

Lived Experiences of Male Sexual Abuse Survivors

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Abstract

Most often, the experiences and welfare of female sexual abuse survivors are being considered by the society. Campaigns and advocacies had been pushed by advocates to address this issue. However, male sexual abuse are often disregarded or neglected. Thus, this study aims to determine the lived experiences of male sexual abuse survivors.

The researcher used qualitative approach through phenomenology. An in-depth interview was conducted, among participants in Baguio City, in order to gather the necessary data, which was analyzed through thematic analysis.

The researcher found out that most male survivors suffered psychological disturbances such as internal conflict, suicidal attempts and disorganization with the society. In addition, in order to address these challenges, the participants had undergone counselling and rehabilitation programs through the help of various agencies.

Male sexual victimization is a topic that needs to be addressed and the society may be more liberated to this topic since it has been around for several years. Sexual abuse does not discriminate age, ethnicity or gender. It may happen to anyone at anytime.

Keywords: Lived experiences; Male Survivors; Neglect; Psychological effect; Sexual Abuse

1. Main text

In years, many had been reported as victims of sexual assault, and most of these victims are women. Sexual assault and women victimization had been explored by researches and literatures for many years, making this topic under feminist revolution. On the other, sexual assault among men had received little attention in the public. According to Lowe (2002) in his study entitled “Male Sexual Assault Victims: A Selective Review of the Literature and Implications for Support Services”, it was cited that male sexual assault had given little attention in research studies or by the public because of the myths on masculinity that men are more strong, assertive, sexually dominant and many more. Thus, men cannot be raped or sexually assaulted.

However, recent literatures show that there are alarming number of men being sexually assaulted. Researches show that the effects of sexual assault on males are often severe. Hence, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study in order to uncover the experiences of male sexual abuse survivors on the selected locale.

This study will benefit the following:

Male Sexual Abuse Survivors. Through this research, it may help survivors understand that they are not alone in their battle. There are institution and people who are willing to understand and help them along the process.

Family of the survivor. This will help inform the family if the survivor on how they may handle the survivor during his impact of the event.

Future Researchers. This study will benefit future researchers by studying further the research gaps of this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored with the following theories: Constructivist Self-development Theory, Sense of Coherence Theory and Gestalt Theory.

Constructivist Self-development Theory. This theory posits that an individual create and construct their own personal realities that shapes their feelings and behavior (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Most sexual abuse survivors construct their own way of dealing with trauma. If the survivor cannot be able to create a way to deal with traumatic events they tend to manifest adverse effect of it.

Sense of Coherence (SOC) Theory. This theory was introduced by Aaron Antonovsky. It simply explains why some people becomes ill or stay healthy under stressful condition. (Ostling, 2017). Sexual abuse survivor with high sense of coherence can be able to manage the traumatic experience he/she was exposed to, otherwise, he/she may suffer further.

Gestalt Theory. The premise of this theory is that individuals form patterns from their experiences. The person's behavior is dependent on the effect of that experience in their lives (Kantrowitz & Okun, 2008). The effect of facing stressful conditions will be dependent on how the sexual abuse survivor perceives the situation.

Review of Related Literatures

Male Victimization

Sexual assault is a reality for many people worldwide, especially for women. Studies and literatures had proved that majority of sexual violence victims are women and most perpetrators are men. However, this does not refute the fact that male sexual victimization is also widespread.

Statistics show that 3.8 percent of the American population belongs to men who reported that they were sexually victimized. While 7.6 percent out of the 10,000 men who were studied in Austria, reveals that they were sexually assaulted (Tewksbury, 2015). This evidently shows that male sexual abuse really exist in the society and there is a high prevalence in some places.

