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Women's Narratives on the Intergenerational Transmission of Intimate Partner Violence in Mindanao, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) remains a critical public health issue globally, with significant implications for women, particularly those from marginalized ethnic communities. In the Philippines, IPV continues to affect women, with ethnic minority groups facing heightened vulnerability. This study investigates the lived experiences of ethnic minority women victims of IPV in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, between October 2021 and July 2022, employing a transcendental phenomenological approach. The research involved in-depth interviews with three purposively selected women who have experienced IPV. Experts validated the interview guide to ensure its relevance to the participants' socio-cultural contexts. Data analysis was conducted using Moustakas' (1994) Van Kaam method. The findings reveal sociocultural and several psychosocial factors contributing to IPV, including systemic gender inequality, economic dependency, and cultural norms (e.g., machismo and the idealization of a "good man"). These factors create an environment in which emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, along with alcoholism, are pervasive. The study also highlights the impact of intergenerational trauma in perpetuating cycles of abuse. The findings underscore the systemic nature of IPV, where entrenched cultural and economic structures reinforce violence. This research emphasizes the need for improved support services and culturally sensitive, gender-responsive policies that address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous women. It also advocates for a multi-sectoral approach to address IPV more effectively. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on IPV in marginalized communities and highlights the importance of integrating gender equality principles into public health policies.

Keywords: Intergenerational transmission of violence, intimate partner violence, narratives, transcendental phenomenology, women

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INTRODUCTION

Violence continuously plays a role in the lives of women and children, particularly in the transmission of violence from one generation to the next, despite efforts to bring about change and prevent it. Studies have shown that intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a primary social concern because of its human rights, anchored on SDG 5, Gender Equality, and public health implications (Meyer et al., 2021; Kerridge & Tran, 2016).

Worldwide, 6% and 71% of women aged 15 to 49 have been victims of physical or sexual abuse by an intimate male partner (Kerridge & Tran, 2016). In the Philippines, 17.5% of Filipino women aged 15-49 have experienced any form of physical, sexual, and emotional violence from their intimate partners (data were taken from Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022), with domestic violence affecting one in every four women aged 24-49 with 8,399 reported cases of physical violence, 1,791 on rape, and 1,505 on acts of lasciviousness as cited by Philippine Commission on Women (2021). This was affirmed by the study of Yoshioka et al. (2020) among 11,727 women and girls in the Philippines (data were taken from the Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey). Violence is often thought to cover more situations in which partners in dating, cohabiting, and marriage relationships are threatened, harassed, coerced, or intimidated (Corvo, 2019; World Health Organization [WHO], 2013).

Although there have been studies regarding intergenerational transmission of violence, the assumptions are primarily focused on the psychological traits of the offender. For instance, Holt (2012) and Miles and Condry (2015) link parental IPV with child-parent abuse. The same is true with the works of Anderson et al. (2018), showing that childhood maltreatment, psychological distress, and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) are all associated risk factors for perpetrating child abuse. Further, as demonstrated by the studies of Chan et al. (2022) and Avakame (1998), as children mature into adults, they repeat the aggressive behavior they learn. Even though numerous studies have been undertaken to understand domestic violence, one question must be explored, and that is how intimate partner violence is transmitted from generation to generation.

Several theories can explain this phenomenon. Hence, an integrative approach was employed to examine the intergenerational transmission of IPV in Indigenous communities. For instance, Standpoint Theory provides the foundational lens, centering Indigenous women's narratives to reveal how macro-level power relations—shaped by colonial hierarchies and patriarchal structures—position them as vulnerable to abuse (Harding, 1991). This aligns with and extends Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity, demonstrating how perpetrators exploit dominant social statuses reinforced by cultural norms like machismo while also exposing how these dynamics are intensified by institutional failures (Smith & Freyd, 2014), such as inadequate legal protections and economic marginalization.

Furthermore, Bandura and Walters' (1977) Social Learning Theory explains the normalization of violence through generational exposure, while the study culturally specifies this process by showing how tribal kinship systems and community expectations mediate behavioral replication. For instance, children in Indigenous families may learn violence not only through direct observation but also through culturally sanctioned gender roles and communal silence around abuse, reflecting the interplay between familial and community ecological systems. Bowen's (1978) Family Systems Theory further elucidates intergenerational transmission through two key mechanisms: (1) the multigenerational transmission process, where emotional patterns (e.g., suppressed trauma from colonial violence) perpetuate IPV cycles across ecological levels—from macro-historical oppression to micro-relational dynamics—and (2) differentiation of self, which helps explain resilience variations among Indigenous women. Those with strong ties to cultural revitalization movements often exhibit more excellent resistance to abusive patterns, highlighting the chronosystem's role (Heise, 1998) in fostering protective factors.

Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology was used to understand how violence is transmitted through generations based on the participants' experiences. Transcendental phenomenology, developed by Husserl, explores human experiences by looking at how people perceive and interpret the world through their senses (Moustakas, 1994). It focuses on how individual consciousness and subjective experiences shape our understanding of social actions. Phenomenology also emphasizes intersubjectivity, where people share a common understanding and interpret events based on their collective knowledge and social norms. This approach helps reveal how shared perceptions influence how violence is transmitted and understood across generations (Smith & Thomasson, 2005).

