



STOPPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AT THE SOURCE: GENDER SENSITIVITY FOR MEN



Dr. Narciso "Jun" Naraval,
executive director of
Health Management and
Research Group

Enrique "Iking" Cadayona and Norman Balbuena, staff of the Health Management and Research Group (HMRC), chuckle and shake their heads in disbelief.

Thirty men holding middle-level management positions from the local government units of Davao City had gathered for a gender sensitivity training organized by the city government's Human Resource Management Office. "Do you know what their conclusion was after half an hour? That it's the women who are responsible for the violence," recalls Iking.

The training, held in November 2003, was part of HMRC's programme called "Men's Responsibilities in Gender and Development: Empowering Women Survivors and Effective Interventions on Doers of Violence," or MR. GAD.

After two years with MR. GAD, Norman and Iking are not new to the defensive, sometimes hostile, reactions of men they meet in their work. "One of them even read from the bible the part that says, 'Woman, subject yourself to thy husband,'" Norman said.

“But we show them the figures, and the figures don’t lie,” Iking said.

Incontrovertible statistics

According to the World Health Organisation, although women can also be violent and abuse exists in some same-sex relationships, the vast majority of partner abuse is by men against their female partners. “I’d tell our publics, ‘As long as we men are still majority of those responsible for violence against women, we should continue talking about it,’” Iking said.

MR. GAD is the maturation of the involvement of HMRG’s executive director, Dr. Camilo A.B. “Jun” Naraval Jr., in a survey on domestic violence by the De La Salle University in Manila. The study included Tibungco, a district of Davao City, where the study saw a high prevalence of abuse in the community: 37.6 percent admitted to verbal abuse of their spouses (use of insulting and/or hurting words) and 22.6 percent, physical abuse.

The incidence of VAW in the community, it should be noted, may even be underreported because asked about violence observed among friends and neighbours, a significant proportion (81.9 percent) of the respondents said they personally knew, on average, two families in violent situations.

Such underreporting would be consistent with the national situation. The latest survey on domestic violence (November 2003) reveals that about 2.16 million Filipino women, or 9 percent of women aged 18 and above, have experienced physical abuse from their partners. But more disconcerting is the larger percentage of men who admitted to having physically harmed someone, majority of whom were their wives, girlfriends and live-in partners. About 12 percent of the male respondents or 2.8 million disclosed that they have harmed their female partners physically.

HMRG saw the timeliness of interventions in Tibungco, and in 2002, spearheaded MR. GAD. The programme is now on its second phase, and has expanded to two other districts in the city, Toril and Calinan. “That’s why we’re very grateful for the support from Canada Fund for Local Initiatives to the project,” he said. “There were no takers [of the MR. GAD proposal] in the beginning. The usual thinking was, why put scarce resources on the men, when assistance to the survivors of violence remains sorely lacking?”

A year after, MR. GAD was cited by a Department of Health-European Union women’s health project as a model for gender mainstreaming at the grassroots

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level. “The only way to end domestic violence is to stop it at its source — the men,” Jun said. “Violence against women is learned behaviour. And since it is learned, it can also be unlearned.”

GAD for social marketing

In approaching the different stakeholders in the prevention of violence against women — local executives, barangay councils, and community women’s and youth organisations, HMRG uses Gender and Development (GAD) as a platform.

The links between gender violence and development are clear. The economic costs of gender violence and abuse include the direct costs of health care, missed work, and the additional strain on national resources for shelter, law enforcement and annulment. (Divorce is not legal in the Philippines.)

Studies show that women who experienced physical or sexual violence, whether in childhood or adulthood, are at greater risk of subsequent health problems: reduced physical functioning, more physical symptoms, worse subjective health, more lifetime diagnoses of health problems, and higher health care consumption. The World Bank estimates that in industrial countries, sexual assault and violence take away almost one in five healthy years of life for women aged 15 to 44.

Children who witness violence, on the other hand, experience many of the same emotional and behavioural problems that abused children do — depression, aggression, disobedience, nightmares, poor school performance and somatic health complaints. Children who witness or experience violence are more likely to be abusive as adults.

In addition, according to the World Health Organisation, in low- and middle-income countries such as the Philippines, society absorbs much of the costs of interpersonal violence, including domestic violence, through direct public negative effects on investment and economic growth.

The Philippines was one of the first countries to adopt a policy providing for GAD in its national budget through the Women in Development and Nation Building Act (Republic Act 7192). The legislation requires all government agencies to set aside 5 percent of their budgets for GAD activities, especially for victims/survivors of violence and armed conflict, prostituted women, adolescents, women with disabilities, indigenous women and migrant women.

However, no mechanism to monitor the impact of the law exists. Local governments have been known to



Enrique “Iking” Cadayona,
MR. GAD staff



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The barangay officials, social workers, women, men and youth of barangay Calanan, all graduates of HMRG's gender sensitivity training

spend their GAD budgets on such items as water dispensers and ballroom dancing lessons! They welcome partnerships with credible and accomplished professionals like a Dr. Jun.

