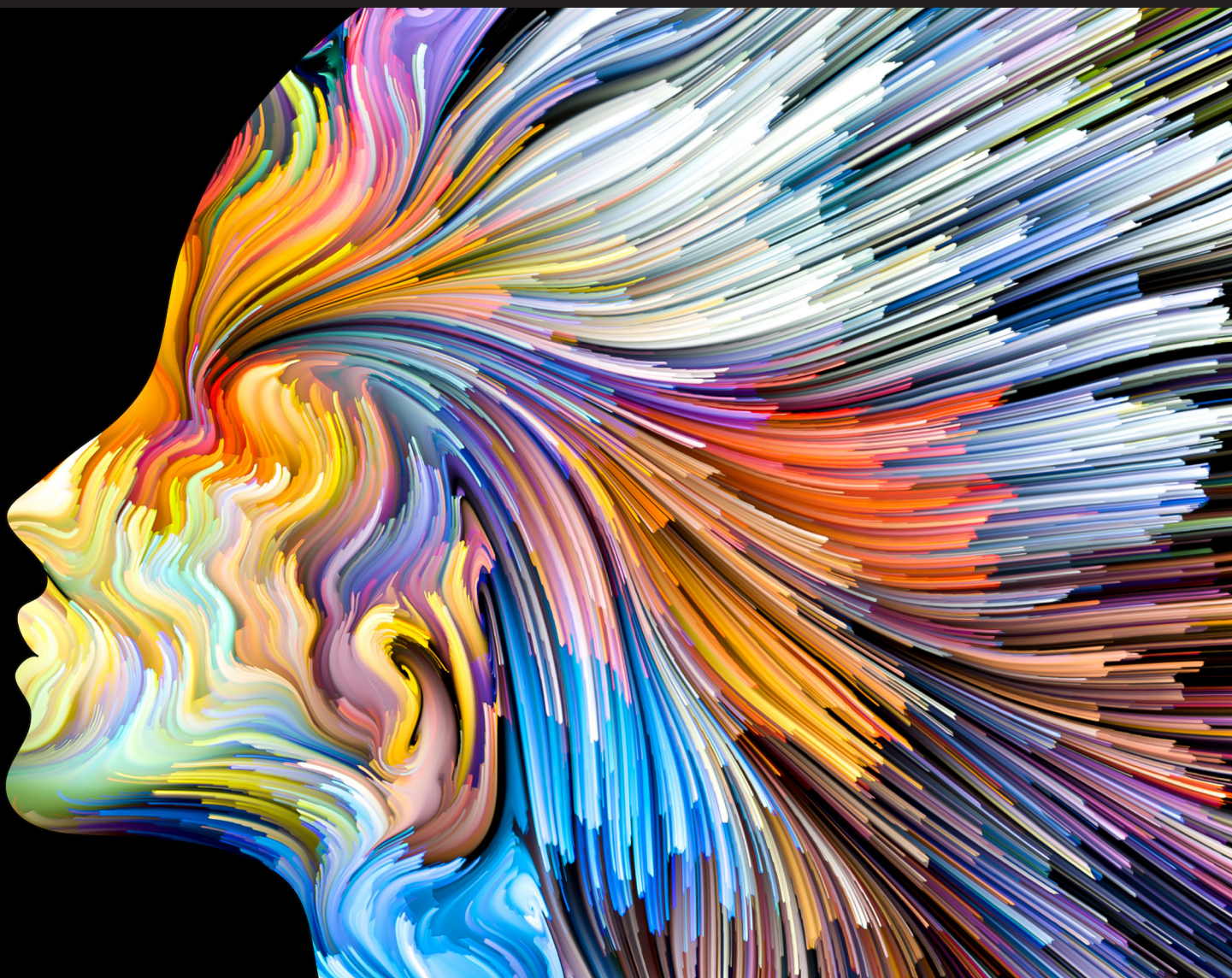


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Editors: Sharo Shafaie & Deborah G. Wooldridge



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Introduction

We are delighted to introduce you to our 2018 spring issue. The *IAFOR Journal of Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences* covers a variety of topics about applications of psychological theories in educational settings, mental health conditions, human development, psychological outreach services and community development, family studies and professional practice, as well as articles addressing the needs of at-risk children, youth and families, and vulnerable populations.

The journal is an internationally peer reviewed, and editorially independent, interdisciplinary journal associated with the IAFOR (The International Academic Forum) conferences on Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences. This issue is devoted to several interdisciplinary studies which represent diverse topics, cultures, and disciplines in the fields of psychology and the behavioral sciences. All papers published in the journal have been subjected to the rigorous and accepted processes of academic peer review. Some of the articles are original, and some are significantly revised versions of previously presented papers or published reports in the IAFOR's conferences and proceedings.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to all reviewers for taking time from their busy schedules to review each assigned manuscript and offer their professional expertise, and recommendations for improvement of these published papers. Also, we like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of our support staffs at the IAFOR who were involved with the publication of this journal.

Please note that we are seeking manuscripts for our upcoming Winter, 2018 issue. Below is the link to the journal's web page for your attention; please review this web page to become familiar with the journal's objectives and the submission guidelines for authors:

<http://iafor.org/publications/iafor-journals/iafor-journal-of-psychology-and-the-behavioral-sciences/>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us, otherwise please send your manuscript to the journal's editors below. Thank you for considering this invitation, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,

Journal Editors

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The IAFOR Journal of Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences

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Economics of Social Proximity – Measuring the Deadweight Loss of Tet Gifts

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Abstract

The question of whether gifts are undervalued or overvalued has long been the subject of investigation among psychologists and economists. At the root of this dilemma is the influence of perception and culture which sometimes affects people's sentimentality regarding gift giving or receiving. In a previous study by Joel Waldfogel, the case was made that gift giving can result in deadweight loss, especially when the giver and the receiver have not collaborated on determining the gift choices. The deadweight loss (DWL) resulting from undervaluation can reduce the economic efficiency of the exchange. Although this phenomenon is widely reported in the United States, the scenario is different in Vietnam. This study has revealed that gifts received or given during Tet festivities are generally overvalued, and cultural orientation is not necessarily the reason.

Keywords: deadweight loss, Tet Nguyen Dan, proximity

Introduction

Gift giving and receiving are fundamental properties of human interaction. Despite the religious connotations of gift exchange during festivals and special occasions, gifts also help with strengthening relationships as well as maintaining the cultural values of a society. By exchanging gifts, humans demonstrate care, love and duty to the receivers and givers of such gifts. However, a problem arises when the receiver places a lower value on the gift than what the gift costs monetarily and sentimentally. Sentimentality is often difficult to exclude when valuing festive gifts, particularly during Christmas, (Davison, Bing, Hutchinson, & Pratt, 2008), although such an assumption can safely be extended to “Tet Nguyen Dan” which is the Vietnamese lunar new year; hereafter called *Tet* gifts. Of course the opposite is true, in the sense that the value placed on a gift item can be much higher than the actual value due to sentimentality. If the value placed on a gift is lower than its actual value, this can lead to what economists (Waldfoegel, 1993; Mankiw and Taylor, 2012; Hubbard and O’Brien, 2013) call deadweight loss. If on the other hand the gifts are overvalued, it is possible that other factors might account for this: for example, sentimental feelings, empathy, cultural environment or social proximity of the givers and the receivers. This paper attempts to estimate the deadweight loss of Tet gifts in Vietnam. It does so by providing explanations for how gifts are valued in Vietnam, and whether the gift exchange process and valuation are similar to other Western societies.

To build on the theoretical framework crafted by Waldfoegel (2002), this study seeks to estimate the deadweight loss of Tet gift-giving and receiving whilst exploring the role culture, face, social proximity and sentiment play in gift choices.

Background of gift exchange and deadweight loss

Every year, the media reports on the cost of unwanted gifts post-Christmas with an average of \$71 dollars being wasted per annum, on gifts that the recipients really do not want. In December 2013, CNBC News estimated that although hundreds of billions worth of Christmas gifts were received, one in 10 such gifts, worth over \$58 billion, would be returned. If the returns were made for reasons other than economic ones, then it is highly likely that other variables determine what recipients prefer. Similarly, Stevens (2014) reported that retailers in the United States see a 5% to 10% return rate of gifts received during the holiday period while apparel returns could even hit a 30% return rate. In contrast, unwanted gift figures are not widely reported in Vietnam, perhaps, because not keeping a gift or returning it to the retailer is culturally unacceptable and commercially untenable. In an earlier study, Gino and Flynn (2011) indicated that when gifts are explicitly requested, they have a greater chance of being appreciated and therefore would result in lower return rates or deadweight loss. Because the national culture and societal orientation are classified as collectivist for Vietnamese (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) most members of its society will likely know each other better in terms of gift preferences and tastes. Such an assumption means that the Vietnamese are not likely to undervalue gifts from an economic perspective.

Tet Festival and gift exchange

The Lunar New Year is the most important celebration of the Vietnamese people and symbolizes the entry of the people into the first day of the first month of the New Year. In comparison to New Year Day in other societies, Tet provides an opportunity for people to celebrate life by exchanging several gifts from food to cash.

The Vietnamese culture is similar in many ways to the Chinese culture, although there are vast influences of French and Russian political systems (Backus, 1969; Nir, 2005). A typical Vietnamese is friendly and kind, whilst having the character of dealing with grief and unhappiness in private (Nguyen & Nguyen, 1985). These attributes are fostered by Confucian and Buddhist principles and traditions that also define the philanthropic nature of a Vietnamese, particularly during occasions and major festivals.

During Tet in Vietnam, vast amounts of gifts are exchanged among families and friends. The practice has been around for centuries and has both socio-psychological and economic relevance to the economy of Vietnam. The Tet festive event has both symbolic and religious meanings to the Vietnamese, in the sense that it allows families to gather together on the first day of the Lunar New Year, visit pagodas and exchange gifts. Whilst most of the exchange is “lucky money” [*lucky money is the representation of wishes of financial success*], a substantial amount of other types of gifts are given and received by families and friends.

Theory

Deadweight loss arises when resources are inefficiently allocated (Hubbard and O’Brien, 2013). In general, such misapplication can result in diminution of total surplus but at the macro level, it can cause a reduction in gross domestic product (GDP) of a country. On the other hand, the socioeconomic well-being of a nation can be enhanced if allocation is done perfectly. In reality, however, several factors affect the valuation of a gift (Sunwolf, 2006; Solnick & Hemenway, 1996), which means that if we take those factors into account when valuing a gift, the perceived values will likely be different from the actual value.

Several researchers (Sunwolf, 2006; Camerer, 1988; Mauss, 1925 and Solnick & Hemenway, 1996) have discussed the concept of “deadweight loss” in relation to gift-giving, although little has been said about how culture and social proximity play a role in augmenting the values of gifts. In addition, less attention has been given to the discussion of religious and cultural relevance of gifts, especially in South East Asia and Vietnam.

In previous studies, Waldfogel (1981) theorized that unwanted gifts generate losses to the United States’ economy. Since the findings in this research received mixed reactions in economics and psychology circles, a similar study in the Far East (Vietnam) is necessary in order to validate Waldfogel’s theory. Unlike the United States and the United Kingdom, Tet is the only main festive occasion in Vietnam; this means that the occasion drives up spending and gifting quite significantly in February. As spending during Tet has a religio-cultural symbolism, it was necessary to find out the influence of the non-economic variables, if any, when assessing the relationship between gifts and deadweight loss. In Vietnam, the closeness of family, friends and neighbors makes it easier to predict what is appropriate to offer as a gift during Tet. Although Gino and Flynn (2011) observed that gift appreciation improves when gifts are purchased from a registry created by recipients [overt communication], Tet gifts are quite specific, and their nature and probability of acceptance learned over time by group members through cultural subtleties [covert communication], making it easier to predict what to give during Tet.

Fisher and Katz (2000) postulated that it is almost impossible to isolate sentimentality from the measurement of gift value and that social desirability often biases the gift value. This “bracketing” is almost impossible in reality as gifts are generally only a prerogative of people already in some form of relationship. The extent to which people share feelings, empathy and cultural values can have a combined effect on the perceived value of gifts, hence the hypothesis that sentimental value can be ignored breaks down in the case of Vietnam during Tet.

Generally, Tet gifts might not even carry with them any meaning if we isolate the cultural, religious and psychological factors. These factors have to be present for the gifts to qualify for the purpose assigned to the symbolic exchange.