The actual prevalence of male sexual abuse is difficult to estimate. According to Lowe (2002), male sexual abuse in the community is common based on surveys, although few are being recorded by the police. In other countries like South Africa, male survivors are difficult to identify and police records may not have reports on it due to various factors like stigmatization and victim blaming (Vera & Cats, 2003). The statement of McLean evidently supports this, that male sexual assault victims are far less likely to report their victimization than female victims because of issues of stigma, shame and disbelief among the society (McLean, 2005).

It is significant to give emphasis on the fact that men also suffer sexual violence since it is being neglected (World Health Organization, n.d.). .

Impact of Victimization

Generally, sexual assault victims may suffer from the so-called “rape trauma syndrome”. This is a type of stress reaction which may affect the psychological, emotional and behavioral response of the person to a life threatening situation (Vera & Cats, 2003).

Specifically, on the study entitled Effects of male rape on psychological functioning, it was cited that most male survivors have poorer psychological functioning and high level of intrusive thoughts towards the victimization and suicidal attempts (Walker, et. al., 2005). In addition, according to Davidson et al (1976), male victims of rape often attempt to commit suicide due to extreme feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame. Supporting this claim is the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide proposed by Joiner et al (2010) which states that feelings of thwarted belongingness and burdensomeness sparks the idea of suicide. Male victims of rape face conflict within themselves leading to suicide.

Also, in the study conducted by Frazier (1993) comparing female and male rape victims found that males were more hostile and depressed immediately after the rape than the female victims. This is because of the loss of the sense of manliness, that the mere admission of them being victims of sexual assault by their fellow men had them feel that they fall short in the meeting of the cultural standards of manhood (Frazier, 1993). A patient interviewed in this study even disclosed that he never told his wife about his childhood experience of sexual violence because the sense of stigma of the rape felt was huge and very devastating. Support services indeed aid victims of sexual violence, however, only few groups cater to the needs of male victims (Riccardi, 2010). The result of this study assert that males are more targeted as victims of violent crimes that is why, specific needs of male sexual violence victims have to be determined so that these victims will receive the most appropriate treatment, going beyond treatment for their victimization to also address the redemption of their sense of manliness and self-worth.

In the Philippine setting, according to the study conducted by United Nations Children’s Fund Philippines (2015), sexual violence against men aged 13 to 24 years old are more likely to happen more than females of the same age bracket. It was observed that among the respondents of the said study, a bigger percentage of the male respondents mentioned sexual violence experience in various settings, be it in the home, workplace, community or while dating as compared to the percentage of female respondents which also shared the same experience.

Locally speaking, in the Cordillera Administrative Region, 898 cases have been recorded by the Police Office Cordillera (PRO-COR) from 2016 up to 2019 with Benguet province having the greatest number of cases. As to the gender of the victims, 10 percent were males. (Llanes, 2019).

II. Methodology:

Qualitative research particularly phenomenology was used to study the lived experiences of the male sexual assault survivors. Further, interview, documentary analysis and observation were used in the conduct of the study. In addition, triangulation were utilized to increase the trustworthiness of the data gathered.

The researcher utilized qualitative research through case study in order to satisfy the objectives of the study. The primary data-gathering tool utilized in this study is semi-structured interview which is open-ended. This allows the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows

the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up (Turner, D. III, 2010). The interview was a one-on-one interview. The one-to-one interview is a commonly used data collection method in health and social research (Ryan et al, 2013).

Participants

The participants of this study is composed of four (4) males whose age ranges from 19-59 years and residents in Baguio City. In selecting the participants, purposive sampling was utilized. Under this method, the researcher selects the sampling units based on his subjective judgment (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Those who meet the purpose or objective of the study are those deliberately included by the researcher in his sample (Garcia, 2015). This sampling technique is suitable since participants were chosen based on the criteria set. The inclusion criteria for participants of this study are: a) Male who experience sexual abuse and b) above 18 years old.

Procedure

The researcher was guided with all ethical consideration and protocols required in the conduct of the study. A Psychologist was consulted for prior information on how the researcher should conduct briefing and debriefing to participants.