Despite the efforts to understand IPV, the need to focus on racially diverse mothers in domestic violence shelters is under-studied (Anderson et al., 2018) to understand the intergenerational transmission of abuse. Hence, in this case, women victims from the same family were taken into account to get a holistic picture of IPV across generations. This study aimed to fill the gap in exploring other aspects of the transmission of intimate partner violence and identify the factors, patterns, and effects based on the narratives of these women victims.

METHODS

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of ethnic minority women who have been victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). Data was collected through in-depth interviews, each lasting **45 minutes to one hour.** Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. A panel of subject matter experts reviewed and validated the interview guide used in this study. To ensure a comprehensive

exploration of their experiences, each participant engaged in three interviews: a pre-interview, a primary interview, and a post-interview. Before the interviews, participants were thoroughly briefed on the purpose of the research to ensure they were fully informed and comfortable with the process. During the interviews, the researchers were accompanied by a licensed Social Worker and Psychologist to ensure the well-being of the participants. Multiple theoretical perspectives were used to analyze the participants' conditions and experiences. Bukidnon State University's Research Ethics Committee granted this research ethical approval.

The study was conducted in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, between October 2021-July 2022. Interviews took place in the participants' respective homes to ensure privacy and comfort. The participants belong to one of the seven tribes of Bukidnon but no longer reside within their ancestral domain. The study included three participants, aged between 18 and 79, all of whom had experienced IPV in heterosexual relationships and had children. All participants were from the maternal lineage (Grandma). Grandma entered marriage at the age of 15, but could not specify the duration of her first marriage due to the passing of her husband. Mama married at 14, subsequently remarried, and had been separated for nine years. Apo was never legally married but had children from two different partners.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, focusing on residents from a single neighborhood. While this sampling strategy ensured the inclusion of individuals with relevant experiences, it also presented limitations, such as potential biases and reduced generalizability. Confidentiality and providing a coherent structure for analysis were maintained. Thus, the participants were assigned pseudonyms: Grandma, Mama, and Apo. (See Table 1)

The researcher analyzed the data from the participants' in-depth interviews using the Van Kaam analysis proposed by Moustakas (1994). The typical responses of the participants were identified by the researcher from the transcripts using the coding procedures of Saldaña (2013). The researcher then reviewed, defined, and named the themes from the coding process.

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Civil Status at the time of the study	Age	Number of Children	Ethnicity	Rank in the Family	Current family arrangement
Grandma	Live-in	79	4	Higaonon	6th	Cohabitating with current partner
Mama	Married but separated for 15 years	56	9	Higaonon	2nd	Living with children
Apo	Live-in	18	2	Higaonon-Cebuano	8th	Living with mother

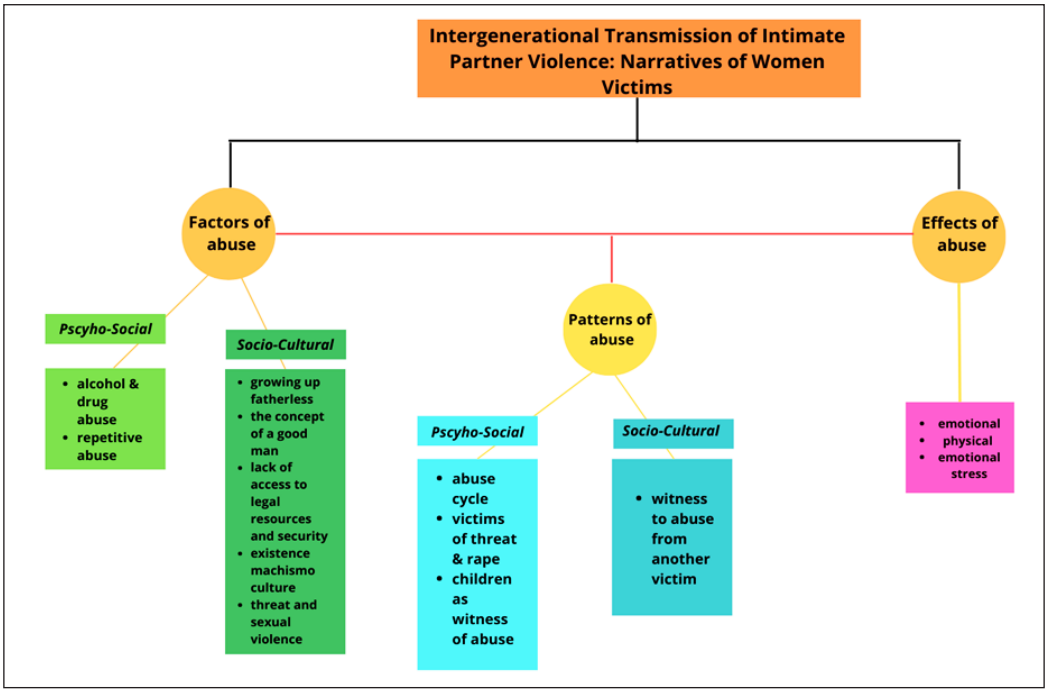

Figure 1. Emerging themes of the study

Further, to increase trustworthiness and data validity, the researcher considered several study validation processes by employing theory triangulation and member-checking.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings elucidate the psycho-social and socio-cultural causes of intimate partner violence (IPV). Additionally, the study identifies the effects and patterns of IPV to understand its dynamics better. Each theme is categorized into distinct categories detailed in this section (refer to Figure 1).

Lived Experiences of Women Victims of IPV

This section presents and analyzes the experiences of women victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), with a focus on the psycho-social and socio-cultural factors. It also explores the effects and patterns of IPV to comprehensively understand the phenomenon under investigation.