For low individualism index societies like Vietnam, actual gift values should likely be closer to the perceived value of the gifts, thereby causing the deadweight loss to be even higher for the Vietnamese economy. The reason for this is that, although huge sums of money are spent on gifts to ensure they are valuable and appreciated by the recipient, if those gifts are not wanted and therefore not used for the purpose(s) they were intended, they result in lower utilities or even zero utilities, hence greater deadweight loss. The deadweight loss for Tet gifts can be measured by a simple hypothetical equation:

$$DWL = \alpha - \beta$$

$$DWL = \text{Deadweight loss of gifts received}$$

$$\alpha = \text{Actual Value of the gift}$$

$$\beta = \text{Perceived Value of the gift}$$

To measure the utility of gifts, it is important to see if there is a difference between α and β . In the event that β for all goods received exceeds the α of all goods, it will lead to deadweight gain. The opposite is true if α is greater than β ; while if there is no difference between β and α there will be no deadweight loss or gain. In the latter case, both givers and receivers perfectly equalized the values of the exchange.

As hypothesized by Fisher and Katz (2000), when zero deadweight loss or deadweight gain occurs, the phenomenon can be explained in several different ways: The impact of face-saving behaviors on acceptance or rejection of the gift as well as the face-saving attitude of the gift receiver can enhance the value of the gift. Emotions and the cultural context of the gift itself might play a role in the valuation of the gift (this is usually an upward evaluation); information asymmetry – availability of the knowledge regarding the gift and the recipient's technical and financial knowledge of the gift can potentially boost the perceived value of the gift; the perceived value of a gift is likely to be on a par with the actual value if the gift is explicitly requested or discussed prior to its purchase, whilst social proximity of the gift giver and receiver also plays a role. Since gifts are generally not obligatory, the gift giving situation may trigger a number of unintentional emotions which can feed into the valuation of the gift. In most cases, interpersonal gift giving is driven by three primary motivations: experiential, obligation, and practicality (Wolfenbarger and Yale, 1993). Elsewhere, Webley and Wilson (2001) pointed out that a gift can intentionally transmit obligation, make receivers feel inferior, display unequal status or wealth, and become vehicles to enact social power. Contrary to this view, gift givers and recipients during Tet do not operate as strangers; they are relatives and the intention is to give a cultural routine rather than one of a social or financial obligation.

If the social and psychological influences in the mind of the recipients are greater than the financial relevance of the gift, the recipient will likely rate the gift as greater than the actual value. In some cases, it is possible that the presence of other members of a group will negatively impact on the judgement of the gift; for example, Wooten (2000) found that the number of people present when a gift was opened triggered gifting anxiety (and potential miscommunication) for both givers and receivers, as people reported painful gift comparisons and anticipated public judgments. However, if the gift is exchanged between close relatives and family, this may not necessarily have the same effect as there is likely to be no dark side motivation of the giver and therefore the notion of owing is minimized.

Rationale for the Study and Hypotheses

As the current literature lacks studies on the role of culture on gift exchanges and specificity whether the gifts are overvalued or undervalued in Vietnam, this study allows an exploration of this important aspect of socioeconomic elements of the Vietnamese society. As cultures and festivals have different implications for different groups of people, gifts may be perceived differently and valued in completely different ways depending on the context in which the gift is received or given. The purpose of this study is to investigate the following hypotheses within the Vietnamese context:

- H1: Gifts that are not explicitly requested lead to deadweight loss.*
- H2: “Face” (culture) is associated with the decision to accept gifts instead of money.*
- H3: Gifts received during Tet may lead to deadweight loss.*

These three hypotheses help in testing the validity of the theoretical equation outlined earlier on whilst helping in understanding the valuation process of gift exchanges in Vietnam.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the form of a survey, with data being gathered via direct contact with respondents who were studying in Hanoi at the time. The study period was within approximately three weeks prior to the 2014 Lunar New Year. The questionnaire instrument used by Waldfogel (2002) was modified to reflect two very important concerns:

- I. Does Tet gift instead of cash result in the undervaluation of gifts, which then leads to deadweight loss?*
- II. Do received gifts during Tet generate deadweight loss and if so, what is the magnitude?*

Survey Data

The original Waldfogel survey questionnaire devised and used in the 2002 study was adopted with some modifications that address the cultural element of gift giving and receiving in Vietnam. A total of 230 respondents in two universities in Hanoi received a paper version of the questionnaire, and 200 (response rate of 87.39%) were returned between February and March 2014. Ten students were first identified who then identified a further 220 students through the snowball technique. The period was deliberately chosen to coincide with the Tet season so that respondents could easily recollect information relating to the gifts received and given during the period. To ensure the accuracy of the responses, respondents were asked to ignore sentimental values when estimating the value of gifts received.

Data Analysis

Participants provided information on gifts they received and gave during the holiday of Tet. In addition, participants provided information on the estimated price of the gifts as well as their perceived value. The percentage ratio of the average value of the average price paid was calculated by dividing the average (or mean) value of the gifts by the average (or mean) price of the gifts. The average percentage yield, which is the average ratio of value to price, was also calculated for all gifts. These calculations were done for all gifts received, and then also by cash gifts and non-cash gifts. Deadweight loss of the gifts was calculated by conducting a regression of the log perceived value of the log estimated price.

To examine whether the value of gifts differed by individual differences, such as face/cultural expectation of the participant, correlations were conducted between the two variables, face and the decision to accept gifts instead of money.

Lastly, the average value, price, and yield of gifts were examined by identity of the gift receiver. The same calculations were conducted as above, but now geared towards establishing if there were any differences in terms of the identity of the person receiving the gift.

Results

The two important concerns that have not been answered in behavioral economics literature have been presented under the methodology section above. These questions guide the formulation of the three hypotheses which are now explored in the subsequent section.

Two hundred participants responded concerning the value and cash of 440 gifts. Respondents estimated that friends and family paid an average of 381,343.20VND, and respondents expressed a willingness to pay 413,306.80VND for the same gifts. The ratio of the average value to average price was 1.08% and the average yield (or average ratio of value to price) was 1.20% (SD = 0.91%). Table 1 provides a summary of these statistics.

Table 1
Average Amounts Paid and Values of Gifts, by Recipient

Variable	All Gifts	Cash-Gifts Only	Non-Cash Gifts Only
Amount paid (VND)	381,343.20	337,538.10	416,856.00
Value (VND)	413,306.80	331,751.30	479,423.90
Percentage ratio of average value to average price paid	108%	98.29%	115%
Average Percentage yield	1.20 (SD = .91)	1.16 (SD = .93)	1.24 (SD = .89)
Number of Recipients/gifts	200/440	197gifts	243 gifts

Of the 440 gifts received, 44.90% (n = 198) were cash (i.e., “lucky money” or gift cards). There was no difference in the price receivers estimated for the gifts: for non-cash gifts the average estimated price was 416,856VND and the cash gifts were estimated to be worth 337,538.10VND, $t(438) = 0.84$, $p = 0.40$. See the first row of Table 1, above, for these values. There was also no difference in the amount receivers estimated the value of the gifts to be: for non-cash gifts the average value was 479423.90VND and the cash gifts were estimated to be worth 331751.3VND (see the 2nd row of Table 1). Though the non-cash gifts were estimated, on average, to hold more value than cash gifts, a t-test confirms this difference is not statistically significant, $t(438) = 1.33$, $p = 0.19$. The ratio of the average value to average price was 98.29% of cash gifts, but 115% for non-cash gifts, indicating that there is greater value in non-cash gifts (see the 3rd row of Table 1). However, the average yield was similar between the two: 124% for non-cash gifts and 116% for cash gifts (see the 4th row of Table 1). A t-test confirmed this is not a significant difference in average yield, $t(348) = 0.94$, $p = 0.35$.

A regression of the log value of log price revealed that the relationship between value and price was:

$$\text{Log}(\text{value}) = 1.16 + .91(\text{log price})$$

(.24) (.02)

This shows standard errors in parentheses and an R^2 of .8298%.

Thus, since the value of gifts was being over-estimated, there was no support for either of the first two hypotheses. The first hypothesis suggested that gifts, rather than cash, are under-valued. However, the opposite was true – gifts were over-valued as compared to cash. The third hypothesis was that receiving gifts at Tet would generate a deadweight loss. Both gifts and money were overvalued, so no deadweight loss was generated. Cash money was slightly undervalued as compared to non-cash gifts, but this difference was not significant.

Participants also wrote down the gifts they had bought other people during Tet. Similar to the above questions, participants wrote down the amount they paid for the item as well as the value of the gift to them. A total of 394 gifts were reported, with 261 gifts being non-cash gifts and the remaining 133 being cash gifts (“lucky money”). The amount paid for all gifts ranged from 10,000VND to 10,000,000VND, with the average paid amount being 290,489.80VND. (See the first row of Table 2, below, for these values.) Gift values received again ranged from 10,000VND to 10,000,000VND, with the average perceived value being 317,710.70VND. Non-cash gifts were more expensive (350,950.20 VND) than cash gifts (171,842.10 VND), $t(392) = 1.97, p = 0.05$. Non-cash gifts were also valued as being more expensive (392,026.80 VND) than cash gifts (171,872.20 VND), $t(392) = 2.12, p = 0.03$. Overall, gifts were over-valued at 109% of their cost. Cash gifts were valued accurately at 100%, whereas non-cash gifts were over-valued at 112% (see the third row of Table 2). The average yield was also similar between the two: 118% for non-cash gifts and 105% for cash gifts. (See the fourth row of Table 2 for these values.) A t-test confirms this is not a significant difference in average yield, $t(392) = 1.15, p = 0.25$.

Table 2
Average Amounts Paid and Values of Gifts, by Giver

Variable	All Gifts	Cash-Gifts Only	Non-Cash Gifts Only
Amount paid (VND)	290,489.80	171,842.10	350,950.20
Value (VND)	317,710.70	171,872.20	392,026.80
Percentage ratio of average value to average price paid	109%	100%	112%
Average Percentage yield	1.20 (SD = .91)	1.16 (SD = .93)	1.24 (SD = .89)
Number of Recipients/gifts	200/394	133 gifts	261 gifts

A regression of the log value of log price received revealed that the relationship between value and price was:

$$\text{Log}(\text{value}) = 0.55 + 0.95(\text{log price})$$

(0.22) (0.02)

with standard errors in parentheses and a R^2 of 87.35%. Thus, since the value of gifts was being over-estimated, there was no support for either of the first two hypotheses in relation to gifts individuals report on giving to others. Overvaluing gifts may be difficult or impossible when the giver is reporting of gifts they are giving to others since they know the cost value of the gift.

The third hypothesis asked if “face” (culture) was associated with the decision to accept gifts instead of money. One question asked: “To what extent would you say that your cultural background influenced your decision?” with the response options, ranging on a 5-point scale from “to a very small amount” to “to a very large extent”. Eight participants answered “no opinion” and were excluded from this analysis. The average answer on the scale was 3.77 (SD = 0.93). A second question asked: “To what extent would you have accepted cash instead of gift if you knew the giver for a very a long time?” The same 5-point answer scale was used for this question. The average response was 2.98 (SD = 1.26). To investigate the research hypothesis that face is associated with the decision to accept gifts instead of money, a correlation was conducted between these two variables, revealing that they were not associated with one another, $r = 0.04$, $p = 0.55$. Thus, face, or culture, does not seem to be related to a preference for accepting gifts instead of money in Vietnam.

Determinants of Gift Yield and Cash-Giving

Table 3

Gift Yield and Tendency to Give Cash, by Identity of Giver (Recipient's values)

	Aunt/Uncle	Sibling	Parents	Partner	Grandparent	Friend	Child/Grandchild
<i>Noncash Gifts</i>							
Number of gifts	38	17	107	2	10	20	3
Price	671,052.60	174,117.60	287,570.10	300,000.00	266,000.00	125,250.00	500,000.00
Value	598,684.20	164,705.90	307,102.80	400,000.00	226,000.00	139,250.00	366,666.70
% Yield	117%	101%	117%	120%	92%	135%	73%
% Exchanged	8.64%	3.87%	24.32%	.46%	2.28%	4.56%	.69%
<i>Cash Gifts</i>							
Number of gifts	25	61	57	11	7	81	1
Price	235,200.00	572,885.20	704,210.50	366,363.60	900,000.00	119,753.10	300,000.00
Value	252,000.00	528,688.50	923,157.90	409,090.90	1,228,571.00	147,284.00	300,000.00
% Yield	120%	124%	136%	103%	149%	118%	100%
% Exchanged	5.61%	13.86%	12.95%	2.50%	1.60%	18.42%	.24%

Note. Value is the estimated value of gift to the recipient. Price is the recipient's estimate of the price the giver paid for the gift.

Percent yield is the average of the ratio (value/price). Percent exchanged is the number of gifts by identity, by the total number of gifts exchanged (440).

