

# The economic cost of violence against Filipino women

By Gina Mission

black eye on a woman's face so mars the icon of the happy family to the extent that most women prefer to suffer in silence. As the 1998 McCann-Erickson National Women's Study states: "... the percentage of men who admitted to beating up their wives regularly is higher than the number of women who admit to having been victims."

But realities of violence against women (VAW) are harsh and its incidence has been increasing that woman's rights advocates can no longer turn a blind eye to it. As economist Ermi Amor Figueroa Yap puts it: "VAW is a human rights violation and regardless of whatever form it takes, there's an attending cost in its commission, to the government, to the individual, and to the community."

No one really knows just how much an act of violence against a woman costs, but it does cost, not just the victim, but also all of society.

In her paper *The Economic Costs of Violence against Women*, Yap attempts to identify and quantify, in the country's first exploratory study, the economic cost of VAW. The paper is one of the policy issue briefs of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) funded by the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) as part of its project on Policy Development and Advocacy on Women's Health, Population and Development.

VAW is defined by the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development as "all forms of violence inflicted on women on account of their gender." In its broadest sense, VAW includes "any violation of a woman's personhood, mental and physical integrity or freedom of movement." It also involves domestic violence, institutional violence, occupational discrimination, violence in media, and public sexual abuse.

The same McCann-Erickson study states that regardless of age and background, Filipino women respondents named sexual crimes as the country's most serious problem.

A 1998 article by the quarterly journal "On the Issues" entitled *Human Rights, Human Wrongs* reported that "one in every five women in the world are subject to some form of domestic violence." The World Health Organization's (WHO) report *on Domestic Violence in Asia and the Pacific*, estimated that in the Philippines, about six out of 10 (or three out of five) women are battered.

Data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) show that from 1,957 in 1991, the incidence of VAW rose to 10,586 in 1996. Around 58.6 per cent of these are battered women and 7.4 per cent are rape victims.

But again, given that most women do not report incidences of violence against them for various reasons, the DSWD figures, concedes Yap, do not give a true picture of the extent of the problem.

Still, following the DSWD figures and given that half of the Philippines' 72 million population are women, Yap surmises that 3.6 million women and girl children experience physical harm at home, while another 1.125 million have been raped.

Going by medical standards, the numbers would indicate, according to Yap, a major public health problem of VAW. By military standards, the numbers of wounded and injured citizens would indicate an internal war – a war against our own Filipino women and girl children.

Estimating the costs of VAW, Yap concludes, "is necessary for us to bring home the urgency of eliminating the root cause of gender injustice."

In her computation of the economic cost of VAW, Yap used seven variables, classified into three main groups: costs to the government, the individual victim, and the community. These are: (1) the budget/expenditures of the government on activities related to the treatment; (2) prevention and monitoring of VAW cases; (3) direct expenditures of the individual victim/survivor for medical services, transportation and subsistence allowances; (4) expenditures of the individual for pursuing legal action against the aggressor such as docket and lawyers' fees; (5) opportunity cost to the individual (income loss) due to absence from work; (6) productivity loss to the market due to absence from work and; (7) opportunity cost to the community such as loss of productivity, reduction of income, higher monitoring costs; and social costs such as breakdown of family and communal relationships, and social unrest.

Government's expenditure on VAW includes the mandatory five per cent budget allocation given to activities for its prevention and solution. These include the conduct of symposia on VAW and elimination of sexual harassment, support to the women's desk officer in investigating, assessing and reporting domestic violence, formulation of sexual harassment rules, and establishment of women's health desk.

Individual expenditure on VAW, Yap concedes, is very difficult to measure. To get a sense of the cost of being a victim of VAW, she used a sample accounting of the expenses incurred by two cases at the Project HAVEN for medical, psychological and crisis intervention alone.

Project HAVEN is a hospital-based center offering medical services, crisis intervention and healing, referrals, education and training, research and documentation for women victims of violence.

Survivor 1, a "serious physical injuries" case, has two children and incurred about P55,000 or a monthly cost of P18,250 for a three-month stay at the Women's Crisis Center (WCC). Her expenses for medical attendance and therapy amounted to P17,850.

Survivor 2, a "less serious physical injuries" case, has one grandchild and incurred P109,500 for staying for nine months at the WCC, or P12,166 per month. Her medical and therapy expenses total P26,700.

Taking into account the seriousness of the injuries these two survivors experienced, Yap computed their average monthly expense at P 6,083.30. Using the world average of 20 per cent of the total Filipino women - 7.2 M women – and multiply this by P 6,083.30 per victim per month, the monthly cost is P437.976 M. In one year, we will spend nearly P6 B to treat victims of VAW.

This estimate does not include costs of litigation, which are also incurred by the individual victim, the service agencies, and health, judicial and penal systems. Nor does it include the cost of counseling children of victims and the quantification of the loss of income or market opportunities brought about by the harm.

Yap's measurement of the economic costs of selected incidences of VAW is telling. In 1997, the government allocated at least P3.7 billion for GAD-related activities. In 1991, an estimated income of P19 million is lost to the individual victims. Some P48 million in expenses is incurred for medical and psychiatric treatments in shelters in 1997, plus there are other related activities expenses for which have not been quantified yet.

In comparison, Canada has an estimated annual VAW cost of \$C 4,225,954,322. In new South Wales, the annual estimate is \$A 1.5 B. In the US, it's \$6.5 B annually.

The Philippine estimate of the economic cost of VAW to the government, Yap stresses, does not include expenses incurred in the performance of functions directly related to VAW. The health department, for instance, does not keep track of the medical expenses incurred by the public health system in treating cases of VAW. The justice department, likewise, cannot identify how much it spends investigating cases. Nor can the Department of Interior and Local Government specify how much of its operating budget actually goes to monitoring and preventing cases and incidences of VAW.

The estimated P6 B annual expenses incurred by women victims of VAW for medical, psychological and crisis intervention, according to Yap, is equivalent to the budget of one government line agency. "Perhaps because of this, our government would rather ignore the problem of VAW and leave the solutions to individual victims and NGOs.

Given this dim scenario, Yap could only ask: "How much longer could we allow VAW to happen before we finally realize that it is not a problem exclusive to husband-wife or internal family affairs only?"

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**Domestic violence (DV):** an act of violence committed within the family, like wife-beating, marital rape, child abuse, incest, sibling violence, abuse of elderly and disabled relatives, abuse by in-laws, and abuse of female household help.

**Institutional violence:** perpetrated by the State, including neglect of basic social services, political discrimination, sexual abuse in institution, political violence in which rape and sexual abuse are the most common forms, legal violence suffered by women due to political conflicts.

**Violence in media:** portraying women as sex objects

**Public sexual abuse:** prostitution (including child prostitution), sex trafficking and the sale of women for marriage.

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Ref.: [http://www.gina.ph/CyberDyaryo/features/cd1999\\_0520\\_014.htm](http://www.gina.ph/CyberDyaryo/features/cd1999_0520_014.htm)