Psycho-Social Factors in Indigenous Women's Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

This theme addresses how psychological and social factors shape Indigenous women's experiences of intimate partner violence, highlighting alcohol abuse, coping mechanisms, emotional trauma, and gendered psycho-social dynamics. These psycho-social elements not only influence the nature of the abuse but also dictate how victims respond to and survive it.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse as a Psycho-Social Trigger and Amplifier of IPV

The role of alcohol abuse in intimate partner violence is a central theme in the experiences shared by the participants. For many victims, alcohol misuse by their partners directly contributed to aggressive and violent behavior. For example, Grandma shares: *"We always fight, and if he ever goes out, he will start a fight with me. He drinks a lot and causes problems for me.*" Apo also recounts: *"He is very *abusive*; he hurts me physically here. He also drinks a lot and goes violent when very drunk*." These accounts demonstrate how substance abuse impairs the cognitive and emotional regulation of perpetrators, leading to an increase in physical aggression.

The psychological impact on the perpetrator is well-documented in studies (e.g., Fritz et al., 2023; Sontate et al., 2021; Vitoria-Estruch et al., 2018; Heinz et al., 2011), which suggests that alcohol consumption impairs cognition and increases aggression. This impairment can lead to violent outbursts, as evidenced by participants' experiences, where alcohol often triggers physical abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014). Substance Use as a Cycle of Violence Studies, like Tadesse et al. (2020), reinforce this connection, suggesting that women whose partners use substances are three times more likely to experience IPV. The psychological impairment induced by alcohol contributes to the perpetrator's aggression, while the victim becomes more vulnerable due to the normalizing effects of substance abuse in the relationship. This creates a complex, interwoven situation in which substance abuse both triggers and amplifies IPV.

Psychological Impact of Repeated Abuse and Coping Strategies

Learned Helplessness and Survival Mechanisms. Participants of IPV reported feeling powerless and trapped within their relationship, mainly when the abuse occurs repeatedly. Grandma reflects on how she internalized the abuse, saying: *"Before, I never fought back whenever he started the fight; I kept thinking that this was only because 'he is drunk'..."* This rationalization, a form of learned helplessness, demonstrates the psychological toll that repeated violence can have on a victim's ability to assert control. Victims may start to believe that their partner's behavior is temporary, rationalizing the violence as something beyond their control, such as the partner's drunken state.

However, over time, these victims develop survival mechanisms that allow them to endure and sometimes respond to the abuse. Consider Mama's narrative: *"Now, we would beat each other up and learn to fight back."* This shift from passivity to active defense is indicative of a coping strategy developed out of necessity. Repeated exposure to abuse forces victims to adapt, changing from feeling helpless to learning how to protect themselves. This adaptation is not a sign of empowerment but rather a response to the ongoing trauma and abuse.

Emotional and Psychological Trauma. Prolonged exposure to IPV results in profound emotional and psychological trauma, as in the case of the participants. The fear and helplessness felt by ethnic minority victims during these abusive episodes can lead to anxiety, depression, and a sense of degradation. For example, Mama shares: *"I was afraid, I did nothing, that is why I felt degraded, and I kept it within myself. I have no choice."* This statement reflects the internalized emotional toll of living in constant fear and powerlessness. As the violence continues, victims may experience emotional numbness or detachment as a defense mechanism, but the underlying psychological harm remains. The continued abuse affects their sense of self-worth and emotional stability, leaving them vulnerable to further abuse and trauma.

Gendered Psycho-Social Dynamics of IPV

IPV often follows a gendered pattern, with men being the primary perpetrators of severe abuse, including physical violence, sexual coercion, and emotional manipulation. As the study by Swan et al. (2008) suggests, men's aggression in relationships is often more severe, while women's violence tends to be a response to self-defense and fear. This is evident in the participants' experiences where abuse, driven by the abuser's aggression and alcohol misuse, leads women to either internalize their suffering or, in some cases, defend themselves physically.

Socio-Cultural Aspect of IPV

Impact of Family Dynamics and Childhood Experiences

Fatherlessness and Early Exposure to Violence. A key socio-cultural aspect in these women's experiences of IPV is the lack of father figures during childhood. As shared by the participants, growing up without a father or in unstable family situations (such as with alcoholic or abusive stepfathers) has far-reaching effects on their psycho-social development, particularly in shaping gender roles and expectations. Exposure to violence and frequent parental conflicts, as mentioned by Apo and Mama, can normalize violent behavior in relationships. Consider the narratives of Grandma, Mama, and Apo as they recount their experiences.

> ***"****I grew up without a father since he passed away when I was three (3) years old,"*- Grandma.

> *"It was hard after our father passed away because of that; my mother would frequently change partners. With her former partner, they had a child, a daughter who now resides abroad. There was a gap between us since it was also because of my mother."*- Mama.

> "*When I was three (3) years old, my father was in prison. When I was 12 years old, my father got released… then my father would always drink. He and my mother would always fight, like every time."*-Apo

Growing up without a father appears to have had a profound impact on the women's

emotional and psychological development, which is compounded by the absence of a stable family environment. For these women, the loss of a father figure and the instability that followed — such as frequent changes in parental relationships — may have played a crucial role in shaping their understanding of gender roles and relationships. Apo's narrative reveals the effects of witnessing domestic violence between her parents, mainly driven by alcohol use. This exposure likely normalized violent behavior and impacted her perception of relationships.