A further analysis examined the average value, price, and yield of gifts by the identity of the giver. Table 3 (see above) shows this information, and breaks it down by cash and non-cash gifts. Parents were the most likely to receive non-cash gifts (24.32% of all gifts). Friends were

the most likely to receive cash gifts (18.42% of all gifts). (Row 5 of Table 3 shows these values.) Two identities had average yields of less than 100% on non-cash giving: grandparents (92%) and children/grandchildren (73%). Friends were the identity with the highest average yield (135%) of non-cash gifts. These lower average yields mean that, on average, recipients valued their gifts as costing less than the actual price of the gift. Non-cash-giving had average yields of less than 100%. Grandparents were the identity with the highest average yield of cash gifts (149%).

For gifts that participants bought for others during Tet, see Table 4. Siblings were the majority recipient of non-cash gifts (21.07% of total gifts) and cash gifts (12.44% of total gifts). For non-cash gifts, three recipient identity categories had average yields below 100%: aunt/uncle (94% average yield), partner (95% average yield) and grandparents/grandchildren (98% average yield). Siblings (130% average yield) and parents (128% average yield) had the highest average yields for non-cash gifts. As far as cash gifts are concerned, all identity groups were above 100%. The highest average yield of non-cash gifts was associated with grandparents (117%). These estimates further confirm the degree of social proximity in Vietnam and how this social variable eliminates the possibility of DWL.

Table 4

Gift Yield and Tendency to Give Cash, by Identity of Giver (Giver's values)

	Aunt/Uncle	Sibling	Parents	Partner	Grandparent	Friend	Child/Grandchild
<i>Noncash Gifts</i>							
Number of gifts	16	83	73	12	17	55	5
Price	419,375.00	335,891.60	556,424.70	172,500.00	248,235.30	167,818.20	174,000.00
Value	379,375.00	440,120.50	607,520.50	170,000.00	248,235.30	150,181.80	170,000.00
% Yield	94%	130%	128%	95%	100%	107%	98%
% Exchanged	4.06%	21.07% 1	8.53%	3.06%	4.31%	13.96%	1.27%
<i>Cash Gifts</i>							
Number of gifts	5	49	21	0	2	33	23
Price	270,000.00	88,979.59	445,238.10		400,000.00	46,818.18	236,956.50
Value	270,000.00	90,591.84	445,238.10		450,000.00	47,575.76	228,260.90
% Yield	100%	105%	100%		117%	110%	100%
% Exchanged	1.27%	12.44%	5.33%		.50%	8.38%	5.84%

Note. Value is the estimated value of gift to recipient. Price is the recipient's estimate of the price the giver paid for the gift.

Percent yield is the average of the ratio (value/price). Percent exchanged is the number of gifts by identity, by the total number of gifts exchanged (394).

Conclusion

Following from previous studies, this paper's aim was to estimate the deadweight loss resulting from Tet gifts and explore what factors lead to poor allocation of Tet gifts in Vietnam. The data returned no evidence of undervaluation of Tet gifts received, confirming a previous similar finding by Gino and Flynn (2011).

With respect to tendency to give cash, the cash givers generally overvalued the cash amount given to relatives. The percentage yield in Table 4 showed this data: sibling (105%), grandparents (117%) and friends (110%). Although from a pure economic perspective, it is

impossible to overvalue cash within a specific gifting period, it appears other factors have accounted for the reason some relatives tend to inflate these gift values. Similarly, receivers of cash gifts other than children/grandchildren have overvalued cash gifts received.

Unlike in previous studies, although respondents were asked to ignore sentimentality in their valuation of gifts given and received, the Tet studies have proven that it is innately impossible to reduce gift decisions to a purely economic one – at least in the Vietnamese context. Major questions therefore still exist in this area of research, given that the experimental data are rather controversial, and there is no general consensus about how exactly respondents may exclude sentimentality when valuing gifts. The “face” seems to be a compelling influence on both the valuation and data collection process. As a result, future research in this area could attempt to find a mechanism that helps to isolate face, sentimentality, culture and other biases from the valuation process.

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A Working Guide to the Asset Based Community Development Approach in Egypt

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Abstract

Many communities in Egypt, specifically in the rural areas, are unquestionably distressed due to the major economic and political shifts that have occurred over the past few years. Strategies of community development are currently viewed as radical remedies for poverty-related problems. In Egypt, community development strategies are usually driven by traditional approaches, including charity-, needs- and rights-based approaches which focus on basic human needs such as shelter and food. These approaches have major limitations as they ignore the structural causes of poverty and address symptoms only. Therefore, an alternative capacity-focused practice becomes an urgent need. This study argues that Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) could offer a coherent strategy of sustainable development for rural and poor communities in Egypt. The research presents a detailed and practical stepwise model for the implementation of the ABCD approach in rural areas, derived from both the Egyptian experience and international guidelines. The results make a substantial contribution to the understanding of the reasons for success, and challenges, of the ABCD approach. Thus, a possible way could be paved to generalize this bottom-up development strategy for rural communities. The findings of the study are most relevant to developing countries, and to those emerging from state capitalism and centrally planned economies.

Keywords: asset based, development, rural communities, developing countries, Egypt

Introduction

According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) Egypt's poverty rate reached 26.3% for the year 2013 compared to 25.2% in 2011. The latest official data of CAPMAS indicates that 49.9% of Egyptians were below the upper poverty line in 2015. In the same year, the World Bank mentioned that 28% of the population lives in extreme poverty, with poverty rates as high as 60% in rural Upper Egypt. Poverty is increasing continuously, particularly in rural areas. Poverty rates in rural areas constitute 42% of the total Egyptian population, in comparison to 7% in urban cities (El-Tawila et al., 2013). One of the main differences between rural and urban Egypt is access to public infrastructure. Inhabitants of rural areas, unlike their urban counterparts, rarely have access to electricity, water or sewage system (Nagi, 2001). Even within rural areas, poverty rates differ from one province to another; rural areas of Upper Egypt are much more impoverished than those in Lower Egypt. For instance, three governorates in Upper Egypt – Assiut, Al-Minya and Suhaj – have 794 villages where impoverished people constitute 82% of the total number of poor people in the countryside (CAPMAS, 2012).

Although a number of other inveterate factors, including isolation, unemployment, lack of education and deteriorated health services contribute enormously to poverty, strategies of community development are currently viewed as the radical remedies for poverty and poverty-related problems. Eradication of poverty and community development became more interdependent goals after they were highlighted by the United Nations (United Nations, 2000) as goal number one and eight respectively in the millennium development goals (MDGs) (Khadka, 2012). As a result, the concept of community development in accordance with the concept of poverty became intertwined and passed through various stages of remodeling. The strategies used to tackle poverty, and develop communities into more humanized and livable places, mostly need focus. Adams and Page (2003) argued that solving societal problems, especially those pertained to education and medical care, could mitigate poverty-related problems. While Olivares and Santos (2009) found that launching small enterprises, and supplying the poor with loans and planned frameworks could serve as a feasible solution for poverty, some countries provide a monthly allowance to fresh graduates and unemployed citizens in an attempt to protect them from poverty. Other researchers have suggested that poverty could be diminished by decreasing the wage gap, providing food security and eradicating illiteracy (Fahmy, 2004). These strategies mainly focus on basic human needs and rights such as shelter, primary health care, water supply, and humanitarian food aid. They are usually driven from traditional development approaches to development, such as charity-needs-based and rights-based approaches (Nagi, 2001).

Most traditional approaches are externally-focused mechanisms that have been adopted extensively to eradicate poverty and accomplish the MDGs. The implications of such approaches cannot be discounted; nevertheless, these are associated with certain limitations that hinder their ability to address policies and regulations that could make radical changes (Uvin, 2007). Long-term problems such as poverty cannot be solved by such approaches alone, and can often be exacerbated by the influx of external resources. The strategy of traditional approaches views the community as a set of needs and problems. This forces community leaders to distort the shape of their communities, highlight problems and deficiencies, and hide capacities and strengths. Leaders are acknowledged by how many resources are attracted to the community, not on how self-reliant the community has become (Marglin, 2008). This strategy denies the basic community wisdom, discourages people from participating at higher community development levels; thus, community members start to feel powerless and see

themselves as people with special needs that can only meet by outsiders. In other words, they get converted into clients rather than citizens (Keeble & Meisel, 2006). Furthermore, focusing on resources based on needs or rights directs the benefits to suppliers, rather than the needy community members (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1997).

Traditional approaches generally require outside expertise, funding and resources which perpetuates the local perception that only outside experts can provide real help and solve problems. They also create a wall between lower income communities and the rest of society; make local groups deal more with external parties than with individuals of their own communities, and eventually weaken the social bond within communities (Roehlkepartain, 2005). Reliance upon needs identified as the sole way to determine what the community deserved could be destructive to its well-being; this creates an endless cycle of dependence as current problems must be worse than those of the previous year for fund to be renewed. Further, the way to determine what the community deserves is questionable. It is corrupted with subjectivity because outsiders are responsible for judging the importance of certain community needs which they are not fully aware of (Keeble, 2006). Traditional strategy can guarantee only survival, but can never lead to serious change or community development as it keeps alive the image of the philanthropist and the needy; and needs of the poor are only met when resources are available (Boyd et al., 2008).

While there are circumstances where some outside assets may be necessary, the way to sustainable resolutions always originates from inside the community (Rans & Green, 2005). In response to these excessively shortages-based methodologies came an alternative capacity-focused practice called the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. ABCD has attracted the attention of community development academics and practitioners as an alternative strategy for development in urban and rural communities. It was created in 1993 by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. Asset-based approaches recognize and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities. It is an internally focused methodology, and aims to reduce poverty through sustainable development, participation and citizen empowerment (Fisher et al., 2009).

ABCD could be seen as an approach for development, as a set of methods for community mobilization, and as a strategy for sustainable community development. As an approach to development, it depends on the principle that the recognition of qualities, natural resources, gifts and assets of members and communities is more acceptable in motivating constructive activity for change than a single concentration on the needs, deficiencies and problems. Seeing the glass half full or half empty is a fundamental principle of ABCD (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003); it is not to deny the real deficits that a community confronts, but to stimulate a positive charge on how every single part has a value, and contribute in significant accomplishments to community development.

Following this approach is a set of methods, called ABCD process, that have been used as a platform to compile starting communities around common framework, and to facilitate communication within, as well as sorting some ideas on mapping the capabilities of the community (Boyd et al, 2008). McKnight and Kretzmann (1993) proposed thorough guidelines to facilitate the ABCD process. The ABCD process could be conceptualized as a strategy for sustainable community-driven development. Beyond the identification and mobilization of particular community assets, ABCD approach focuses on restating micro community assets – physical or human resources – to the macro external environment. In other words, a great

amount of effort is made to destruct non-tangible insulated walls around local communities. More attention is paid to the community position in relation to local institutions and external economic environments (Pan et al., 2005). Asset-based approach recognizes and builds on a combination of human, social and physical capitals that exist within local communities. It complements public services and traditional methods for reducing poverty and creating public value (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993).

In Egypt, ABCD is quite well-known among developmental organizations; nevertheless, it is not incorporated in their development activities. Several international and national development organizations such as Copse Egypt and Center for Development Services (CDS) employ ABCD terms and equivalent concepts on their websites. Despite this, their development programs follow traditional approaches to development, and ABCD has not been translated into the implementation stage. On the contrary, the Egyptian Small Enterprise Development Foundation (ESED) is a non-governmental organization that adopts and embraces the ABCD approach in all of its activities and community development projects. It was founded in 2003 and concentrates its activities in rural communities of Upper Egypt. Therefore, this organization and its programs were chosen to achieve the research objectives of the current study.

This study has two interrelated purposes. The main objective is to comprehensively examine the application of the ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt through scrutinizing one ESED activity as a case study in a retrospective manner. The research aims to translate such activities into well-identified steps and clear processes derived from both the McKnight and Kretzmann (1997) guidelines and the Egyptian experience. Thus, a proposed model of ABCD implementation could be introduced to generalize this bottom-up development strategy all over distressed communities in Egypt. Another purpose of the research is to explore and document the outcomes, challenges and reasons of success of the ABCD approach in Egypt; this would serve as a directory for further projects, and give a chance for community developers to build upon former experiences.

Methods

Data gathering for this study was dependent on qualitative research methods, and mainly focused on meanings, views, and perceptions, where participants' descriptions of their situation was highly valued. Multiple methods, including in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted. This variation was valuable as it ensured validity and reliability of data. The questions were designed to elicit a vivid picture of participants' perspectives of the ABCD approach, and the current status of community development in Egypt. The questions were semi-structured to let the interviewees talk freely, and probing questions were asked if the discussion skewed to unneeded directions; questionnaires were used in some interviews (Annexes 1-11).

