) questions with follow-up or probe questions. These were crafted in a way that the participants would be able to spontaneously tell stories about how they viewed themselves before and after the abuse. All questions were asked in Tagalog. Sample questions include: *Kumusta ka ngayon? Maaari mo ba akong kwentuhan ng mga bagay-bagay tungkol sa iyong sarili?* (How are you today? Kindly tell me stories about yourself), *Bago ka nadala dito sa Center, ano ang pagtingin mo sa iyong sarili?* (How did you perceive yourself before coming to the center?), *Makalipas ang isang taong pagtira o pamamalagi mo dito sa center, ano na ang tingin mo sa iyong sarili?* (After 1 year at the Center, how do you see yourself now?) and *Anu-ano ang mga parangap o layunin mo sa buhay?* (What are your dreams or future goals?).

Four Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) with advance training in qualitative research validated the interview guide.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers sought approval from the Regional Director of the government agency under study wherein request letter, terms and conditions, research request form and copy of the proposal were submitted. When the request was approved,

pilot testing of the instrument followed. After adjustments were made to the interview guide based on the result of the pilot test, interviews were conducted by the main researcher at the Therapy Room for two months. Rapport was established through storytelling, drawing, and coloring prior the interview. With the presence of the supervising social worker, the informed consent was read aloud to each participant to ensure that they fully understood and accepted the conditions regarding the conduct of the research. Since they were minors, the consent form was signed by their supervising social worker. Participants were also ensured of complete confidentiality. Their responses were documented through the use of audio-recorder and transcribed in verbatim.

The length of the main interview was 50 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes . The participants underwent two sessions: the first session was for the main interview and the second was for the validation of the transcribed interview proceedings. Using the phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis of the interview went through the following phases: *I. Familiarizing with the data* (verbatim transcriptions of interview proceedings, reading of transcripts); *II. Generating initial codes* (identification and coding of significant statements); *III. Searching for themes* (codes generated were grouped together and looked for associations); *IV. Reviewing the themes* (refine initial themes into more meaningful themes); *V. Defining and naming themes* (finalizing the themes and giving definitions); and *VI. Producing the report* (writing of the manuscript). The codes and themes were validated by two external judges who were RGCs.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study involved participants who are specially vulnerable, their physical and psychological safety and

protection were ensured. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to such as securing necessary permits, protection of privacy and confidentiality of information, informed consent process was observed, and respect for the participants especially their voluntary participation in the study. In writing the final paper, pseudonyms were assigned per participant to maintain their anonymity.

Results

Impact of Sexual Abuse on Self-Concept

The experience of sexual abuse brought significant impact on the self-concept of the participants. In their stories, themes were generated to illustrate how it proliferated their negative self-evaluations which centered on the three components of self-concept.

Self-esteem

The study yields four predominant themes. Feelings of *worthlessness* emerged as a result of meaningless life after having been sexually abused. The participants *pity* themselves for they have been victimized by people who are more powerful than them. They also *blame* themselves because they could have avoided the event if only they acted differently. The participants also had feelings of *isolation* since they were unable to share their dreaded experience to others. Table 1 shows the overview of the participants' self-esteem.

Among the four themes, worthlessness was the most common impact to the self-esteem. Of the 13 participants, 10 shared that they experience feeling worthless while two accounted having experienced all these four impacts.

Table 1.
Overview of the participants' self-esteem.

General Themes	Sample Transcript	Codes	General Description
Feelings of Worthlessness	<p>"Parang wala na ako Ma'am... wala na po ako sa sarili ko. Para na akong walang pag-asang umangat.. magbago. Kasi naman kalakas lakas ko dati tapos bigla na akong napunta dito sa center." (Feels like I am nothing. I am not myself anymore. I no longer have the chance to improve and to change. I was so strong then, until I suddenly found myself here at the center.)</p>	<p>biglang bagsak bobo mababa nobody sira na tanga walang pag-asa walang kwenta walang silbi</p>	<p>The feeling of being useless, devalued, inferior and hopeless as a result of their sexual victimization.</p>
Feelings of Self-pity	<p>"Naawa po ako sa sarili ko. Sinabi ko po sa tatay ko na tama na. Masakit po. Sinasabi ko po sa kanya na dapat huwag niyang gawin yong ganon dahil sarili niya nga akong anak... dahil sarili ko dim po siyang tatay... bakit niya ako ginagamito." (I pitied myself. I told my father to stop because it was really painful. I kept on saying that he should not do it because I am his own child and that he is my father. Why is he doing it to me?)</p>	<p>naawa sa sarili</p>	<p>The painful feelings suffered by the participants for not being able to defend themselves during their sexual abuse experience.</p>