Research suggests that fatherless homes, particularly those where IPV is present, can lead to adverse developmental outcomes for children, including problems with identity formation, difficulties in emotional regulation, and an increased risk of experiencing or perpetrating IPV in their adult relationships (Shorey et al., 2012). The lack of a father figure may lead to the internalization of gender roles that are shaped more by observed behavior than by nurturing, leading to a higher tolerance or expectation of abuse in relationships.

Machismo and Aggression in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

The Concept of a Good Man. The narratives above expose the profound contradictions between the cultural ideal of a "good man" and the abusive behavior experienced in relationships.

Below was the recount of the experiences of participant Grandma:

> *"My advice for you is to marry a Godly man. Since marrying someone like that would never hurt you, since they would fear doing that because someone is watching us."-Grandma*

Grandma's ideal of a "Godly man" who would never hurt her because of societal oversight and Mama's disappointment in her abusive partner reflect a central conflict. These women's lived experiences directly challenge the traditional notion of masculinity, where strength, dominance, and the role of protector are revered. However, as these victims reveal, violence and control often take the place of these idealized virtues.

Grandma's cultural advice reinforced the concept of a good man, but it also placed a moral and gendered expectation on what women should seek in a partner: a man who exhibits "good" behavior or one who adheres to a moral or religious framework. In contrast, Mama's experience of coercion and emotional confusion questions the ability to live up to the societal expectation of a good man, especially when manipulation and physical violence mar the relationship.

Pollak (2004) provides a framework for understanding the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence and highlights that the backgrounds and experiences of both partners influence the likelihood of domestic violence in a relationship. Specifically, Pollak identifies three key factors in domestic violence: (1) the likelihood that a partner/husband will be violent is dependent on whether he grew up in a violent home; (2) the likelihood that a wife/partner will stay with a violent partner/husband is dependent on her

environment at home; and (3) a person tend to marry individuals with violent behaviour. The concept of a good man represents an idealization that is in direct contrast with the violent behaviors these women experienced in their relationships. The idea of the "Godly man" as someone who does not inflict harm aligns with the expectations that women have for safety, respect, and love in relationships. However, Pollak's (2004) framework provides an essential lens for understanding why the perpetrators failed to meet these expectations. The intergenerational transmission of violence, coupled with personal history and learned behaviors, often shapes the dynamics within IPV situations, as evidenced in Mama and Apo's experiences.

Pollak's findings underscore that the idealized image of a "good man" may remain elusive because partners often carry the legacies of their own past experiences. These expectations, however, can sometimes be misaligned with the reality of what men have internalized about relationships, power, and control, which may explain why Mama and Apo found themselves in abusive partnerships despite their hopes for love and safety.

Machismo and Masculinity. One of the significant socio-cultural influences in IPV is the deeply rooted machismo culture, which emphasizes male dominance and aggression. This culture pressures men to display authority and strength within the household, often manifesting in physical and emotional abuse toward women. For example, Mama and Apo spoke about how their partners displayed violent behavior, sometimes triggered by minor frustrations. These actions are linked to the aggressive enforcement of masculinity and power.

Below are the narratives of the women victims:

> *"I told him, 'Leave me, if all you want is to hurt me.'"*-Grandma

> *"The only problem is that he [referring to first former husband] has a short temper that would lead to physical assault… what is more confusing is that he does not drink (alcohol)."*-Mama

> *"He would be triggered and irritable. That even the smallest things he would get mad easily. For example, you would do something small that would irritate him, he would suddenly take something and throw it at you."*-Apo

The narratives highlight a key characteristic of machismo culture — the inability to control emotions, especially aggression, and the tendency for small triggers to escalate into violent outbursts. Apo's description of her partner getting angry over minor irritations, like throwing objects, and Grandma's statement about being hurt repeatedly, suggest that this form of aggression is not only common but also normalized within relationships marked by a machismo culture.

In many societies that emphasize machismo, men are socialized to express dominance through aggression and control.

Machismo is the embodiment of exaggerated masculinity, where men are expected to assert power, maintain dominance, and often use aggression or violence as a means of reinforcing their authority. This system of thought is often ingrained in childhood through family structures, peer interactions, and social norms, which leads to the internalization of these behaviors. For Apo's partner, even minor triggers led to violent reactions. This aggression might be a way for the perpetrator to reassert control, especially when feeling insecure or threatened. Apo's narrative shows the frustration with the partner's inability to express emotions healthily.

In cultures that hold strong beliefs in machismo, aggression can arise even in the absence of intoxication, indicating that violence is more deeply rooted in the perceived need for dominance and control. Mama's partner's short temper and the resulting violence are clear examples of how machismo expectations can manifest without the added complexity of substance abuse. This supports the notion that machismo culture can independently fuel violent behavior through rigid gender expectations, where men feel entitled to dominate and control their female partners regardless of external circumstances.

The incident where Apo's partner threatened her with a blade after suspecting infidelity highlights how machismo often involves not just emotional dominance but physical control as well. Apo shares: *"Another incident when she was still in the place of the perpetrator, wherein she went to a neighboring house to watch television when her perpetrator suddenly ran towards her with a blade, thinking she was cheating with another man.* The need for Apo's partner to demonstrate his authority by threatening her with violence over a perceived betrayal (even if unfounded) is a typical reflection of the intense fear of losing control or masculine power in relationships. In machismo culture, men often feel compelled to defend their honor at all costs, including through physical violence. This can also reflect broader societal expectations where men must defend their masculinity, often violently, to retain respect and authority, both from their partners and others. Apo's partner's reaction, thinking she was cheating, may have been driven by feelings of shame or embarrassment. Thus, he resorted to aggression as a way to regain control of the relationship and prove his masculinity.