Two IDIs were conducted, with the technical manager and the site manager of Al-Kayat project of the ESED. The discussions during these interviews pertained to details of the process they use for community development, and day-to-day activities of the project. Another interview was conducted with the administrative manager of the ESED; questions pertained to the successful methods of management of development projects. In addition, a focus group discussion was conducted with the three of them, and two community developers who work with the ESED. As well, two interviews were done with community developers working at different grassroots organizations in Al-Kayat village; they were considered beneficiaries and

community developers. Questions about race, participation, and the impact of the project on the villagers were asked. Two more IDIs were conducted with the beneficiaries of the project. Similar questions were asked, in addition to questions about the outcomes of the project and challenges they faced. An additional interview was done with a community developer working at the CDS organization; questions about the approaches they adopted in their projects, challenges they face and the future of community development in Egypt were addressed. The final interview was conducted with the director of the innovation unit of the Egyptian ministry of local development. The questions in this interview focused on the role of the government in community development, and the current developmental programs of the ministry. Quotes of the interviewees were used as needed in the Findings section of this study, followed by the interview number.

Purposive sampling strategy was used in selecting participants; preliminary criteria relevant to the research objectives were predetermined to guide the selection process. The criteria included: participants should include both community developers and beneficiaries, the ratio between pioneers and novices was weighed, and diversity in demographics, educational background, and affiliated sectors were taken into consideration. The number of interviews was determined on a theoretical saturation basis, when data no longer bring additional insights to the research.

Case study: “Al-Kayat Village”

Additionally, a case study approach guided the documentation of the research. As Yin (2008) argues, case studies are the preferred strategy when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary and real-life phenomenon. The Al-Kayat village was selected as an optimum rural case in which ABCD approach is implemented. It is one of the poorest villages of Al-Minya province, located in Upper Egypt. The Al-Kayat is extremely marginalized and isolated from the government services including education, health care, infrastructure and urbanization. This greatly minimizes job vacancies, and in turn, aggravates unemployment. Moreover, Al-Kayat suffers from political conflict and intermittent religious conflict. In terms of assets, it has natural assets summarized in the land and palms, and human assets summarized in the large number of inhabitants and basic farming skills. The village's economy is based on date trade. Although the palms are the major assets of the village, they represent a problem. The palm fronds (the hard leaves of the palm) are aggregated in piles everywhere in the village; it blocks the way, causes fires and sometimes injures children. From this problem, the idea emerged of converting the palm fronds to wood. The project of converting fronds to wood started in 2010. It is still operational and up till now the results are promising. From the fronds, two products are produced—parquet wood, which is used for the floor of fancy houses and hotels; and MDF wood which used for building homes and furniture of villagers. Moreover, from the fronds' residues a poultry feed was produced which increases the productivity by 25% more than regular feed. In addition, the project provides a number of job opportunities and adds skills to the villagers. The products of the projects are being sold in many exhibitions, and the revenue is used to cover the project expenses and providing other services for the village.

Ethical considerations

All research activities including IDIs and FGD were started after receiving IRB approval (# 14-15-21; Annex 12). The interviews were conducted in Arabic, then translated and transcribed in English by the researchers. Before conducting the interviews, all participants were informed about the nature, purpose and possible outcomes of the research through the informed consent (Annex 13); and permission was obtained on record, where needed. All interviews, recordings

and handouts were kept confidential; names and initials never disclosed, and the data were analyzed and interpreted by the researchers.

Findings

The first part of the findings defines the development activities conducted by ESED, and puts them in a stepwise framework guided by McKnight and Kretzmann's ABCD approach.

Step 1: Determination of the location

Determination of the community deserving help is the first step in any development approach, and is also a very difficult step that organizations sometimes cannot accomplish by themselves.

"Sometimes, we chose the village by ourselves and in other cases, external entities offer a village for us, but in both cases, we have certain inclusion criteria that should be fulfilled in the village" IDI #02

Strategies used to locate the deserving village differ from one project to another. For instance, some villages were selected because they were categorized among the poorest 1,500 villages in the UN report of 2003, others were suggested by private companies as part of their corporate social responsibility. However, selection of Al-Kayat village was done through field study by ESED with the help of the Resala charity organization. The ESED prepared a questionnaire as a guide to compare 11 villages in Al-Minya. This included questions about the number of palm trees, unemployment rates, rental rates, daily wages, local industries, and local NGOs and their activities. Then 22 volunteers from Resala took over the field study. They were divided into 11 teams each comprised two volunteers and started to collect the data from villagers, grassroots organizations and local directorates.

After deliberating upon the results of the field study and reports of the World Bank and the Egyptian center for economic studies on 1,000 of the poorest villages in Egypt, Al-Kayat village was selected. The selection process usually differs from one village to another; however, each village should possess certain criteria to be accepted.

"No specific system for selection, but common attributes should be inscribed in our selected villages; number one is extreme poverty, then assets availability then accessibility" IDI #03

Three conditions need to exist in a village to be selected; the village should be poor, contain assets, and be accessible. Poverty and asset availability are two consistent factors that cannot be separated. If the village is poor but has no assets, the project will have nothing to build upon and cannot be operated. Vice versa, if the village is not poor and has assets, then the core value of development and poverty eradication is lost and there is no need for the project. Additionally, reports from international organizations such as the UN and World Bank about development in Egypt always act as guides in the selection process.

Step 2: Exploring community assets

Step two of ESED development approach views the glass as half full. Regardless of the deficiencies and needs, it builds an inventory of all the strengths and qualities within the community. Beaulieu (2002) proposes that the ideal way to address the difficulties of any group is to precisely evaluate its accessible assets, and suggests disclosing the learning and abilities existing within the community.

“The step is pretty compounded, it includes sub activities. It usually starts with selection of team number one, who will be responsible for initiating the communication between the ESED and the village” IDI #01

Discovering community assets could be subdivided into two successive stages. Stage one encompasses selection of team members (team 1). Certain features should be present in the members of team 1, thus a lot of time is allocated to select them. The members should be from diverse backgrounds and professions. Social, administrative, technical and psychological skills should be represented within the team. Furthermore, they should be reputable, trusted and have a valuable position in society. The team members are often life mavens and have former experience in community development projects. Spending more time at this stage is recommended, as team 1 will be responsible for building mutual trust between ESED and the community. All team members settle in the community as they try to join the villagers in their daily activities. The exact period of this step is determined according to the nature and complexity of the project, but is usually not less than three months. Creating a robust relationship between the team and the villagers will transfer the process organically to stage two.

“Then this team will start doing a comprehensive study that enables us to know everything about the village such as natural and human resources and also allows us to get closer to the lifestyle of the villagers. It occurs through informal interviews” IDI #02

Stage two involves conducting a comprehensive field study by team 1. The principal objective of this study is to identify all the natural, physical and social assets that could be mobilized, in line with understanding power relations and gender sensitive issues, and realizing norms, culture and key personnel within the community. First, the team engages in formal visits to community leaders to introduce the project, then continue with storytelling tools to elicit the needed information from community members. Second, a preliminary feasibility study of the project could be done to give a general idea about the benefit risk ratio of the project. The elongation of this step differs according to the social acceptability of the community and size of the project. For instance, this step took longer for the Al-Kayat project. Identification of community assets depends greatly on the results of the comprehensive field study and, to a lesser extent, on official data obtained from CAPMAS, local directorates or other NGOs. This step yielded the identification of palm fronds as a precious source of wood in Al-Kayat village, and exploration of neglected assets in other villages. Kong (2008) supports this idea of finding significant value in casual conversations among community members, which can evolve into practical applications for identified assets.

Step 3: Preparation for mobilization of assets

Step three expands to develop an equal identity and shared vision for the project through formation of the steering committee mentioned by Kretzmann and McKnight in 1993. This step is a transition state between the idea of the project and its actual implementation. It involves numerous tasks that build upon step 2, while all the data used to execute these tasks are derived from the comprehensive field study that is done by a team 1 in the previous step.

“The preparation phase is the most important step; it includes a lot of activities, which after that determine the success of the project. We can say that this step is the manual for the project; it basically consists of conducting scientific research and long-term plans for the project” IDI #02

The preparation step comprises three stages that are done in varying orders according to requirements of projects. It usually starts with conducting scientific research in which community developers integrate their technical and scientific backgrounds to turn neglected community assets into profitable resources. For example, in the Al-Kayat project, researchers conducted various experiments on converting the palm frond into wood. After reaching a satisfactory point in scientific research, the planning stage starts. The planning phase comprises a detailed feasibility study and generic project plan, which identify the time plan, financial plan and resource plan of the project. A communication plan that determines various entities and institutions that would help in the execution of the project, usually follows the project plan. Aigner (2002) supports multisectorial collaboration through ensuring that community members ought to join as equivalent partners to engender positive impacts for their communities.

“Choosing the team no. 2 members should be done carefully; they will monitor the activities throughout the project and build friendship with the villagers. The team of Al-Kayat project is carrying out the project activities during the day and is making social visits (such as attending weddings, condolences and frolics) during the evening. The choosing of facilitation committee members should also be done carefully; these members are appeared to be powerful, trusted and have enthusiasm towards the project, and the information about them are obtained from the comprehensive field study of the previous step” IDI #01

The final stage of step three involves formation of team 2 and the steering committee of the project. Members of team 2 are community developers selected from the ESED; they are usually youth of diverse backgrounds, and could also be culled from members of team 1. Their role is to ensure implementation of the project and compliance with the plan. They are not only responsible for facilitating day-to-day activities and overcoming problems, but also building trust and social relations with the community members. Team 2 continues until the end of the project as it represents the connector between ESED and the community. The number of team members and number of days they are going to stay vary according to the complexity of the project. In the Al-Kayat project, two members are responsible for such activities and spend three days every week in the village. Selection of the steering committee members is also done in this phase. It is composed of individuals from the community, who were previously recognized by ESED members as natural leaders. They are individuals who have a strong passion for the cause, appreciated status and good reputation among villagers. They are insiders; therefore, they are able to successfully lead the way for team 2 throughout the project.

Step 4: Implementation of asset mobilization

Step four incorporates the actual processes of asset mobilization; it starts with small scale implementation, then customization, and ends with large scale implementation. Lack of capacity to support continuous participation can form a barrier to community mobilization (Foster-Fishman, 2006). Consequently, the tasks of team 2 continue with this step.

“Operationalization of the project should flow smoothly if the previous three steps were perfectly done. Thus, this step is easy compared to the previous ones” FGD #04

Mobilization of community is composed of several activities. First, the research that was conducted in laboratories should be transferred to the community. However, this is not blindly transferred; it is modified to suit the village circumstances and villagers' skills. This involves the replacement of sophisticated devices with simple instruments that community members can readily operate, and taking into consideration environmental conditions of the village. A pilot experiment is then done, and the final product is subject to certain tests to ensure validation

and compliance with quality standards. After meeting the requirements, a training program is conducted for the villagers to familiarize them with the process, instructions and instruments. Ultimately, the project progresses to large scale production. In certain cases, female villagers have played a successful role in actuating the project and controlling turnover problems.

Step 5: Independence of the project

The final step describes the post-mobilization stage; different courses of action are taken, according to the conditions of the community. However, they all aim to ensure the success and perpetuation of the project.

“No specific action is taken at this stage; we do the action that the community members prefer. Sometimes, it is a company while in other cases it is a charity organization; it is all about their preference” IDI #06

This step involves finding an entity to take over the project. The objective of this step is to ensure sustainability of the project through proper management by community members. It begins when ESED members observe that their domination over the project has become unnecessary for its existence. The interpretation of such observation differs from one project to another according to the overarching circumstances of the community. In certain cases, a grassroots organization, which has been established before, manages the project and handles revenues in discharging charity activities. In other cases, an association is established to administer the project, which comprises community leaders, members of the steering committee and interested community members; and in some communities, the project is controlled by the village mayor. Members of the association are usually selected on recommendations of team 2. Certain proceedings are performed to prepare leaving the community. In previous projects, the role of ESED was over after optimizing all operations within the project, ensuring its success and perpetuation; no further interference was necessary. However, at the Al-Kayat village, additional action is proposed; an agreement that shapes future communications between the community and ESED would be settled. This conveys that part of the project revenues will be used by ESED for further development projects, and a representative of ESED will be a member in the final project association.