<p>Feeling of Self-blame</p>	<p>“<i>Sinisisi ko ang sarili ko, galit ako sa sarili ko... Sana hindi na lang po ako nagpadala sa nanay ko. Sana hindi na lang niya ako kimuha. Hindi na lang po sana ako sumama kung ganun lang din naman po yong mangyayari sa akin. Sobrang bait ko kasi. Ganon. Nagtiitwala ako agad. Syempre malaki po kasi yong tiwala ko. Steppfather ko po kasi yon eh.</i>” (I blamed and hated myself. I regretted coming over with my mother. I was indeed a good daughter. If I did not join her, the abuse would not have happened to me. I trusted her so much because he is my stepfather).</p>	<p>Indicates participants’ feelings that they are the ones responsible for their sexual victimization.</p>
<p>Feelings of Isolation</p>	<p>“<i>Parang ayaw ko na pong mabuhay. Gusto ko na lang pong sukuan yong mga problems ko. Feeling ko po kasi walang nagmamahal sa akin nung time na yon. nag-iisa Feeling ko po nag-iisa lang ako. Gusto ko na lang pong sarilinin yong problema ko.</i>” (I felt like I didn’t want to live anymore. I just wanted to surrender. It seemed that nobody loved me then. I felt that I was all alone so I decided to keep my problems to myself).</p>	<p>Concerns participants’ state of being alone and helpless especially after the sexual abuse.</p>

Self-image

As an impact of the abuse, the participants developed negative self-views which greatly affected their behaviors and relationship with other people. Three themes emerged: becoming *hateful* towards their perpetrators for causing the abuse, being *fearful* of the events that may arise such as their perpetrator's presence, and court hearings and seeing themselves as *helpless* because of their inability to make themselves better. Table 2 shows the overview of the participants' self-image.

Among the three themes, becoming hateful and fearful was seen as the most common impact to the self-image of the participants. Six of them narrated these self-views while only one participant experienced these three impacts.

Ideal Self

The narratives show that sexual abuse did not stop the participants from crafting their own dreams and seeing themselves successful in the future. Two themes were generated: the anticipatory self and the satisfied self.

The participants look forward to having a bright future not only for themselves but for their families as well, a description of their *anticipatory self*. Even though they are sheltered in a residential institution, the participants exhibit career aspirations and plans of becoming professionals. Among their career aspirations include becoming police officers, singers, teachers, social workers, flight attendant, chef, and architect wherein police officer served as the top career choice among them.

More so, the participants no longer dream of being other persons, a clear expression of a *satisfied self*. Eight of the thirteen females believed that God has a purpose for allowing what happened to them. They do not want to be

Table 2.
Overview of the participants' self-image.

General Themes	Sample Transcript	Codes	General Description
Hateful	"Parang sumama na yong loob ko sa kanya. Nagkaroon na ako ng galit sa kanya. Parang nag-iba na yong ano [tingin] ko sa kanya." (It seems I have a grudge against him... I am angry at him. The way I looked at him changed).	galit masama ang loob	The participants' view of themselves as having full of anger or hate because of their victimization.
Fearful	"Natakatok po ako eh. Kasi po kapiling ko yong tatay ko na gumalaw sa sarili niyang anak." (I feel afraid because I am living with my father who molested her own daughter).	natakot takot	An unpleasant emotion, usually having feelings of being afraid, due to perceived danger.
Helpless	"Pero nung nagkaproblema po ako, nawala po yong [ako] na masaya. Nawala po yong laging nasa labas para makipaglaro. Nawalan na po ako ng gana." (When I got into this mess, I lost my old self. I even stopped playing with other kids. I lost my drive to life).	nawala sa sarili naging tamad nawala si God	Indicates the participants' inability to continue living and take an action after the abuse.

Table 3.
Overview of the participants' ideal self

General Themes	Sample Transcript	Codes	General Description
Anticipatory self	<p>"Pangarap ko pong maging engineer at makatulong sa mga bata dito. Para makapagpatayo po ako ng kagaya nito Ma'am, center isaka po ng bahay. Sa mga wala pong bahay... sa mga nagungupahan. Sa mga mahihirap po. Para po makatulong sa mga kababaihang may ganitong kaso po." (I want to be an engineer and help the children living here. I want to build a center like this and build homes for the homeless. I also want to help other women who experienced the same predicament).</p>	<p><i>Pangarap</i> <i>(maging engineer)</i></p>	<p>This refers to the professions and careers, goals and aspirations that the female children wanted to become in the future.</p>
Satisfied self	<p>"Masaya na po kung among meron ako at kung ano ako. Kasi po mas gusto ko po yong binigay sa akin ni God na sarili po. Kapag hindi ko po tinanggap ito, parang hindi ko na din po tinanggap si God sa life ko." (I am happy with what I have and with what I am. I like what God has given me. If I don't accept this, it seems I am not accepting God in my life).</p>	<p><i>masaya</i> <i>kuntento</i></p>	<p>Denotes contentment in life; that despite the abuse, they no longer dream to become someone else.</p>

“other persons” anymore for they believe that their life is a precious gift from God and their experiences were just tests on how strong and resilient they could become. One factor that may be attributed to their having a satisfied self is the fact that they are already recommended for reintegration back to their respective families. They are about to finish their treatment plans. Similarly, considering the length of stay of the participants at the institution, (shortest – 1 year; longest 8 years & 6 months), they have benefitted from the different activities and programs conducted at the center.