In Toril, MR. GAD has become a family affair for the barangay chair. After he attended the session, he encouraged his wife to attend the next one that HMRG gave, then his daughter. On his initiative, the barangay council decided that the gender sensitivity modules be echoed to the youth in the form of a youth camp. The barangay government is spending for the activity.

In the case of Calinan, the district office's social workers and Women's Desk of the police are looking to repeat the course to a core group of trainers so that this can be replicated in the district's 19 barangays. "We can't bring the module to each barangay, that would be too expensive. But we can organise a trainers' pool who will go from one barangay to another to give the course," said Minierva "Minnie" Guevara, one of the district's social workers.

Imaging of men

The design of MR. GAD sits well not only with local executives but also with the men in the community. The men are threatened at the mention of "gender equality" or "women's rights," according to Norman said, but when these concepts are couched in development language, they become more responsive. "That's why we use the word "doer" instead of 'batterer' or 'perpetrator,'" Norman said.

"Perpetrator," he noted, suggests permanent depravity. "But these men are reformable," he added. "We also don't use 'victim' in referring to the wife, but 'survivor.'"

The training typically consists of the basics — the differences between gender and sex, gender roles and gender stereotyping, and the forms, signs and causes of violence against women. HMRG ventures into the theory

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city social worker: "There
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of patriarchy — the questions of power and control — without the jargon.

During the second day, participants are introduced to anger management and interpersonal communication dynamics. "Here, participants begin to understand why men are tight, and women are more affective, and why women are skilled in what they know to be 'verbal warfare,' or nagging," Iking said.

By this time, the male participants are also more at ease with their confidences. "A man who might have said during the first day that he knows a fellow who beats his wife will admit he was referring to himself," Iking added.

The programme also provides direct counselling services. At first, these were carried out one-on-one with the perpetrator. But after three or four sessions, the client drops out. HMRG then switched to peer counselling, which proved more effective in eliciting the men's disclosures and insecurities. "The men became more relaxed, more expressive, and more generous with their suggestions to one another," Norman observed.

The HMRG staff submit — with much reluctance — that gender sensitivity for men seems best carried out by men too.

At the same time, however, Jun cautioned, a gender sensitivity programme with men works only in areas where the women's organisations are strong. HMRG is a visible and important part of the women's movement in Davao City. There is a clear division of responsibilities within the network: HMRG handles the counselling of the perpetrators; the women's groups, crisis centres, shelters and hospitals take care of the counselling and other services required by the victims.

Life turning

The programme's ultimate "secret weapon" is an



Norman Balbuena sharing
the schedule of future
MR. GAD sessions during
the group discussion with
Calanan residents

The men of MR. GAD
proudly declare their vision
during the 2002
International Women's
Day march in Davao City.



innovation of the “loss exercise” or empathy exercise usually carried out with people living with HIV-AIDS, and their families and friends. This is the only activity on the third day of HMRG’s gender sensitivity course.

Participants are asked to write down five places, values or items they cannot live without. Then, they are instructed to do a variety of things with their responses that imply irretrievable loss — crumple the paper, give it away to a friend. The last piece of paper that bears the name of the person one feels closest to has to be burned. A round-robin sharing follows.

The loss exercise, Norman and Iking swear, is guaranteed to break down even the most hard-core chauvinist or cynic.

During the training held with the the city’s LGUs, the most telling evidence that the men eventually sobered to the realities of violence against women and acknowledged men’s role was when a participant discreetly stepped out of the room right after the loss exercise. Norman overheard him saying into his mobile phone: “*Ma, mag-usap tayo.*” (“Ma, let’s talk.”)

“Ma,” “Mama” or “Mommy” are common terms of endearment of Filipino men for their spouses.”

The man’s voice was tempered, but distinctly about to break.

In Calinan, when a group of over 30 adults and youths were asked to determine what their most significant learning from the HMRG training was, the most frequent answer was the empathy exercise. It revealed a simple yet startling realisation: a loved one is never subjected to abuse.

The impact of MR. GAD on both Iking and Norman has been no less dramatic. For Iking, it helped him understand his mother, also a victim of spousal abuse, and his own disposition toward this. Both mother and

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son say their encounter with MR. GAD should have come much earlier.

Norman, on the other hand, finds he became a more considerate spouse. “I share in the household work now. I never even did the laundry before,” he admitted.

Jun also recently received a congratulatory call from one of the city’s prominent feminists about a recidivist that was referred to HMRG for counselling. The wife was the caller’s counselling client but over the past nine years, the feminist declared, “the man is indeed a batterer no more.”

“There should be more efforts like MR. GAD,” Calinan’s social worker Minnie said. Minnie’s annulment case is in court now. After 17 years of an abusive marriage, she thought she was already inured. The MR. GAD sessions mirrored to her the extent and magnitude of the violence she was made to endure. “I don’t even remember what happened, I think I fainted when it was my time to share (during the loss exercise).”

Her most urgent personal agenda is for her teenage son to join the MR. GAD youth camp. “He sometimes saw his father beat me up. It’s important for him to understand, while he’s still young, that that’s not a part of a normal relationship.”

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