As the Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) process is global in perspective, it concentrates more on the conceptual framework of the ABCD approach, and less on the practical steps that should be implemented. This study found that ESED process addresses the two aspects carefully; it highlights the conceptual framework of ABCD approach and the functional steps efficiently. Moreover, it gives additional insights for location determination and the post-mobilization stage.

The second part of the findings was designed to examine implications of the ABCD approach in rural communities through disclosing outcomes, challenges and reasons for success. The data for this part was obtained mainly from beneficiaries of the projects and, to a lesser extent, from the community developers.

Outcomes

Development of local economy

Implementation of the ABCD approach leads to mobilizing natural and physical assets. This effects positively the economy of the community, and the wellbeing of its members. The ABCD approach does not seek external help; it depends on utilizing the resources and positive

aspects within the community to achieve sustainable economic development (Pinkett, 2000). Al-Kayat village has 25,000 palm trees which naturally produce dates and palm fronds. Palm fronds were not only a neglected asset earlier, but they also represented a major cause of injury to the village as a fire hazard. Through embracing the ABCD approach, neglected palm fronds are converted to valuable raw material, wood. The products of the projects are sold, and revenues used to improve community services including, but not limited to, infrastructure, education and healthcare. This simple process activates economic self-reliance of community members, and creates a sustainable local economy for marginalized communities. ABCD, as a strategy for sustainable economic development, makes communities less dependent on the state economy and government services.

Job opportunities

Another outcome that was realized from adopting the ABCD approach is generating numerous job opportunities. According to World Development Report (2013), development happens through jobs.

“Before this project we know nothing except farming, which is not guaranteed. A farmer can work for only five days in a month and each day he earns 30 pounds (\$1.5) and of course 900 pounds (\$45) per month cannot cover his family expenses. Previous projects that were done in the village provided us with jobs, but just like farming they were not guaranteed. In this project I can feel some kind of stability; at least I can draw prospective plans based on my salary.” IDI #08

Creation of job opportunities brings about a huge reduction in unemployment rates which, in turn, increases productivity and fortifies the local economy of the community. Job vacancies decrease crime rate, immigration rate and psychological disturbances associated with unemployment. Other development approaches can also create job opportunities; however, the opportunities created through adopting the ABCD approach are sustainable ones. The natural assets of the community are sustainable; therefore, jobs created through them are stable. Stabilized jobs provide regular income that can enhance living standards of the workers, and give better access to education and healthcare services. Beyond earnings, jobs provide a sense of security and share in capacity building of community members. Generally, the wellbeing of community members is improved by implementing an ABCD approach to development.

Social cohesion

The importance of social cohesion in any community development work cannot be overstated; it can inevitably lead to success or failure of the project (Perkins et al., 2004).

“Social conflict is a major problem that we used to face in the beginning of each project, but upon implementing the project, the conflict turned to be harmony” FGD #04

“We were eating each other like fish at the beginning of the project, but now we get to know each other better and have the desire to do something to our village” IDI #05

Due to its tribal structure, rural communities in Egypt suffer from social conflict and in some cases, religious conflict. Moreover, political conflict has risen due to political instability too. Such conflicts are aggravated upon adopting charity, needs or rights development approaches as community members start to fight over the benefits they can gain from externals. Contrarily, the ABCD approach depends on the assets of community members so they feel that externals have nothing to give them; instead, they only help them to exploit their assets. Adopting an

ABCD approach connects the interests of community members; it enables them to have a common background and unifies them around a shared vision. Moreover, it leads to establishing new networks of relationships between conflicting parties. For instance, the steering committee of Al-Kayat project contains members from rival parties; yet they agree on supporting the project and find a way to communicate with each other successfully. Gilchrist (2009) states that networks which connect individuals and various sections of the local community are an invaluable resource, operating as communication systems and organization mechanisms. Hence, the ABCD approach is able to strengthen and extend networks of relationships and, in turn, foster social cohesion in rural communities of Egypt.

Empowerment

A central theme of the ABCD approach is the relocation of power to communities (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003); this was obviously recognized in the rural community of Egypt under purview here. Empowerment of community members was not only realized from their speeches, but also in their body language and facial expressions.

“We used to see external people who come and take the fronds for free, but we never know what they are going to do with it. Now no one can deceive us, we became aware of what we have” IDI #09

“We have treasures more than urban areas and our products can compete the products of the biggest companies in Egypt” IDI #09

“A lot of people from different cities in Egypt come to see our project; they cannot imagine what we have done, and many times television interviews were made with us about the project” IDI #05

The ABCD approach achieves empowerment through awareness, participation and capacity building of community members. Informing community members about their assets puts aside the idea of ‘philanthropic and needy’ that is associated with other development approaches. Community members have a feeling of richness and enhanced self-esteem. Awareness also decreases reliance on external agencies and eliminates the concept of “only outsiders can help”. Moreover, the active participation of community members in all steps of ABCD process increase their self-confidence and involvement. Capacity building that has been implemented through an ABCD approach also helps in achieving empowerment. Community members have multiple skills; they feel productive and perform various tasks. Empowerment of community members through the ABCD approach turns them from clients to citizens.

Challenges

The asset-based approach holds great promise for development of distressed communities; however, its actual implementation encompasses numerous challenges that could be similar in different rural communities of Egypt.

Lack of trust

Lack of trust is one of the major challenges for promoters of ABCD approach in rural communities. This may be traced back to the fact that members of these communities have been deceived several times by externals, who tend to use the human and natural resources for their own interests, and never consider community interests.

“In the beginning, the villagers were always afraid of us. They refuse to take with us, and every time we enter a public place, they tend to leave it. Even when they start to communicate, after a while, they were very cautious not to release any information” IDI #03

“When I first met them, and heard about the project, I was nodding my head to pretend I am convinced but deep inside I am not. I only got convinced when I found them living with us” IDI #06

Exploration of community assets is done through casual discussions between community members and community developers. Lack of trust hinders such effective communication, and could eventually lead to termination of the project, if not overcome. The criteria for team 1 members and the tools they use to conduct field study are key to gain community members' trust. The members of team 1 are usually males, elderly, have good reputation, and have from the villagers' perspective influential professions in society, such as a journalist, engineer or physician. These characteristics are greatly appreciated in rural communities of Egypt. Moreover, the team lives with the community for a long time, adopting the lifestyle of community members. During this time, day-to-day communications and friendly discussions take place. Finally, team 1 does not leave the community until a mutual trust has been achieved.

Cultural difference

Cultural difference is another challenge faced in using the ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt. Culture refers to a set of behaviors, habits, rules, traditions and norms that apply to a particular community. Each village in Egypt has its unique culture that could be completely different from the neighboring village. The success of a development project in a certain community does not refer to its spontaneous success in different communities.

“The attitude of villagers varies greatly from one village to another within the same district. In some villages, you cannot talk to female villagers while in other villages you can talk, but without making eye contact” “From my point of view, Shammass project was failed due to cultural difference; we were not able to engage within the community culture and understand their customs and traditions” IDI #01

Understanding the culture of the community before implementing an ABCD approach to development is crucial to achieve success. Moreover, inefficient interpretation of culture within the community inevitably leads to failure of the project. That is what happened in a previous project; community developers were not able to relate to the norms and behaviors of the community members. Consequently, they did not recognize that community members prefer to gain their leaders' satisfaction rather than self-benefits, and the project was terminated. Understanding culture is an ongoing process that starts with step one and continues throughout the ABCD process. In some communities, the steering committee acts as a cultural meeting point between community developers and community members. However, team 2 often takes over the responsibility of understanding the community and culture; and, in turn, adapting the steps of the ABCD process to perfectly fit into the culture.

Social conflict

Most rural communities in Egypt suffer from social conflict. Reasons for social conflict differ from one area to another. For instance, rural communities in Upper Egypt engage in religious conflicts, while rural communities in Lower Egypt suffer from political conflicts. In addition, the tribal structure of rural communities of the West is the reason behind social conflicts. Regardless of the reason, the ABCD approach cannot function in the face of such social

conflict. Conflict is associated with disruption of power, and the ABCD approach needs the collective power of all community members to achieve development.

“We exert a lot of effort and spend a lot of time to reach an agreement from all stakeholders of the village, but this is necessary for proper implementation of the project” IDI #03

Resolving the original cause of the social conflict is impossible. Instead, creating a common objective upon which community members agree is the path to unify warring parties. The steering committee, which includes leaders of different interests, enforces them to find a way for productive communication. Moreover, the association that is formed in step five of ABCD approach ensures the sustainability of this effective communication.

The development concept

The idea of endogenous development is an alien concept to rural communities. Community members act as passive consumers in development projects based on charity-, needs- or rights-based approaches. Therefore, they view themselves as a vulnerable group of people with many needs and problems. The development concept for them is all about gaining services from outsiders with minimal participation. Active interaction of community members and self-reliance are the cardinal principles in ABCD approach. Here is the challenge: community developers should modulate the concept of development from passive clients to active citizens. Moreover, the involvement of the community developers should be thoughtful to avoid induction of dependency.

Reasons for success

While studying the implementation of the ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt, certain factors have been realized for their great contribution to the success of the approach. Utilization of storytelling tool could be considered a factor for success of the ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt. Storytelling is one of the tools used for needs assessment in needs-based approach. It is based on deriving community needs from the stories narrated by community members. In the ABCD process, the storytelling tool is extensively used to get deeper information about the physical, natural and human assets of the community. In addition, it creates a friendly environment between community developers and community members, and facilitates the social acceptability of the project.

The characteristics of community developers who employ ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt are a major factor for success. All of them have a passion to ensure concrete achievements and a great sense of responsibility towards distressed communities in Egypt. They work in a horizontal hierarchy with team spirit, and conduct weekly meetings to discuss the status of projects. Moreover, they never share personal, religious or political views with community members. Community developers try to be as objective as possible and always envision sustainable development as their ultimate goal.

Certain considerations should be kept in mind to achieve success of the ABCD approach in rural communities of Egypt. First, community developers are very careful about power relations; they always start by conducting meetings with community leaders before members. In addition, they are fully oriented to gender sensitive issues among different communities. Second, community developers incorporate key personnel of the community on the steering committee to ensure their loyalty throughout the project and, in turn, the success of the project. Finally, community developers never initiate a project until previous projects and peers' experiences have been carefully examined.

Conclusions

By outlining the ABCD process and unpacking its steps and outcomes, this study has served to position ABCD approach as a promising strategy to achieve development and eradicate poverty in rural communities of Egypt. In accordance with that, the research highlighted a few limitations of the approach that should be considered when applying it in similar settings. The asset-based approach to development builds upon strengths and resources that already exist within a community. Therefore, an extremely poor community with no assets cannot embrace the ABCD approach. Moreover, creating a strong relationship between community developers and community members is one of the main pillars upon ABCD process is based. This could lead to personalization of projects in some cases; and community members may refuse to facilitate the process except in the presence of certain community developers whom they trust. Even though the ABCD approach aims to reduce the level of external dependency that is associated with other approaches, it still depends on outsiders help to undertake the development initiative. In addition, sustainable development which is the ultimate goal of the ABCD approach needs external funding to be initiated and a long period of time to be maintained.

The ABCD approach proved to be capable of bringing development and alleviate poverty in rural communities of Egypt. It views community as a source of positive energy and self-sufficiency that can ensure social justice and inclusiveness, and is able to handle changes. However, the efficacy of ABCD does not only depend on the approach itself, but also on how the organizations, individuals and practitioners involved incorporate it within their communities. Besides, establishing and maintaining social cohesion among community members is fundamental to achieve sustainable development. It could also be concluded that ABCD is not a “copy and paste” process; it needs customization and cannot be imitated directly from theories. Another area that needs extensive improvement is the relationship between the government and NGOs. Unfortunately, it was realized in the course of the interviews that government support is diminishing and ineffective. Cooperation is crucial for successful generalization of ABCD in Egypt’s rural communities. The government should play a bigger role in aspects such as monetary aid, technical and marketing support, and elimination of bureaucracy. Finally, this research study developed a directory for further implementation of asset-based sustainable development in Egypt; and more research by different disciplines will be continuously required to fill in emerging gaps of ABCD processes as time goes on.