The concept of machismo, or exaggerated masculinity, plays a critical role in shaping how men and women experience and navigate intimate relationships. Men who adhere to traditional gender roles often feel they are compelled to dominate their partners, leading to abusive behaviors when they feel their power is threatened. Ceballos (2013) explains that machismo can be seen as a protective and destructive cultural value. When men feel disrespected, disempowered, or threatened by a partner's actions, they often respond with aggression as a means to reaffirm their masculinity and control. Further, it was said that the expression of machismo can shift from

positive to negative depending on the circumstances. Men who feel that their respect and power are undermined may turn to aggression to prove their dominance (Ceballos, 2013).

The cultural dimension of machismo is linked to the perpetuation of violence through intergenerational patterns. Research by Graham-Bermann and Brescoll (2000) and Levinson (1984) suggests that ethnic minorities, especially those in close-knit communities, may be more likely to condone or justify physical discipline, perpetuating a belief system that violence is an acceptable way to handle conflict. In the case of these participants, their cultural backgrounds and family dynamics likely shaped the perpetrators' responses to perceived disrespect and loss of power. The tribal affiliations mentioned by the participants may have created an environment where aggression was normalized or even expected in situations where masculinity or family honor was at stake.

Additionally, the pressure to uphold patriarchal norms in these communities likely reinforced these aggressive behaviors. Men are often expected to be the primary decision-makers in their households, and any perceived threat to this power dynamic can trigger violent responses. The societal framework in which these men operate tends to favor male dominance, further embedding the cycle of violence and aggression.

Legal and Institutional Support Systems. The lack of adequate legal support and expertise in handling IPV cases reflects broader societal and institutional failures to address the issue effectively. These narratives expose the failure of the legal system to offer protection or even to take these women's complaints seriously. The dismissive and insensitive responses from officers, like telling the victims to "discuss it among yourselves," highlight a systemic lack of understanding and gender insensitivity in addressing IPV. Consider the annoying experience Grandma shared: *"The officer in charge was rude, and they said, 'You discuss that both since you are a couple." That is it. That is all they said: we should discuss this among ourselves since we are just a couple."* Mama's experience also shows how legal authorities often fail to take women's rights seriously, making it more likely that victims will feel disempowered and unable to access the legal recourse needed to escape their abusers. She recalled, ***"****I asked for help from the barangay captain, telling him that I was beaten with a sort of stick by my partner, and he responded, 'Go back home! Get beaten first before coming back here. Because of that, I prefer to keep it to myself since I have no one to ask for help.".* This was also the same frustration experienced by Apo as she shared: ***"****We filed a case of rape, but this was disregarded for the filing of the case should be in the place where the incident happened according to the officer we talked to. The case was also not pushed because it must get to the barangay level before forwarding it to the police station."*

Apo's frustration with the bureaucratic processes — being told to file cases at the appropriate local level — reflects the lack

of proper legal education on IPV and the challenges women face when navigating a system not designed with their needs in mind. The complexity of these processes and the insufficient resources available to support victims of IPV lead many women to abandon their pursuit of justice, trapping them in ongoing abusive relationships.

The narratives shared by Grandma, Mama, and Apo reflect the severe gaps in the legal and institutional support systems for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the Philippines. These stories highlight institutional negligence and systemic barriers that hinder victims from obtaining justice and protection, leaving them feeling unsupported and vulnerable.

One of the primary issues raised is officers' lack of professionalism and incompetence when victims attempt to report IPV. Grandma's account of encountering a dismissive officer illustrates a lack of understanding and empathy towards IPV victims. Instead of providing help, the officer trivialized the abuse by suggesting the couple should simply "discuss it" among themselves, dismissing it as a private issue rather than a matter of public concern or legal violation. This aligns with findings from the Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC, 2024), which reported that some police officers in the Philippines display gender insensitivity when handling IPV cases, advising victims to reconcile with their abusers rather than pursuing legal protection.

Mama's experience further illustrates the inadequacy of local governance in responding to IPV cases. She sought help from the barangay captain, yet was shamed and told to "get beaten first" before returning for assistance. This reflects a deeply ingrained cultural perception that domestic violence is a personal issue to be dealt with privately rather than a crime that demands institutional intervention. This is supported by the Philippines: Sweeping Violence Under the Carpet report, which suggests that domestic violence is often seen as a personal problem rather than a criminal one, causing law enforcement to downplay or dismiss these cases.

Apo's story highlights another significant barrier: the bureaucratic complexity of the legal system. Despite attempting to file a rape complaint, she was unable to move forward due to procedural hurdles, with officers telling her that the case could not proceed unless it was first processed at the barangay level. This lack of knowledge about the laws on domestic violence was further exacerbated by the absence of adequate legal support to help navigate the complex system. This situation aligns with the Asian Development Report on Gender and Development, which reveals that police often lack training on laws related to gender-based violence and fail to implement regulations properly, such as ensuring separate interviews for women victims of IPV.

