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RECOGNITION, THEN REMORSE: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



Martiniana Mercado,
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According to national statistics, an average of 14 women are battered everyday in the Philippines. The data refers to *reported* cases of abuse; many other cases are unreported. In a survey of experiences of violence against women conducted by a women's organization in Manila in 2002 among 1,000 women, the majority cited "shame" as the reason they would rather keep the experience of abuse to themselves. Based on the 2001 records of the Women's and Children's Desk of the national police, of the reported complaints of violence, majority were cases of physical injuries/wife battering (55.1 percent), followed by rape (10.1 percent), and acts of lasciviousness (6.9 percent). And, while no local data on recidivism is available, it is estimated that 90 percent of men arrested for domestic abuse are repeat offenders.

Women's advocates point to the absence of a law on violence in intimate relationships as among the culprits for the country's high incidence of domestic violence. They also point to the intensely patriarchal mores that relegate a woman to a subsidiary role vis-à-vis her partner. There is also the traditional reluctance of relatives and neighbours to intervene, the home being "private sphere," so much so that even though barangay officials are empowered to step into a "private" squabble

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where the woman is beaten, and to detain the abuser, they are clueless where and how to proceed with the intervention.

The macho mentality reinforced by pushing gender issues to the unseen, “private” space of the home, where many men – without hesitation – take liberties with their wives and children, makes the counselling of the abusers all more important, explains Martiniana Mercado, executive director of the Albert Schweitzer Familienwerk Foundation Philippines Inc. (ASFFPI). But why spend time and effort on the perpetrators, instead of assisting the victims? This is a question often posed to Martiniana. Her answer is simple. “So that the violence is stopped.”

As retired regional director of the Department of Social Welfare and Development in Central Visayas (Region VII), Martiniana has accumulated the experience and developed the network for the ASFFPI to carry out counselling and rehabilitation of perpetrators of domestic violence among inmates and juvenile delinquents. An intensive study program she attended in Australia while still in government service in 1993 convinced her of the effectiveness of Cognitive Intervention in preventing domestic abuse. The premise of Cognitive Intervention is that the abuser does not realize the harm he is inflicting on another person. For that matter, he does not realize that what he is doing – beating his partner – is unacceptable.

The trainer’s manual used by ASFFPI for its Batterers Counselling Program states:

It does no good to preach. It does no good to present your “expert interpretations.”

and:

Our goal is to teach them to see. A condition of seeing is that they use their own eyes.

The approach of Cognitive Intervention is consistent with the argument that violence is a vicious cycle, and there being no one to point out that the abuse is wrong, the people witness to the violence begin to consider this normal, acceptable behaviour.

Broad Reach

In 2000, Canada Fund supported the conduct of a trainers’ training for facilitators and the counselling of more than 300 spousal abusers within Cebu with a grant of PhP458,000 (Cdn\$13,170). The complete counselling

Role-playing shows the different dynamics between parents and children.



course is composed of ten to 14 sessions of two hours each, usually held once a week. Participants were referred by the regional offices of five agencies: Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Parole and Probation Administration, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Regional Trial Court and Philippine National Police. In addition to direct counselling among offenders, ASFFPI also assisted in the counselling of more than a hundred victims of spousal abuse, some of them refugees in either of the two shelters (one government-run, and the other, private) in the region, and gave inputs on the family-court model to barangay officials, nongovernmental organizations and parish councils.

According to Jessie Maglasang of the Parole and Probation Administration, one of the facilitators trained by ASFFPI to handle the counselling program among parolees, in practically *all* of the cases he handles, the perpetrators were victims of abuse in their childhood. Sophia Peones of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology estimates that 80 percent of the offenders are from poor families.

“This is not to say that there is less violence occurring in the rich homes. Only that their houses are big, so you can’t hear any ruckus going on inside. It may be a case of underreporting,” Martiniana notes.

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Tangible Results

A module included in the Cognitive Intervention course called “Self Change” calls for several exercises designed to inculcate in participants self-control and accountability for their behaviour. Many of the offenders in Cebu’s detention centres only need to be taught to see, “with their own eyes,” their actions in all their detail and consequences, Martiniana and her colleagues point out.