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Stigma and Discrimination: Coping Strategies for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in Rural America

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Abstract

Individuals with HIV/AIDS that live in rural areas experience significant stigma that creates psychosocial stress, depression, anxiety and reduced self-esteem. Coping with stigma and discrimination is a significant aspect of living with HIV/AIDS and has implications for the psychological and physical well-being of these individuals (Moskowitz, Hult, Bussolari & Acree, 2009). This study examined the relationship between stigma and discrimination, and coping strategies used by People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in rural areas using a mixed method study design. HIV-positive individuals served by the Illinois HIV Care Connect in Region 5, completed the survey for the study. The results showed that self-isolation was the most preferred method of coping, closely followed by engaging in destructive behaviors or reactions. The least preferred method was seeking spiritual guidance. Results of regression analysis also revealed that spending more years in care and having more social support really do have an effect on coping with HIV stigma and discrimination among the rural population. Implications for health and human services workers such as rehabilitation counselors and health communication officers are discussed.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, stigma, discrimination, coping, rural population

Global estimates place the number of people living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) at about 35.5 million people (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2015). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 1.2 million people are currently living with HIV in the United States (US), with 50,000 new cases occurring each year (CDC, 2013). The agency reported that as of 2011, 6.1% of existing HIV/AIDS cases and 7.5% of new cases involved persons between the ages of 35–44 living in rural areas (CDC, 2014). The breakdown of HIV cases in rural America showed that the majority of HIV/AIDS cases (50%) were African-American, followed by whites with 38%, Latinos 10%, and American Indians and Alaska Natives at 2% (CDC, 2013). Nationwide, rural counties in the South, Southwest and Northeast of the U.S have the highest rate of people living with HIV/AIDS (CDC, 2008; Dreisbach, 2011). The majority of rural HIV/AIDS cases has been attributed to heterosexual activity and drug use (CDC, 2014; Gerbi et al., 2011; Gere, 2014). Rural HIV/AIDS impacts local communities and households by transforming the socioeconomic landscape: age structure, diminished workforce, increased poverty, reduced agricultural productivity, and altered household structures (Oramasionwu, Daniels, Labreche, & Frei, 2011).

However, many rural areas lag behind urban areas in HIV/AIDS related services, funding and awareness in addition to lack of accessibility to medical, mental and social services. People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in rural areas within states with limited participation in the Medicaid expansion lack care coverage. In addition, because Medicaid and the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act have income eligibility requirements, as well as a waiting list to get HIV medication, many in rural areas do not have access to adequate treatment (National Rural Health Association [NRHA], 2004). Worse still, there is significant stigma and discouragement that impedes voluntary testing or treatment (Chandra, Billiou, Copen, & Sionean 2012). Chandra, et al. (2012) further noted that rural populations are particularly at increased risk for HIV/AIDS infection or transmission because of the absence of low cost free routine testing for HIV/AIDS, STD or testing as part of blood donation. Persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in rural areas experience difficulties such as the exorbitant cost of treatment and adequate insurance coverage, isolation, disclosure of HIV status, low levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge and lack of information on access to treatment and support services (NRHA, 2004). Within their communities, PLWHA in rural areas also experience problems with resources: availability of health care facilities, support services and competent care professionals, access to health care facilities, as well cultural practices and attitudes including stigma and discrimination (NRHA, 2004; Schur et al., 2002).

Health behavior theorists cite cultural and environmental factors, including social norms, attitudes and expected cultural acceptance as motivators or barriers to uptake of health services (Kohler et al., 2014). Cultural and environmental factors such as stigma and discrimination have been identified as significant barriers to the treatment and quality of life management of PLWHA (Kohler et al., 2014). Nyblade et al. (2005) specified four distinct domains of stigma: fear of causal contact, moral values of shame, blame and judgment, discrimination and disclosure. Stigma and discrimination of PLWHA is pervasive and interfere with HIV/AIDS treatment efforts (Parker & Aggleton, 2005). Goffman (1963) defines stigma as an undesirable or discrediting attribute that an individual possesses, that reduces that individual's status in the eyes of society. Another attribute of stigma, according to Goffman (1963) is deviance: viewed as being negatively different from common or valued norms. Although stigma and discrimination are related, the former refers to attitudes and perceptions, whereas the latter encompass actions and behaviors that are directed at an individual as a result of a perceived difference (Goffman, 1963). Stigma and discrimination, therefore include negative attitudes

and behaviors directed at PLWHA, their partners, friends and families as a result of their condition (Lyimo et al., 2014). These attitudes and behaviors reinforce social differences in class, race and gender (Parker & Aggleton, 2003). For instance, ostracism and violence against PLWHA are common consequences of stigma (Parker & Aggleton, 2005). In addition, individuals that experience stigma also end up applying the public stigma to themselves, resulting in self or internalized stigma. Internalized stigma has been reported to result in low self-esteem and anger (Lyimo et al., 2014).

PLWHA deal with and respond to the condition in different ways (Franks & Scott, 2006; Lyimo et al., 2014). Coping is a significant aspect of living with HIV/AIDS and has implications for psychological and physical well-being (Moskowitz et al., 2009), medication adherence and treatment outcomes (Lyimo et al., 2014). The absence of effective coping strategies may cause PLWHA to resort to self-isolation, substance abuse and indiscriminate sexual behavior (Franks & Scott, 2006). However, the environment in which the individual lives is a significant determining factor in both the availability and the type of coping used by PLWHA (Bolton & Talman, 2010).

The latest 2013 estimate for persons living with HIV/AIDS disease in Illinois is conservatively placed at 36,064 people with 2,189 or 6% living in rural areas (Illinois HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Profile [IHEF], 2014). As at 2011, the state ranked eighth among 50 states in cumulative reported AIDS cases (Illinois Department of Public Health, 2011). The highest prevalence rates were found in Johnson, Fayette, and Alexander counties (IHEF, 2014). Among these populations, individuals' greater than 50 years of age, youth 13–24 years, and injection drug users constituted the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the rural areas. In addition, non-Hispanic (NH) whites made up a majority (51%) of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in rural areas in 2013 (IHEF, 2014). According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (2015) HIV/AIDS incidence plateaued in rural counties in 2013, although there was almost a one third decline in death rate among HIV positive persons for the period.

Generally, research has shown that PLWHA in rural areas experience elevated levels of stigma (Lyimo et al., 2014; Simbayi et al., 2007). Factors which perpetuate stigma among the rural population include but are not limited to: lack of accurate knowledge on how the epidemic spreads gender and cultural issues, religious teachings and taboos surrounding sexuality (Kalichman & Simbayi, 2003). Rural population with HIV often experience discrimination and violence and incidences of unfair treatment within their families, workplaces, communities and treatment facilities (Kalichman & Simbayi, 2003). These attitudes and behaviors negatively impact the attitude of PLWA towards treatment, self-care and coping behavior (Moskowitz et al., 2009). Stigma and discrimination against PLWHA has been reported to lead to increased internal stigma, excessive stress, reduced self-esteem and low self-esteem, isolation, avoidance of health services and support services, and non-disclosure of status (Pharris et al., 2011). The impact of stigma and discrimination might be particularly difficult for PLWHA in rural areas and further constitute a barrier to treatment and prevent efforts (Simbayi et al., 2007), as well as an increase in the HIV epidemic and mortality rates ([DFID], 2007; IHEF, 2014). Addressing the barriers associated with HIV/AIDS stigma can improve disclosure, use of services and the overall quality of life among rural PLWHA. However, there have been relatively few studies that have examined HIV/AIDS related stigma and coping strategies in rural areas exclusively, as this paper does. In looking at the coping strategies used to buffer the effects of stigma and discrimination, and the factors that act as barriers to eliminating these from HIV discourse, the following research question was the focus of this study: For people in

rural areas: What coping strategies are used to buffer stigma and discrimination for HIV-positives?

Rural Population and HIV Stigma

With the rise of new infections in the United States, it is not uncommon for most infected people to move from the urban to the rural areas in order to avoid the added hassles of urban living. This has created a rural-urban dichotomy with HIV-positives, where the rural people encounter more barriers to care than their urban counterparts (Kalichman, 1998; Pellowski, 2013). Pellowski (2013) outlined several barriers that people with HIV/AIDS face in rural settings, most of which will be addressed in this study, including social support stigma and discrimination, poverty, confidentiality, and transportation. This is contrary to findings from Eastwood, Fletcher, Quinlivan, Verdecias, Birnbaum, and Blank (2015), which established that people living with HIV in urban areas report barriers to care more frequently. However, the authors noted that reporting less frequently did not imply lack of barriers in rural settings, but rather the presence of accounting factors. They highlighted social support as one such factor that might be responsible for why people in urban areas reported barriers less frequently. This study looks further into this claim as well.

Coping with HIV Stigma among Rural Population

Coping serves two major functions among PLWHA: managing the problem that is causing distress, and regulating the individual's response to the distress (Folkman et al., 1991; Heckman et al., 2008). Strategies for coping with HIV/AIDS related stigma among individuals with the condition in general include direct action and positive reappraisal, religious coping, substance use, denial, concealment of HIV/AIDS status as well as social support (Lyimo et al., 2014). Further, the ability to cope is determined by several factors such as individual effort, family support, socio-cultural environment and the amount of coping resources available in the environment (Heckman et al., 2008).

Method

Participants

All study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and the Jackson County Health Department HIV Services Division. Participants for the study were recruited from the Illinois Surveillance Region 5, which caters to nineteen (19) counties. The 43 participants ranged in age from 30 to 68 years. Participants included people who had been diagnosed HIV-positive, and those who resided in any of the nineteen counties catered to by the Illinois HIV Care Connect. As an inclusion criterion, the respondents must be an HIV-positive, must reside in any of the nineteen counties served by the Illinois HIV Care Connect in Region 5, and must be receiving HIV-related health services from this region. Limitations were not placed on age, gender, sexual orientation, education, or economic background, in order to include the entire population of people living with HIV/AIDS in this region.

Participants also received a \$10 gift-card from Wal-Mart as an incentive for participating in the study. Participants who completed the survey received the card at the end of data collection. The incentive was necessary in order to garner a high participation rate, which was needed to reach a high enough sample size to allow for generalization of results into the larger HIV-positive population in the region.

Procedure

A concurrent mixed method design was used in the collection and analysis of data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A cross-sectional survey design was mixed with a brief interview (Dillman et al., 2009). The surveys were distributed to participants at the Jackson County Health Department HIV Services Division. A waived-signature informed consent and a cover letter were attached to the surveys. Participants completed the survey only after both the consent form and cover letter were read and approval was given by the participant. Surveys were then collected immediately upon completion. All responses were kept confidential. Additional qualitative brief interviews were conducted with the respondents concurrently to corroborate and aid in the interpretation of the quantitative findings and highlighted ways in which respondents coped with HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Instruments and measures

Data collection was achieved using a survey and a brief interview. The two-part survey consisted of 14 questions designed to assess instances of stigma and discrimination, and explore the coping strategies used to buffer the effects of these on the HIV-positives who experienced them. The first ten (10) unique questions collected demographic data relating to respondents' age, gender, sexual orientation, economic and educational background, employment status, the current Illinois Surveillance Region 5 in which they reside, and their marital status. The second part of the survey was specific to stigma and discrimination. Respondents were asked about their experiences with stigma and discrimination, and asked to qualify such experiences by stating such experiences and the coping strategies used in mitigating instances of stigma and discrimination. The interview involved semi-structured questions on coping methods used for HIV related stigma and discrimination.

Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22.0) was used in the analysis of demographic, stigma and coping strategies related variables. Audio files from the interviews were directly transcribed and thematically coded by one of the first authors using QSR NVivo which is a qualitative data analysis software for windows 11®. Another of the first authors served as a co-coder and consensus on the themes that emerged were achieved after further discussions between the two first authors. Consistency was ensured via an audit trail, maintaining neutrality and ensuring that the co-coder followed the same procedures in the data analysis.

Results

Sample description

The 43 participants ranged in age from 30 to 68 years ($M = 50.84$, $SD = 10.08$). Of the 43 participants 32 (74.4%) were male and 11 (25.6%) were female. Among the participants, 11 (25.6%) identified themselves as Black/African American, 1 (2.3%) identified themselves Hispanic, 30 (69.8%) were White/Caucasian, and 1 (2.6%) were other or not in the previous categories. Participants averaged 3.51 years of education. Seven (16.3%) completed middle school, 15 (34.9%) had completed high school, 11 (25.6%) held a college degree, 1 (2.3%) had an associate degree and 9 (20.9) had completed some type of education other than the aforementioned. The majority of participants ($n=16$, 37.2%) were single, 10 (23.3%) were separated, 6 (14.0%) were married and 3 (7.0%) were widowed. Seven (16.3%) of the participants were in paid employment, 24 (55.8%) were unemployed, 11 (25.6%) were on disability income and 1 (2.3%) was self-employed. In terms of sexual orientation, 22 (51.2%) identified as homosexual, 13 (30.2%) identified as heterosexual, 5 (11.6%) were bisexual and 2 (4.6%) identified as asexual. The majority ($n=30$, 69.8%) of the participants had an

undetectable HIV/AIDS, viral load, 10 (23.3%) had a detectable load and 3 (7.0%) had an almost undetectable viral load. Twelve (27.9%) were currently enrolled in Medicare, 9 (20.9%) were enrolled in Medicaid, 9 (20.9%) had a dual enrollment in Medicare/Medicaid, 1 (2.3%) had a supplementary insurance plan, 5 (11.6%) were on disability insurance and 6 (14.0%) had other types of insurance. With regard to yearly household income before tax, 20 (45.5%) had a household income less than \$10,000, 18 (41.9%) reported household income that ranged from \$10,000-\$24,000 and 5 (11.6%) had household incomes that ranged from \$25, 000- \$49,000.