Furthermore, this issue is compounded by the cultural and institutional resistance to laws like RA 9262, which aims to protect women from violence, as well as the broader legal context in the Philippines, where the absence of divorce laws continues to trap

many women in abusive relationships. As the Philippines: Sweeping Violence Under the Carpet report highlights, the religious and cultural stigma against divorce and the prevailing belief that marriage is sacred and indissoluble often causes IPV victims to feel trapped within their abusive relationships. This cultural perspective, along with the lack of accessible legal resources, results in many women feeling like they have no legal recourse or support to escape violence.

This systemic neglect of IPV victims is not only a failure of law enforcement but also a failure of the entire legal infrastructure to prioritize the safety and well-being of women. The fact that the Police National Police (PNP) has been unable or unwilling to properly implement laws such as RA 9262 speaks volumes about the gaps in the legal protection afforded to victims of IPV. Male officers often being assigned to Women and Children Protection Desks (WCPDs), combined with their gender insensitivity, exacerbates the difficulties women face in trying to report or seek justice for the abuse they suffer. This reflects findings from the IRBC (2024), which points to a lack of training among officers to handle gender-based violence cases.

Patterns of IPV

The Abuse Cycle and Predictable Patterns of Violence

The abuse cycle, a critical concept in the study of intimate partner violence (IPV), refers to the predictable sequence of events that often characterize abusive relationships. These cycles, coined by Walker (2016) as the Battered Women Syndrome, consist of phases of tension building, abusive incidents, and a honeymoon phase where the abuser expresses remorse. These cycles trap victims in abusive relationships by creating a sense of instability and unpredictability. The tension phase starts with minor triggers, such as actions or words from the victim that unintentionally provoke the abuser, leading to escalated aggression. This cyclical process reinforces the victim's feelings of helplessness and entrapment, a phenomenon closely linked to learned helplessness, where victims come to believe they cannot escape their situation (Miller & Seligman, 1975). This is reflected in the narratives of the victims, such as Mama shared: *"If I did something wrong or if one of my children did something wrong, it always ends up with us getting beaten. Like my son, he would even bleed from the beatings he got from his father.* "Mama, whose family faced regular beatings, emphasized that minor infractions led to severe consequences.

Victims often internalize their abuser's actions, believing they must endure the violence to avoid triggering further aggression. Rakovec-Felser (2014) explains that victims of IPV experience symptoms like hypervigilance and emotional withdrawal, which are part of the cycle of learned helplessness. They may repeatedly try to avoid situations that would escalate the abuse, but this avoidance only increases the control and power of the perpetrator, making it harder for the victim to seek help.

The abuse cycle often manifests as a predictable and recurrent pattern of violence within intimate partner relationships.

However, for women who belong to minority groups, such as indigenous communities, this cycle is compounded by additional layers of vulnerability due to their social status. As minority women, they face marginalization and discrimination both within their communities and from external systems, which exacerbates their exposure to violence. The experience of minority stress, as discussed by Meyer (2003), posits that individuals from marginalized groups experience chronic social stress that makes them more vulnerable to IPV.

In the case of Mama and Apo, both of whom are Indigenous women, their marginalized status within their communities often meant their experiences were minimized or overlooked. The abuse cycle, in their case, is not just a personal or relational issue but also an issue deeply rooted in systemic factors such as colonialism, patriarchy, and cultural marginalization. As part of the minority, the victims' lived experiences are also shaped by systemic oppression, where the legal and institutional systems that are supposed to protect them may be ineffective, biased, or discriminatory. The marginalization of Indigenous people within the broader legal and social framework often prevents them from accessing support or justice. Walker's abuse cycle becomes particularly insidious in this context, as the social, legal, and cultural structures that should support victims of violence are often absent, leaving Indigenous women more vulnerable to cycles of abuse.

Sexual Violence and Coercion as Turning Points in Abuse

Sexual violence experienced by Indigenous women like Mama and Apo represents a turning point in their abuse. Sexual violence becomes a breaking point where victims feel that their autonomy has been stripped away, and they are subjected to physical and emotional harm. Mama shared a painful moment: "Would you even like to be intimate with your partner when you are already sleeping well, when suddenly he would hurt you physically if you did not give him what he wanted?" This represents a form of sexual coercion where the perpetrator uses violence and threats to manipulate the victim into compliance.

Apo's experience was similarly harrowing: "He went inside the room, then he covered me with a blanket and pointed a gun at me, threatening me to keep quiet or not to tell anyone about this." This use of threats and sexual coercion left Apo in a vulnerable position, where her identity as a woman, compounded by her Indigenous status, made it difficult for her to seek justice or even feel that her trauma would be validated. Sexual violence in these cases is not just a violation of their bodies but a cultural assault, with perpetrators exploiting their victims' vulnerability as women in marginalized Indigenous communities.

For Mama, the situation was further complicated by cultural pressures: “I was forced to marry my rapist because our elders, including my parents, insisted.” In Indigenous communities, there can be intense cultural pressure to conform to

traditional norms, even at the expense of the woman's safety and well-being. The cultural expectation to maintain family cohesion and avoid disgracing the family often keeps victims like Mama trapped in abusive relationships.

Both of these narratives speak to the compounded vulnerability of Indigenous women in abusive relationships. They face not only physical and emotional harm but also the trauma of being silenced by cultural expectations, societal stigma, and a lack of legal or institutional support. The intersectionality of being both female and indigenous contributes to a cycle of abuse that becomes harder to break.

