

Resolution of the Psychological Association of the Philippines on Gender-Based Violence and Violence Against Women (VAW)

Recent events have brought public attention to the continuing problem of gender-based dehumanization and violence against women in Philippine society. These include the documented sale of a t-shirt framing rape as a “snuggle with a struggle” in a large department store chain, the staging of a fashion show by the major retail brand featuring a male actor pulling a female model on an animal leash, and most recently, the violent death of a transgender woman from Olongapo City. In this resolution, we articulate the position of our national professional organization of Filipino psychologists, psychometricians, psychological researchers, and allied mental health professionals on the pressing problem of gender-based violence and its associated harms to mental health and well-being, especially for women.

Gender-based violence, particularly violence directed against women and girls, continues to be a widespread human rights violation and a public health concern globally and in Philippine society. VAW takes on many forms, including physical abuse, sexual assault, and psychological violence (Krantz & Garcia-Moreno, 2005; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

In the Philippines, recent national data indicate that one out of five women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Philippine Statistics Authority & ICF International, 2014). Psychological violence, otherwise known as emotional abuse, is also common and includes acts like humiliating a woman, shouting at a woman for talking with men other than her spouse, insisting to know where she is at all times, preventing her from spending time with family and friends, threats to take away or destroy cherished material objects, and other controlling behaviors.

These forms of violence against women interact and may occur singly or in combination. And while violence and other forms of gender-based aggression are also experienced by men, violence targeting women — including young women, girls, older women, women who are heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender — is an especially critical issue because it is violence rooted in a broader social context of gender inequality and often serves to maintain this unequal status quo (O’Toole, Schiffman, & Kiter Edwards, 2007).

The Philippine context of gender inequality is reflected in daily life and can be reinforced by institutions such as families, the media, and the business sector. This everyday sexism includes imagery that trivializes rape and desensitizes women, men, and young people to the harms of sexual violence by framing it as affection, rather than as sexualized control and aggression against women. Depictions that reduce women and girls to sexual objects for the use of others, instead of as agentic persons with the capacity for independent thought, feelings, and decision-making, are another example of gender-based dehumanization and violence (American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2010).

Not all survivors of VAW experience negative effects to the same extent, but the evidence for harm brought about by gender-based violence is clear (Philippine Statistics Authority & ICF International, 2014). Sixty-four percent of Filipina women and girls who ever experienced sexual violence suffered some form of physical injury; 11% had eye injuries, sprains, dislocations or burns; 36% had cuts, bruises or aches; 8% lost their job or source of income; and 5% suffered deep wounds, broken bones, broken teeth, or another serious injury.

The harm to mental health is no less serious: feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem, beliefs of being damaged, debilitating anxiety, symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder, and in extreme cases, psychotic reactions (Jordan, Campbell, & Follingstad, 2010). National data indicate that 57% of VAW survivors report depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, confusion, or feelings of isolation, and 16% attempted suicide. Equally worrying is 38% of women who experience VAW never seek help and never tell anyone; less than 10% seek help from a professional like a counselor

or psychologist.

The Psychological Association of the Philippines stands with international human rights bodies, civil society organizations, women's rights groups, and the rest of the mental health professional community in recognizing the problem of gender-based violence, especially violence against women. The PAP Code of Ethics (2010) calls upon all Filipino psychologists to uphold human dignity of women and men (Principle I) and to act in accordance to professional responsibilities to society, rights, and well-being (Principle IV).

In order to eliminate gender-based violence, especially violence against women, the PAP resolves to support efforts to:

- oppose all public and private forms of gender-based violence, especially physical, sexual, and psychological violence directed toward women and girls;
- support legislation at the local and national levels that protect the rights and promote the welfare of women and girls, especially against gender-based violence;
- eliminate all forms of sexism and gender inequality, including content and practices that may legitimise or trivialize gender-based violence, in teaching, research, psychological interventions, assessment and other psychological programs;
- encourage psychological research that addresses the experiences and concerns of Filipina women and girls in the context of safety, gender-based violence, and sexual dehumanization;
- disseminate and apply accurate and evidence-based information about gender-based violence and its harms to mental health and well-being;
- design and provide psychological services that foster mental health and wellbeing of women and girls, address the harms of gender-based violence, and contribute to a culture of gender equality.

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