Coping Strategies

Quantitative analysis

For descriptive purposes, we first examined the frequencies of responses to the coping with stigma items. Table 1 provides insight about coping strategies that are used by persons living with HIV/AIDS against related stigma. To explore the concept of coping, seven items or questions about how respondents coped with HIV/AIDS related stigma were posed. Results showed that the self-isolation 31 (37%) was the most preferred method, closely followed by engaging in destructive behaviors or reactions, 16 (20.2%). The least preferred method was seeking spiritual guidance, 2 (2.4%).

Table 1

Coping Strategies that are used by persons living with HIV/AIDS against related stigma.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Activity	3	3.60
Seeking Spiritual guidance	2	2.40
Isolation	31	37
Seeking Social support	16	19.40
Advocacy	8	9.52
Providing Positive Reassurance to self	7	8.33
Making/ engaging in destructive reactions/behaviors	17	20.24

Regression analysis was also conducted to test the relationship between demographic variables (age, gender, sexual orientation, year in care, employment status, income level, race/ethnicity, social support) and coping. Specifically, the relationships between each of these variables and coping scores were examined using one-way ANOVA procedures. Year in care was found to be statistically significant, $F(18, 24) = 2.291, p = .029$. Similarly, Social support was also found to be statistically significant $F(27, 15) = 3.199, p = .011$. None of the other demographic variables were found to be statistically significant. Scheffe post-hoc analysis revealed that the mean of individuals with that have been in care for more than 5 years were significantly higher

than all other groups; those with 5 years were higher than those with less than 5 years. Similarly, the means of individuals with more support were higher than those with little social support; those with little social support were higher than those with no social support. Taken together, these results suggest that more years in care and having more social support really do have a positive effect on coping with HIV stigma and discrimination among the rural population.

Qualitative analysis

From the analysis of the interview conducted as part of the data gathering process on stigma and discrimination, two distinct coping strategies that encompassed the seven major coping strategies emerged and were described by the respondents. The identified coping strategies were *emotional* coping strategies (e.g. isolation, engaging in destructive behaviors, providing positive reassurance to self, engaging in physical activity) and *problem* focused (seeking social support, seeking spiritual guidance, and advocacy) (Julawong, 2009; Makoae et al. 2008).

Emotional coping strategies. This category referred to personal, social and religious measures that were used to mitigate against HIV related stress or conflicts and to stabilize emotions as reflected in the following statements:

I usually take the dog out for a walk or go outside to work in the garden whenever I have a conversation with my partner. Whenever we have a conversation on my condition . . . which are often initiated by her, tone of voice and reprimands often lead to arguments and make me feel as though I should be in control of my condition. I often feel overwhelmed with emotions after such arguments and would simply step outside for a walk (Rural HIV infected Male).

I don't usually drink but sometimes I would rather live in that state of numbness than live in the reality of reality of dying daily. At least, I can hasten the process and find some peace (Rural HIV infected female).

Problem-focused strategies. These strategies focus on seeking some type of solution such as seeking social support, finding a purpose or engaging in behaviors that are geared towards advancing the lot of persons with HIV/AIDS.

I enjoy my weekly visits to the health center as they provide me with an opportunity to make new friends and to interact. Some of these individuals have become my strongest support (Rural, HIV-infected female).

Sometimes the only way people get to know more about HIV is when we talk about it. People at the Health Center know that I am always willing and available to talk about my experiences living with HIV/AIDS whenever, there is a program in the community to enlighten people about HIV/AIDS. Certainly, you can see by a person's reaction that there is a lot that they do not know about the condition (Rural, HIV-infected female).

I talk to my kids, family or friends whenever I need some type of encouragement or support. I realize that sharing my concern with close family members gives me some peace of mind. I know I can always count on them (Rural HIV-infected male).

Discussion

The purpose of this mixed method study was to examine the relationship between the HIV/AIDS-related stigma and coping methods among the rural population with HIV/AIDS. The results showed that self-isolation was the most common type of coping strategy used among respondents. This result is consistent with the findings of Audet et al. (2013) where the majority (75%) of participants used self-isolation from friends, families, and community members as a coping mechanism for HIV/AIDS related stigma. Because rural communities tend to be small and people knew one another in an intimate way, many stigmatized individuals are likely to avoid increase contact with others resulting in an inability to develop new friendships, or seek employment or social experiences. This suggests that the more prevalent the level of perceived stigma, the more likely individuals living with HIV/AIDS are more likely to seek help concerning their condition or live integrated in the community.

Second, the results of the study showed that coping strategies can be either emotional or problem focused. The extent to which one approach is used compared to the other is likely to depend on personal characteristics of the individual. For instance, few respondents were willing to seek religious support, whereas a large number of respondents are willing to either seek some form of social support or engage in destructive or harmful behaviors. This suggests the changing attitude or views of rural people with HIV towards seeking spiritual or religious guidance. In the past, religion was viewed as a highly efficient way to buffer against incidences of stigma and discrimination than in recent times; many individuals are dealing with their stigma away from the judgement of the church (Mahajan et al., 2010; Pulerwitz et al., 2008). Third, the results of the study with respect to the use of high use of social support is also consistent with previous studies. Galvan et al. (2008) noted that individuals' high levels of perceived social support are more likely to develop more effective coping skills that can be utilized when confronting specific situations related to HIV/AIDS related stigma. Specifically, the sense that close family members and friends are available to provide assistance can result in enhancing one's ability to cope with the stigma.

Lastly, the result of the study also showed that more years in care and having more social support really do have an effect on coping with HIV stigma and discrimination among the rural population. This has implications for the provision of support systems for HIV/AIDS individuals that are experiencing stigma and discrimination. Specifically, as these individuals continue in treatment, there develop better social relationship and learn better coping strategies to deal with stigma and discrimination (Makoe, 2008).

Implications for Health and Human Services Workers

Given the findings about the use of isolation as a coping method, it is imperative for health care officials working in the rural areas to address socio-cultural barriers that perpetuate stigma. One way through which this can be achieved is through mass sensitization and enlightenment programs. In particular, health communication officers at the local level may need to provide a factual description of the disease, modes of transmission and methods of risk reduction. Health care workers in rural areas need to be oriented to the rights of these individuals to treatment, respect and privacy. Privacy laws that provide these individuals from stigma need to be respected and observed. The confidentiality of HIV-related information, particularly HIV test results, should be guaranteed at the local or county level. Attention should also be devoted to programmatic interventions, which attempt to change attitudes and behaviors towards persons with HIV/AIDS.

Limitations

The study used a convenience sample of HIV-positive people from the Illinois Surveillance Region 5, which caters to 19 counties. Hence, we are not able to generalize from these findings to the population of HIV-positive individuals in the entire state or country. In addition, the study was cross-sectional in nature. Thus, we are not able to make causal inferences with regard to the associations that were obtained among the variables in the results.

Conclusion and Future Research

In the history of infectious diseases, stigma and discrimination borne of fear of the unknown has been a recurring human reaction to diseases that have been highly infectious. From leprosy, to mental illness, to venereal diseases, stigma and discrimination have been a normal human reaction. Without understanding the epidemiology of a particular disease, people are much more likely to react in a negative manner than be accepting of people suffering from that disease. The aftermath has been years of setback in eliminating diseases from our public sphere, as these negative reactions continue to bar improvements in disease eradication and management.

For rural settings where access to health facilities are usually far and between, stigma and discrimination of HIV/AIDS and people living with the disease has contributed to the abysmally low numbers of people adopting positive health behaviors in order to avoid risk of contracting the disease at a later time. People make the choice to steer clear of testing centers, most of which provide tools to encourage healthy sexual behaviors, including free condoms, free health literacy classes and materials, as well as access to health care providers trained to give optimum guidance and care to people most at risk of infection. Future research should examine the role that family and other social support play in the coping strategies used against HIV/AIDS stigma among persons living with HIV/AIDS in rural America. Such an examination will determine the extent to which differences in the types and nature of social support, intervene on the coping strategies among these populations.

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Identifying Emotion Regulation Altering Targets as Depressive Mood Disorder Treatments Using Fuzzy Stochastic Hybrid Petri Nets

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Abstract

Recent studies support that emotion regulation plays a prominent role in depression and depressive mood related disorders. However, the details related to such relations are still unknown. Therefore, constructing a model to describe and analyze these connections is essential. Fortunately, there exist many strategies to treat depressive mood disorders, but choosing the correct strategy for any individual should be personalized. Thus, there are always alternatives for discovering novel strategies to improve the treatments. The aim of this study is to model the relation between emotion regulation and depression to identify emotion regulation altering targets to improve the treatment of depressive mood disorders. By random sampling method, 108 volunteers were selected from Eastern Mediterranean University. The significant emotion traits, emotion interaction probability distribution, and personality traits of these individuals were measured using a questionnaire. In the present study, Fuzzy Stochastic Hybrid Petri nets were used as a mathematical tool to model this complex psychological system. Fuzzy and stochastic properties made it possible to deal with randomness feature of psychological systems and unknown kinetic parameters, respectively. The simulation results were obtained by finding the mean of 40,000 stochastic runs with 95% confidence level. The simulation results validated that decreasing the level of anger, distress, and fear may decrease the severity of depression. In addition, the comparison of these simulation results revealed that decreasing the level of shame, and increasing the sense of gratification can be considered to be emotion regulation altering targets, and thus as potential psychotherapy of depressive mood disorders.

Keywords: depressive mood disorders, emotion regulation, fuzzy stochastic petri nets, quantitative modeling

Introduction

Depression is a common disorder that negatively affects feelings, actions, and the way of thinking of an individual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence of major depressive disorder together with bipolar depression (major depressive episode) in a lifetime is about 53% based on the World Mental Health surveys (WMH) (Kessler & Bromet, 2013). Fortunately, there exist several treatments for depression such as drug therapy, psychotherapy, and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, diagnosis and treatment process of depression should be personalized since there are genetics, personality, and environmental factors to be considered. On the other hand, one of the obvious symptoms of either mild or major depression is having sad emotional responses and depressive mood. Therefore, emotion regulation as a collection of regularity processes which controls the behavior of our affective responses (Gross & Thompson, 2007) can be considered as a target for treating depressive mood disorders.

The role of emotion traits such as anger, fear, distress, and shame in depression is inevitable as it is discussed in many recent studies (Joormann & Vanderlind, 2014; Mohammadkhani et al., 2016; Michopoulos et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2013). Many empirical studies revealed that there exist consistent links between anger and depression (Balsamo, 2013). A regression analysis of data obtained from a survey in region of Korea showed that anger plays a prominent role in suicidal ideation beyond the effect of depression (Jang et al., 2014). Therefore, anger can be a component to consider in studies related to emotional regulation to treat depression. On the other hand, when it comes to changing the level of fear in an individual, there are emotional regulation techniques such as extinction, cognitive emotion, active coping, and reconsolidation to treat psychological disorders such as depression (Hartley & Phelps, 2010). Distress is the other component, which should be under consideration. The result of comparing compulsory and voluntary admissions of patients with substance use disorders revealed that distress has played a vivid role in depression too (Pasareanu, 2017). Thus, there must be an approach to compare such emotional regulation techniques with each other, and predict novel strategies to ideally treat depression.

It is essential to find a model to explain how objects, agents, and events are appraised based on personalities of individuals to identify possible emotion regulation altering targets to treat depressive mood disorders. Ortony, Clore, and Collins (OCC) introduced such a model in the early 90s (Ortony et al., 1990). A few years after that, Mehrabian constructed a model to describe mood states based on three independent components – Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance (PAD) (Mehrabian, 1996). Then, a mapping from OCC emotions to PAD mood components was introduced in Alma's approach to establish a link between the mentioned models (Gebhard, 2005). Finally, models were constructed to predict emotion and mood states by using time series forecasting methods (Mehraei & Akcay, 2017) and stochastic petri nets (Mehraei, 2017).