Children as Witnesses to IPV and Intergenerational Violence

The impact of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) extends beyond the victims themselves and significantly affects children, especially when they witness violence inflicted upon their mothers. These children experience a unique form of trauma, and for some, witnessing abuse becomes a catalyst for intergenerational violence. In the narratives provided by Mama and Apo, we see how their children were not only exposed to the violence inflicted upon their mothers but also directly victimized by the same perpetrators.

Mama shared her painful experience: *"He would beat my child here! It got so swollen that it almost got fractured from the beating. I just hugged my child in this sweet potato field. Then my eldest would tell me, 'Ma, let's go away from here.'"* This narrative reflects the direct impact of IPV on children, where Mama's child was subjected to physical violence. Despite the child's innocence, they found themselves caught in the cycle of abuse. This example speaks to the direct victimization of children in IPV situations, which is increasingly recognized as an important factor in understanding the full scope of IPV's damage. Children who witness or are involved in the abuse experience a range of physical and emotional consequences, many of which may persist into adulthood.

Apo provided another example of the emotional toll on children: *"I felt sorry for my father because he longed for a family. But despite giving him chances to change, he kept repeating the same mistakes."* Here, Apo's child was not physically abused but witnessed the cycle of violence, experiencing emotional distress and confusion. These experiences can contribute to psychological difficulties in children, who may struggle with understanding their role in the violence or develop complex feelings of loyalty to their abusive parent.

Research indicates that children who witness IPV often experience severe psychological and emotional difficulties. Callaghan et al. (2018) argue that children exposed to IPV are direct victims of violence and abuse, not just passive witnesses. This highlights the need to shift the perspective on IPV, recognizing that children who witness violence experience significant trauma and require intervention and support. It is important to note that, as Harper et al. (2018) pointed out, young children who

witness abuse face particular difficulties in their psychosocial development. Toddlers exposed to IPV may experience emotional difficulties such as separation anxiety from the non-abusive parent, particularly the mother, which can further hinder their emotional growth.

Moreover, children of IPV victims are at risk of intergenerational violence, as they may come to internalize the abuse they witnessed or experienced. Studies have shown that children who grow up in violent households are more likely to either become perpetrators of violence themselves or suffer from violent relationships later in life (Baker & Cunningham, 2009). The intergenerational transmission of violence is a concerning aspect of IPV, as children raised in these environments often perpetuate similar cycles of abuse when they become adults.

In the case of Mama and her child, the trauma and violence they experienced together might influence how the child understands relationships in the future. Children who grow up in violent households may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms or struggle with developing healthy relationships as adults. This perpetuates a cycle of violence and dysfunction that can last across generations. Apo's child, similarly, might carry emotional scars from witnessing the violence, contributing to a potential pattern of relationship dysfunction or emotional instability in their future.

Baker and Cunningham (2009) emphasize that preschool children exposed to IPV often develop coping strategies that may include behavioral disengagement, sleep issues, or emotional withdrawal. These children may have difficulty forming secure attachments to caregivers, which can affect their future emotional and social development. The behaviors exhibited by Mama's child, who asked, "Ma, let's go away from here," show a form of emotional distress in response to the violence, which is characteristic of children affected by IPV.

Additionally, as Lloyd (2018) notes, children who are exposed to domestic violence often experience a range of psychological issues, from anxiety to depression, and their responses to IPV can manifest in different ways, such as through withdrawal, aggression, or regressive behavior. These issues can worsen if children are left unsupported, as they may not have the resources or emotional tools to process the trauma of witnessing or experiencing violence.

The experiences shared by Mama and Apo reflect the intergenerational cycle of abuse that is common among children raised in households affected by IPV. This cycle continues as children grow up, often replicating the behaviors and relationships they witnessed as children. Indigenous children, specifically, may face additional barriers in breaking this cycle due to cultural stigmas around seeking help and a lack of support within their communities. Their exposure to IPV becomes compounded by their marginalized status as Indigenous peoples, who may have limited access to support services or legal protections.

Effects of IPV on Women Victims

Emotional Effects. The emotional toll of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on victims is profound, often manifesting as long-term psychological distress. Both Grandma and Mama highlighted feelings of fear, anxiety, and self-blame that stemmed from their experiences with their perpetrators. Grandma shared, *"I'm mostly scared of what my child will do to him. But yes! I would feel nervous. Until now, I still feel nervous."* This reflects the pervasive fear that women victims of IPV experience, which can remain even after the abusive relationship ends. Fear of retribution or harm to loved ones often keeps these women in a constant state of nervousness and hypervigilance, unable to heal from the trauma.

Similarly, Mama's comment, *"I can never speak about it. I would keep it to myself, I would never speak up against him for he would only get mad even if it was my right,"* reflects emotional repression. Victims often feel powerless to speak out or seek support because of the potential for further anger or violence from their abusers. This silence can result in self-isolation and suppressed emotions, further contributing to mental health challenges like depression and anxiety.

Research supports that women who endure IPV are more likely to experience mental health difficulties. Clements and Sawhney (2000) found that women experiencing IPV often suffer from dysphoria (a state of dissatisfaction and discomfort) rather than complete hopelessness. This state is associated with feelings of self-blame and a lack of problem-focused coping, leading to further psychological distress. The absence of control over their circumstances exacerbates feelings of dysphoria, creating a mental health burden that persists over time. Additionally, the WHO (2020) reports that IPV victims often face depression, anxiety, and stress disorders, which are compounded by emotional withdrawal and alienation from support networks.