Prior to the interview, the researcher provided informed consent, which guaranteed the willingness of the participants in the interview, and non-disclosure agreement form. This guaranteed that whatever information the participants shared should only be used for educational purposes and should not be divulged or disclosed to anyone or to any office, to include the identity and personal information of the participants, unless permitted.

In the conduct of the interview, an audio recording device was used to augment and validate data taken down by the researcher. The data gathered was stored in a word file and mp3 (recorded) format which was kept by the researcher for the duration of the conduct of said study. After completing the study, the researcher properly disposed the data.

Materials

Interview Guide. The interview guide was formulated based on desired information that is related to the topic and specific problem of the study. The researcher constructed the interview guide questions based on inputs from journals, books and other reference materials. The content of the interview guide was taken directly from the statement of the problems of this research.

Voice Recorder. A voice recorder was used to record the interview. However, permission was sought before utilizing it.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis. The researcher used thematic analysis in presenting the facts in the study. According to Clarke and Braun (2003), thematic analysis refers to a process of identifying themes or patterns, from the data collected, and use these themes to address the research problem (Maguire et al, 2017).

The researcher reviewed the notes and listen to the information that was recorded from the interview. The data gathered was transcribed into writing, the common responses was coded and segmented. Theories and other related literature was used to interpret the data gathered. The researcher, in order to protect the identity of the participants made use of codenames.

III. Result and Discussion

Lived Experiences of Male Sexual Abuse Survivors

This discusses the experiences of the survivors after their victimization. The following themes describe the experiences of Male sexual abuse survivors:

Self-isolation. Most studies claimed that victims of sexual abuse suffer several psychological problems brought by what happened. This can be proved by the statements of Participant 2 and 3 whereby they claimed that they chose to distance themselves from their social groups. It was mentioned by both participants that after *jay nangyari, mas pinilik nga agmaymaysa kesa makikadwa iti adu nga tao* (After the incident, I chose to be alone than to be in a group of people). This means that sexual abuse do affect the social aspect of the survivor. It creates the idea of mistrust thus the survivor would choose to be alone than in a group.

Khazi (2015) stated that emotional sensitivity and vulnerability is not a gender issue. People, regardless of being a male or female will become sensitive and experience breakdowns when provoked or when placed into a situation that reaches their emotional limitations. Thus affects how the person deal with or view other person.

Difficulties of forgetting. All participants shared that they have trouble forgetting what happened. Participant 1 said that *nagrigat, uray inya ti aramiden wennu panunuten ada ditan, haanen nga maikkat* (It's difficult. Whatever you do or think, it's already there, it cannot be removed.). Also, Participant 2 and 4 said that *narigat nga lipaten daya nga didigra, nagmarkan dyta* (It's hard to forget that incident, it is already engraved.). This denotes that traumatic experiences are the hardest thing to forget because it already leaves imprint to the person.

Fearful. It was mentioned by Participants 1, 2 and 4 that *mabutengak karkaru nu amuk nga ada manen isuna* (I'm afraid especially when I know that she/he is there.) while Participant 3 said that *mabutengak idi nu pinagdidismis ti klase ta baka ayaban nak manen kt uliten na jy inaramid na* (I an afraid during class dismissal that she might call me and do it again). This shows that after the incident most participants became fearful especially on the aspect that the perpetrator might do it again and again. According to Anderson (1982), most victims of sexual assault feel fear of being assaulted again as a normal reaction to what happened before. Also, the occurrence of prior sexual abuse may predict the possibility of revictimization (Classen, et. al., 2005).

Also, Emotional Processing Theory claims that fear is activated through associative networks. Most sexual assault survivors deal with traumatic events in which if left without intervention may further aggravate.

Effect of the Victimization towards the Survivor

This discussed the effect of sexual abuse towards the survivor. This section is represented by a theme namely: Psychological Problems

Psychological Problem

Paranoia. Participants 1 and 4 stressed that they are being paranoid especially if they are alone. They commonly overthink that what if the suspect will show up suddenly or what if it will happen again to them.