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Jessie narrates that one participant in his 40s, wrote on his feedback sheet: “I thought it [the violence against women] was ok before. It was easy. But now I know it is not good because it will affect the family.”

Jessie and Sophia vouch for the effectiveness of the cognitive approach. “They noticeably behave better. With those who attended the course, I don’t have any problems. But notice that those who don’t take it, those inmates who ignore the course, they’re the ones who get involved in jail riots and fights,” Sophia said.

Counselling helps shape behaviour, Jessie adds. The parolees that attended the course require much less supervision and are more deliberate. “They have plans – about finding a job right away and helping the family. They show initiative,” he adds. As a result, the Probation and Parole Administration conducted a region-wide echo of the trainers’ training that Jessie attended with the ASFFPI for all the agency staff, and has administered the course to a new group of parolees and probationers in the municipality of Barili. The Central Visayas office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, on the other hand, has recommended the nationwide duplication of the course to the head office in Manila.

Encouraged, ASFFPI is spearheading a nationwide coverage of the trainers’ training component of the project and coordinating with different government agencies for counterpart financing of the staff selected to attend it.

Juvenile Delinquency Too

Cognitive Intervention does not apply to spousal battering alone, but also to child abuse and molestation. “The cognitive-change program we use in our rehabilitation of counselling has also been applied to youth offenders as a pro-active response to violence,” Martiniana said. She considers this an “early intervention program.”

ASFFPI has held orientation sessions on violence prevention with more than five hundred child victims, and gender sensitivity sessions with dozens of students.

“Cognitive Intervention is effective, but it could be even more effective if there was coordination with family members and close kin,” Sophia reflects. The advantage of enrolling the family into abuse prevention is also seen in ASFFPI’s advocacy work with the juvenile delinquents under the jurisdiction of the City Social Welfare and Development Office.

The agency’s Leticia Patalinghug is the case officer of Arthur Hernandez (not his real name), 17, who was detained last year in the barangay detention hall for a

A group activity emphasizes the importance of teamwork in the family.



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day, before being remanded to the police for appropriate charges and to the juvenile court for subsequent hearings. Arthur was apprehended while sniffing “Rugby,” a brand of chemical-based contact cement that street children have taken to sniffing off the bottle or plastic containers for a “fix” that assuages their hunger pangs and carries them through from day to day. “The Rugby problem in Cebu is really bad,” Leticia says. She estimates at least 2 percent of Cebu’s children are hooked on “Rugby.”

Arthur had come upon bad company, and turned to cutting classes and hanging out in the malls, drinking alcohol, sniffing Rugby and at one point, taking crack too. He was always in street brawls with his friends. It could be anything – from a basketball game turned sour to the “annoying way” someone had looked at him and his group. At the time of his detention, Arthur had yet to get past first year in high school, dropping out in the middle of the schoolyear three times in a row.

At first Arthur’s mother minded that her son had to be taken into custody even though, she admits, she had also “given up on him.” Arthur and his mother, on the recommendation of the barangay officials, were among forty pairs of mothers and children who attended a two-day violence-prevention orientation organized by ASFFPI in September 2002 in observance of Family Week. There was much sharing between and among the parents and children, although in the beginning many were too shy to participate in the discussions. Toward the end of the program, some “encounters” became highly emotional.

Arthur now realizes the folly and waste of his past years. He is back at home, released on recognizance,

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even as his hearings are ongoing. But both Leticia and Arthur are confident of the outcome of the hearings. “I’m finished, I’m reformed,” was the youth’s firm but calm declaration. He is certain he will finish his freshman year now. He attends school in the afternoon, and tends to his younger siblings in the morning while his mother works as a laundrywoman in other homes.

Arthur even tried to convince former “street peers” to join the activities of reformed delinquents organized by the City Social Welfare and Development Office. They merely laughed at him. He turned his back without saying anything else and went back home.

“Did you mind being ridiculed by former friends?”

“Never mind, in the end, they will be the ones sorry,” he said.

For her part, Arthur’s mother realizes on hindsight that her decision to ignore the “problematic” son may have even encouraged his delinquency.

Martiniana looks at Arthur and his mother, who are obviously comfortable with each other’s company now. “When we teach the youth the effects of violence on women, children and the community, and how to control their thinking so they have control over their lives, we prevent the transmission of abuse to the next generation,” she said.