For women like Mama, who eventually chose to live as a single mother rather than stay in an abusive relationship, this decision stems from the realization that the stress and difficulties of staying with an abusive spouse far outweigh the hardships of living independently. It underscores the immense psychological burden of remaining in a violent relationship and the emotional toll it has on the individual, influencing decisions to leave.

The emotional impact of IPV is both immediate and enduring. Women victims often carry with them fear, anxiety, self-blame, and depression. They often suppress their emotions out of fear of further retribution, and this emotional repression exacerbates their mental health struggles, contributing to long-term psychological distress. Addressing these emotional effects is crucial to supporting recovery for women victims of IPV.

Physical Effects. Physical abuse in IPV has immediate and long-lasting effects on the victims' bodies. In the narratives shared by Grandma, Mama, and Apo, the perpetrators of violence inflicted physical

harm, resulting in a variety of injuries and health consequences. Grandma described being slapped in the ear, which caused hearing loss: "Sometimes I would get slapped. Maybe that's the reason why I can't hear properly; he slapped my ear, and then after he did that, he would go away." Similarly, Mama shared how she was punched and kicked, even while pregnant: "I will not get punched right in the face, but instead I would get punched in my shoulders, or some parts of my body. Yes, it was two years, then three years. Because I get pregnant from time to time, at the same time, I get beaten." This illustrates the chronic nature of physical violence and its toll on the victims' physical health, even during pregnancy, when women are already more vulnerable.

Apo recounted how she was assaulted while pregnant, leading to injuries on her back. She also reflected on the long-term consequences of abuse: "I regretted and resented everything that happened to me, but eventually I accepted it since my mother told me that it was biblically immoral to kill a child." The violence resulted in physical injuries, including back injuries, which may have long-term effects on her physical health.

The physical consequences of IPV are well-documented in the literature. According to the WHO (2024), the physical abuse of women can lead to severe and lasting health issues, including bone fractures, bruises, hearing loss, miscarriage, and sexually transmitted diseases. Long-term consequences of physical violence include gastrointestinal disorders, headaches, back pain, sleep disturbances, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Women who experience IPV also have a higher likelihood of developing substance abuse problems, such as turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with the physical and emotional pain they endure.

For Mama, the combination of physical abuse and pregnancy created a complicated and dangerous situation. She was subjected to repeated beatings while carrying children, which not only harmed her physically but also put her children at risk. The physical violence these women suffered became a source of chronic pain and health issues that persisted long after the immediate violence had ended.

The physical effects of IPV can have long-lasting and debilitating consequences for women. From hearing loss and physical injuries to the psychological toll of repeated abuse, the physical harm inflicted by perpetrators can significantly affect victims' health and well-being. It is crucial to recognize the severe and wide-reaching consequences of physical violence in IPV and to provide appropriate medical and psychological support for victims.

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances theoretical understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) through three key contributions. First, it extends Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework by illustrating how IPV is shaped by the convergence of Indigenous identity, gender-based oppression, and

socioeconomic marginalization in the Philippine context. The findings reveal how colonial histories and tribal kinship systems create distinct pathways for violence transmission that differ from urban, non-Indigenous contexts (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Yllo, 2005). By centering Indigenous women's narratives, the research empirically validates Harding's (1991) Standpoint Theory while contributing new insights about culturally specific expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), particularly how machismo culture interacts with structural constraints to perpetuate abuse cycles, and the validation of intersectional oppression mechanisms as theorized by Hill Collins (2000).

Second, the study expands Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) by documenting how multigenerational trauma operates within Indigenous family structures. The analysis shows how fatherlessness and disrupted attachments facilitate violence transmission across generations (Alexander, 2015; Johnson & Ray, 2016) while also revealing the protective role of elder authority and community expectations in some contexts. These findings support but culturally specify Umberson et al.'s (2016) arguments about historical trauma's impact on relationship stability, offering a better understanding of family violence in postcolonial settings.

Finally, the study enhances the IPV ecological models of Heise (1998) by systematically incorporating colonial structural factors and institutional betrayal dynamics. The empirical documentation of systemic failures in legal and community protections for Indigenous women substantiates Smith and Freyd's (2014) institutional betrayal framework while extending Deer's (2015) analysis of colonial continuities in gendered violence. These findings challenge the limitations of Eurocentric victimological approaches (Cunneen & Rowe, 2015), demonstrating how conventional frameworks often fail to account for the historical and cultural specificities of Indigenous experiences. By integrating micro-level narratives with macro-structural analysis, the research advances a more comprehensive model for understanding IPV's persistence in marginalized communities - one that acknowledges both contemporary systemic barriers and their historical roots (Nancarrow, 2019). This approach moves beyond universalizing theories to develop contextually grounded frameworks that center Indigenous perspectives on violence and justice.

CONCLUSION

This study advances IPV theory by demonstrating how intergenerational violence in Indigenous communities emerges from the intersection of structural oppression, cultural norms, and institutional failures—extending intersectional, family systems, and ecological frameworks through culturally grounded analysis. By centering Indigenous women's lived experiences, the research not only validates but expands theories of institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014) and colonial continuities in

violence (Deer, 2015), while challenging the limitations of Eurocentric models (Cunneen & Rowe, 2015). The resulting structural-cyclical model bridges micro-level trauma and macro-level systems, offering a transformative lens for IPV research that prioritizes Indigenous epistemologies and structural interventions over individual pathology narratives.

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