Discussion

Previous researches have recognized the deficits in self-concept as an outcome of child sexual abuse. Focusing on the three components of self-concept, this study sought how sexual abuse impact the self-concept of sexually abused children.

Self-esteem

This study found that sexual abuse is related to having a decreased self-esteem. The participants’ experience was truly distressing which resulted to inferior feelings of self-worth. It created detrimental changes responsible for the development of one’s high self-esteem. Based on the narratives, their shared self-evaluations of “*walang kwenta, walang pag-asa, walang silbi*” (useless, hopeless, worthless) and “*bobo*” (stupid) has made them feel worthless as persons. This is ascertained in the findings of Mundorf (2013) and Hall and Hall (2011) which stated that feelings of worthlessness is evident among childhood abuse survivors.

Manifestation of self-pity among the participants is one notable impact. Because of the participants’ innocence, weakness, and inability to fight for themselves, they tend

to dwell on their own sorrows. Similarly, their perpetrators were older and bigger, leaving them powerless and incapable to protect themselves over somebody who is stronger than them. Among the thirteen participants, five of those who expressed having self-pity were victims of intrafamilial abuse. Their perpetrators were part of their respective families. The men who should protect them from harm were also the ones who left them wounded. Hence, those who were victimized by sexual abuse perpetrated by their own family member has to face their inner monsters and regrets with difficulty getting back at their own feet. As mentioned by Hall and Hall (2011), victims take personal responsibility for the abuse, thereby making them feel sorry for themselves.

For self-blame, when sexual abuse is committed by a trusted adult, it will be difficult for victims to put their perpetrators in bad light, thus making them unable to understand that what happened was not their responsibility at all. One reason which may be attributed to this is the society's false belief that women and children experience sexual assaults because of being weak, fragile, and naïve. These stereotypes became an excuse for sexual violence especially in the Philippines where we are still influenced by a patriarchal culture. Men devalue women that resulted to cruel practices against them, including sexual abuse. In addition, since most of the perpetrators are part of the participants' family, trust has been an important element of their relationship. They became too trusting and never did they think of the possibility of sexual abuse. This result supports the findings of Hall and Hall (2011) that self-blame is commonly reported by victims who were sexually abused. Victims were found at fault and were put at a disadvantage because of their inability to resist or refuse the perpetrator due to their physical strength as men.

Isolation is an impact of sexual abuse that resulted to feelings of being alone after victimization. Because of

their decision to conceal the abuse, nobody was around to safeguard them from harm nor to speak about their experiences. This result proves that sexual abuse greatly affects the interpersonal relationships of the victims. It impairs their ability to open up to others and run for help to authorities. This result supports the findings of Zyed (2008), cited in Hassan (2014), that young victims of sexual abuse typically share feelings of isolation, victimization, and hostile interpersonal relationships with peers and adults. Similarly, Gibson and Morgan (2015) found that because victim's lives are infused with fear, they learned to retreat from the world.

Self-image

The participants' self-image also received negative impact. They became hateful because of the disruption of their normal emotional development and relationship management. With the profound betrayal and abandonment they experienced from the hands of these trusted adults, hate becomes a natural reaction. As seen in the findings of Edwards et al. (2012), cited by Duckett (2015), more intense feelings of anger were reported among victims of child sexual abuse who had a high level of perceived betrayal especially if the perpetrator was someone close to the victim such as a family member. Similarly, the findings of Thomas, Bannister, and Hall (2012) reported that anger was common among female survivors of childhood abuse.

Another self-image presented by the participants was becoming fearful of situations they perceived to be unsafe for them. Perpetrators were trusted caregivers and they live together under one roof. Fear is also reinforced by the reality that their perpetrators were more powerful, causing them to be terrorized by the situation. The study of Adefolalu (2014) affirms the result of this study wherein

fear of reprisal attack from the perpetrator was the main reason why victims could not have gone to the hospital unless an adult suspected sexual violation of the child. Likewise, delayed disclosure due to fear that their relatives would not believe that they were sexually assaulted was also found. Meanwhile, in the study of Young, Riggs, and Robinson (2011), victims of adolescent sexual abuse were less likely to report due to fear of losing parental support, fear of having a bad image among other family members, and fear of having caused pain and shame to the family.