Participant 3 supported the statements of Participants 1 and 4 through his statement that the way I view *jay community ngay kt asla nagsabali perception ko. Naging mas sensitive ak karkaru nu asla suspicious jay garaw ti tao. Feeling ko asla ada madi nga aramiden na kanyak.* (The way I view the community changed. I became more sensitive especially if the act of the person seems suspicious. I feel that the person will do

something bad to me.). This shows that survivors' perception towards the community had been greatly affected.

Gestalt Theory supports this result. This theory posits that individuals form patterns from their experiences. The effect of facing stressful conditions will be dependent on how the sexual survivor perceives the situation (Kantrowitz & Okun, 2008). Thus, if a survivor becomes paranoid towards his surrounding that is because of how he perceived what happened to him.

Fear of Disbelief. Fear had already been identified as part of the participants' experiences after the incident. However, it is not just limited on the fear of revictimization. Most often, victims of sexual assault do not report, especially male survivors, because of the notion that no one might believe their story.

All participants stated that they did not share what happened to them because of the threat from the perpetrator and fear that no one will believe them. Specifically, Participant 2 said *Kayat ko nga ibaga iti sabali jy nangyari ngem sinu ngay pangibagaak? Ada ngata mangtulong knyak? Ada ngata mamati kanyak karkaru kt lalaki ak.* (I want to tell it to others but to whom will I tell?. Will someone believe me especially that I am a boy?).

As discussed in the previous section, it was presented that male sexual assault victims are far less likely to report their victimization than female victims because of issues of stigma, shame and disbelief among the society (McLean, 2005). Further, Lowe (2002) stressed that male survivors fear telling others about the assault they experienced because they may not believe their story and they may question even their sexuality.

The men also feared telling others about the assault because they may be disbelieved or have doubts about their sexuality cast against them.

Coping mechanisms in response to the psychological effects

Social Support System. It refers to the physical and emotional comfort given to you by your family, friends, co-workers and others. Most survivors cope thru the support of their family members, friends and other people around them by making them feel that someone is willing to listen to their grievances. However, most survivors are reluctant in communicating their problem with other people since for them it is something that may shame or embarrass them. For male survivors, most of them are not open talking about what happened to them since they believe no one might listen to their story especially that they are seen as masculine by the society.

"Idi umuna madik nga makisao iti sabali ta baka ada ibaga da nga madi kanyak, ngem idi bumayag, naamiris ko nga mayat gayam nu ada kasasao nga daduma nga tao, jy kayat na talaga nga dumngeg iti ibagam nga haan daka ijude. (At first, I am reluctant to talk with others because I thought they might say something bad against me, but later on, I realized it's okay to talk with other people, with someone who is willing to listen to your story without judging you.)" a participant stated.

This shows that male survivors find it helpful when they are around other people. Merely talking with them is important.

Self Intervention. This includes activities that the person do to manage his/ her stress. It may include self-concept, self-motivation and therapy.

"Kasasaok nu maminsan ti bagik. Ibagbagak nga kelangak agbalin nga positibo nga tao ta amuk siak mtlng makatulong iti bagik nu kayat ko tlga agmove on ijay nangyari knyak. (I talk to myself sometimes. I kept telling myself that I need to be positive since I believe, if I really want to move on with what happened, it is only I that can help myself.)" cited by one participant.

This shows that providing time for one's self is also important for him or her to contemplate over what happened and make their realizations.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The researcher found out that most male survivors suffered psychological disturbances such as internal conflict, suicidal attempts and disorganization with the society. In addition, in order to address these challenges, the participants had undergone counselling and rehabilitation programs through the help of various agencies.

The researcher recommends that specific programs to address the negative impact of sexual abuse to male survivors maybe designed based on their individual needs.

Acknowledgements

These and the Reference headings are in bold but have no numbers. Text below continues as normal.

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