Lastly, the participants described themselves as helpless. Their narratives show accounts of becoming weak, unable to do something to improve their situation, inability to boost themselves, and loss of interest. This could be attributed to their low self-esteem as reflected on their statements of feelings of worthlessness, self-pity, self-blame, and isolation. Due to their perceived trauma, victims were incapable and unwilling to paint a new version of themselves. Rather, they were already consumed by the pain, making it difficult to bounce back to life. As found in the study of Ekechukwu and Isiguzo (2015), emotional deficit among victims of sexual abuse (i.e. learned helplessness) leads to depression and lowered self-esteem.

Ideal Self

The experience of sexual abuse did not have a negative impact on the ideal self of the participants. In fact, their abuse experience lead them to have big dreams. Consequently, self-satisfaction was evident in all of them. They have recognized their shortcomings and acknowledged their painful experiences but these were not enough reasons to aspire for “another self.”

These results were consistent with Sabanci (2015) that young people in Uganda who received rehabilitation

services expressed hope and aspiration for a better future. However, results did not affirm the study of Nikischer (2014). In her in-depth interviews with eight women who were sexually assaulted while under the age of 18, findings indicated that sexual assault during adolescence has negative impacts on the educational outcomes and life choices of the women participants. The study of Abulon (2012) did not also yield the same result. The experiences of domestic violence among battered women which made them feel worthless as persons made them stop dreaming and setting new aspirations for themselves.

According to the social workers, each resident at the institution has a treatment plan containing how she will be assisted until recovery. They receive helping strategies like psychosocial care, counseling, therapy, and psychological testing. Moreover, the participants were tasked to perform activities such as helping in the household chores and participating in livelihood programs. Some of the girls were also attending formal studies in a nearby school. The center provides Values Education Program where the residents are taught of acquiring values, clarifying personal vision and life goals through values education sessions. These helping strategies are useful for the participants in outgrowing their trauma. From being someone who has developed negative evaluations and views about oneself, the participants have learned to regain self-worth, thereby having the ability to plan for a bright future and manifest a satisfied self.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of sexual abuse to the self-concept of female children. In view of data analysis, results draw attention to the damaging effects of sexual abuse to the self-concept. Decline in

self-esteem and self-image are much evident but it did not have any direct impact to the ideal self. Worthlessness was noted as the most common impact to the self-esteem while becoming hateful was mostly their self-view.

With the increasing number of victims and the noted effect to their sense of self, it is high time for the government to strengthen the social services provided by residential institutions to further deliver the necessary support needed by the victims. Recovering from trauma is possible if they will receive adequate programs, feel the love and support of their family and the community. Hence, the role of educational institutions is highly significant. Teachers, as frontliners in schools can immediately identify the physical and psychological changes occurring among students who are victims of sexual abuse since effects are often manifested in their school performance. Through them, referral system may begin. Together with the teachers, RGCs may also serve as focal persons in the campaign on violence against women by crafting modules with special consideration on the development of self-concept. They may further collaborate with teachers, other school personnel, government and non-government institutions for extension programs catering to sexual abuse victims.

Recommendation

This study is only limited to looking into the self-concept of sexual abuse victims who were 13-18 years old and are about to be discharged from the government-owned residential institution after having received rehabilitative services. Future researchers are encouraged to study children under 13 years so as to discover other impacts of abuse to younger population. Researchers may also conduct studies to non-government institutions.

In light of the findings, it is recommended that standardized psychological tests such as Self-Concept Scale may be administered to the residents upon their admission and prior to discharge from the center. This will scientifically measure their current psychological state and emotional functioning. Similarly, the test results are a good benchmark in crafting an effective formation and intervention programs for sexual abuse victims. To better facilitate the giving of psychological tests, full time RGCs may be hired by the Philippine government and be deployed to residential institutions catering to victims of sexual abuse.

Teachers and other school personnel may also undergo seminars and trainings related to sexual abuse or VAW in general. The school may further come up with a curriculum that could provide an opportunity to incorporate lessons on VAW and establish psychoeducational interventions (e.g. enhancing self-concept, taking care of one's body) for its victims. As such, teachers, other school personnel, and even students may gain knowledge and skills on gender-based violence, to prevention, disclosure, identification, reporting of sexual abuse and even psychological first-aid for the victims.

As a preventive measure against sexual abuse, advocacy campaigns may be done by both government and non-government organizations most especially in far flung areas to disseminate information on the existence of Philippine laws that protect the rights of women. These may be done through distribution of advocacy materials and conduct of seminars by the Gender and Development Office of each city or municipality.



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