The current study aims to identify emotion regulation altering targets by extending the model introduced by Mehraei (Mehraei, 2017) to find potential psychotherapies for depressive mood disorders. The extended model includes fuzzy parameters to deal with unknown or missing process rates in the model.

Methods

Petri nets

A classical Petri net is a directed graph consisting of places, transitions, and arcs (Murata, 1989). A pair of place and transition can be connected by a directed arc, but there cannot be an arc connecting any two places/transitions to each other. Arcs are identified by their weights, indicating the number of parallel arcs between specified pair of objects. Dynamic structure of a Petri net can be described in terms of flow of tokens. The distribution of tokens among places in a Petri net is called marking.

When the size of a marking grows exponentially, it rises a problem named state explosion problem. State explosion problem is the main drawback of analyzing dynamic discrete event systems with classical Petri nets (Recalde et al., 2007). Continuous Petri nets were introduced by defining continuous places and transition to avoid state explosion problem (David & Alla, 1987). Hybrid Petri nets can be used in systems, which both discrete and continuous places/transitions must be defined (David & Alla, 2001). Extensions such as time, color, stochastic, and fuzzy have been added to Petri nets to model complex biological systems over the past two decades (Liu & Heiner, 2016). In the field of experimental psychology, stochastic Petri nets has been used to predict mood states (Mehraei, 2017).

Creating the model

The sample in this study comprised 108 students or employees at Eastern Mediterranean University after removing the volunteers with missing data and outliers. More than 52% of these participants were female, and the average age of the total sample size was 24 with standard deviation of 3.2 years. These volunteers were born in various countries, so they came from diverse backgrounds. To increase the reliability of the obtained data, the volunteers were asked to fill the questionnaire anonymously. The questionnaire was designed to obtain the following: 1) measuring the main personality traits, which are Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism (Mehrabian, 1996); 2) The probability distribution of the most significant emotion state before and after a certain event (Mehraei, 2017); and 3) The most significant emotion hour by hour for two weeks (Mehraei & Akcay, 2016; Mehraei, 2017).

The extended model in this study was conducted based on quantitative modeling with fuzzy stochastic Petri nets on the Snoopy platform (Heiner et al., 2012). New places, transitions, arcs, and properties were added to the initial model (Mehraei, 2017). The initial model contained 20 continuous places; 17 of these continuous places represented the possible emotion states which are anger, admiration, dislike, disappointment, sadness, fear, gloating, hate, hope, joy, like, love, pity, pride, relief, resentment, and shame. The other two continuous places showed the concentration level of PAD independent mood components. 6 discrete places were added to the extended model. Absence of a token in 4 of these discrete places caused 50% decrease in concentration level of a certain emotion state. On the other hand, the presence of a token in the other two discrete places lead to depressive mood or increase in sense of gratification. The initial model contained 48 stochastic transitions to transfer a certain emotional state to another one. The extended model had 4 additional stochastic transitions to decrease the level of certain emotion types by 50%. There were 35 continuous transitions in the initial model to update mood states based on changes in emotional states by using the mapping in Alma's approach (Gebhard, 2005). There were 4 additional continuous transitions in the extended model to decrease or increase the level of PAD mood components in case of depression or increase in sense of gratification, respectively. There exist 460 regular arcs to connect places to transitions

and vice versa, and 8 inhibitory arcs in the extended model. To obtain reliable information from simulation results, accurate parameters should be defined in a stochastic Petri nets model. However, many kinetic parameters in psychological systems are uncertain, vague, or unknown. On the other hand, these kinetic parameters are different in individuals. Fuzzy stochastic Petri nets (FSPNs) were introduced to solve this problem by combining stochastic Petri nets and fuzzy sets (Liu & Heiner, 2016). In such FSPNs, fuzzy numbers can be considered as the kinetic parameters instead of crisp real values (Lue & Heiner, 2016). Therefore, in the proposed extended model, fuzzy stochastic hybrid Petri nets was applied to cover randomness and fuzziness of psychological systems by considering both continuous and discrete components.

The structure of the extended model is the same for all individuals, but the initial markings and process rates should be personalized. In this study, the initial markings and process rates were defined based on the sample. For instance, the relative frequency of changing a specific emotional state to another one was different in each person. Thus, the rates for the stochastic transitions of the extended model were calculated by using emotion interaction probability distribution for each person. The reason such transitions were set to stochastic type is to consider the randomness of the events. A part of such segments in the model is illustrated in Figure 1.

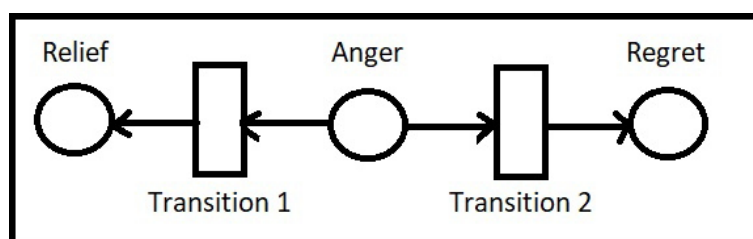


Figure 1: A part of emotion interactions in the extended model.

PAD mood components were defined as continuous places. Their possible values could be any real number from -1 to 1. Since markings in Petri nets cannot take negative numbers, a mapping was applied to assign -1 to minimum value, and 1 to maximum value, respectively. The initial markings for PAD mood components places were set to the calculated values of the mapping from OCEAN personality traits (Mehrabian 1996; Gebhard, 2005), which were obtained from the questionnaire.

PAD mood components can be updated by using a function defined by the history of emotion and mood states in an individual as its domain (Mehrabian, 1996; Gebhard, 2005; Mehraei & Akcay, 2016). The transitions in the extended model were defined as continuous transitions to constantly update PAD mood components. The process rates for these continuous transitions are assigned by applying Alma's mapping from OCC emotions to PAD mood space (Gebhard, 2005), and such process rates are fixed for all individuals regardless of their personalities as an estimation. For example, if someone feels fear type of emotion, it is expected that fear emotion state negatively affects pleasure and dominance mood components, and positively influences arousal mood component. This example is illustrated in Figure 2.

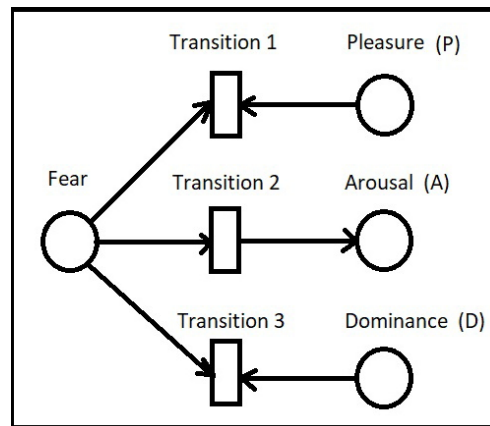


Figure 2: A part mood updating in the extended model.

Depression as a discrete place in the fuzzy stochastic hybrid Petri nets model was defined the way to decrease the level of PAD mood components by using inhibitory arcs. Whenever there was no token in this place, a continuous transition was activated and affected PAD mood components negatively. On the other hand, experiencing a sense of gratification was defined as a discrete place to increase the level of PAD mood components by 3 inhibitory arcs using Alma's mapping (Gebhard, 2005). These components are illustrated in Figure 3.

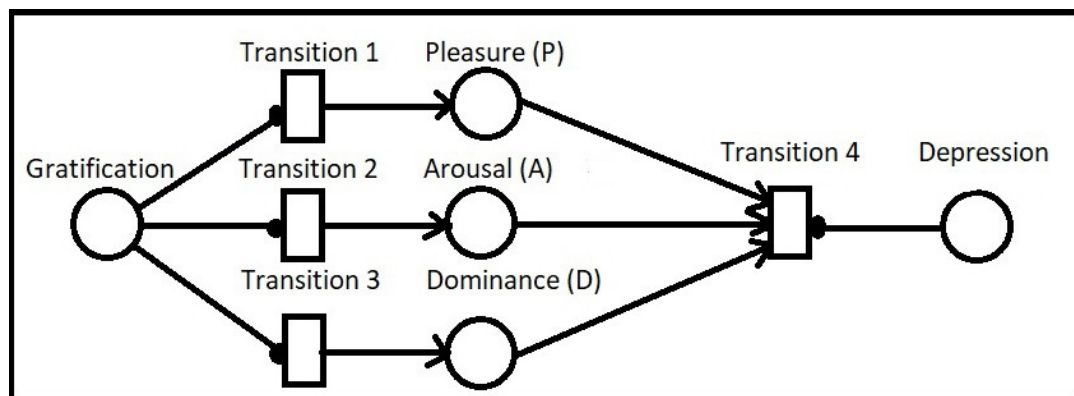


Figure 3: Gratification and Depression discrete places in the extended model.

There are few stochastic transitions in the extended model to decrease the level of specific emotional states by 50%. These transitions randomly change a specific emotion to another emotion type, and their process rates are personalized for each person. To activate such transitions, discrete places with corresponding inhibitory arcs were defined. An example of such segments in the model is illustrated in Figure 4. In the extended model, the initial markings were defined as fuzzy numbers instead of crisp values to cover the problem regarding to unknown, missing, or uncertain values.

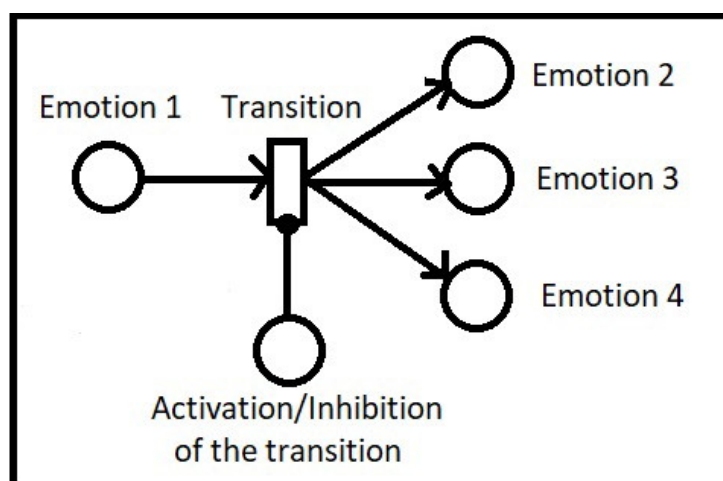


Figure 4: An example of decreasing the level of specific emotions.

Results and Discussion

It was validated that stochastic Petri nets can model PAD mood components accurately (Mehraei, 2017). The extended model as a fuzzy stochastic Petri nets was conducted on Snoopy platform (Heiner et al., 2012) with the same sample in the previous study (Mehraei, 2017). The simulation results were found by calculating the average point of 40,000 stochastic runs with 95% confidence level based on the formula proposed by Sandmann and Maier (Sandmann & Maier, 2008). Such a large number of runs was considered to obtain a coefficient of variation close to 1, and not to neglect the accuracy (Liu et al., 2016). The ending point of the time interval was set on 500 to compare simulation results with each other at a certain Petri Time (Pt).

As explained earlier, Petri net markings do not accept negative values. Therefore, there is a mapping from the simulation results to PAD components, which should take values between -1 to 1. The mean of the simulation results for each PAD components can be considered as the value 0. Thus, when a mood component value was bigger than the mean, it was considered a positive value, otherwise a negative value. It is known that in the case of a depressive mood, all PAD components are negative (Mehrabian, 1996).

Anger, distress, and fear emotion levels were intentionally decreased by 50% one by one to make it possible to quantitatively compare their influences on PAD components as illustrated in Figure 4. The simulation result shows that decreasing the level of anger emotion leads to positive Pleasure and Dominance components, but the Arousal component remains negative. On the other hand, the simulation results reveal that all PAD components remain negative. The simulation results related to decreasing the level of fear component was similar to anger emotion. However, the level of increase or decrease in PAD components were not exactly same. The calculated average of the markings showed that decreasing the level of anger, distress, and fear emotions increased the level of the Pleasure component by 3.3, 1.5, and 3.1 folds, Arousal component by 1.4, 1.2, and 1.2 folds, and Dominance component by 1.8, 1.5, and 1.6 folds, respectively. These simulation results are in line with the mapping used in Alma's approach (Gebhart, 2005).

The proposed model made it possible to manipulate emotion types and predict the possible mood states based on PAD components. The level of emotion types was decreased intentionally by 50% to check which emotion type can positively affect PAD components the most.

Surprisingly, decreasing the level of shame emotion along with experiencing sense of gratification led to the biggest number of folds in all PAD components. This proposed strategy increased the level of Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance components by 3.3, 1.8, and 1.9, respectively. The summary of these results is illustrated in Figures 5.

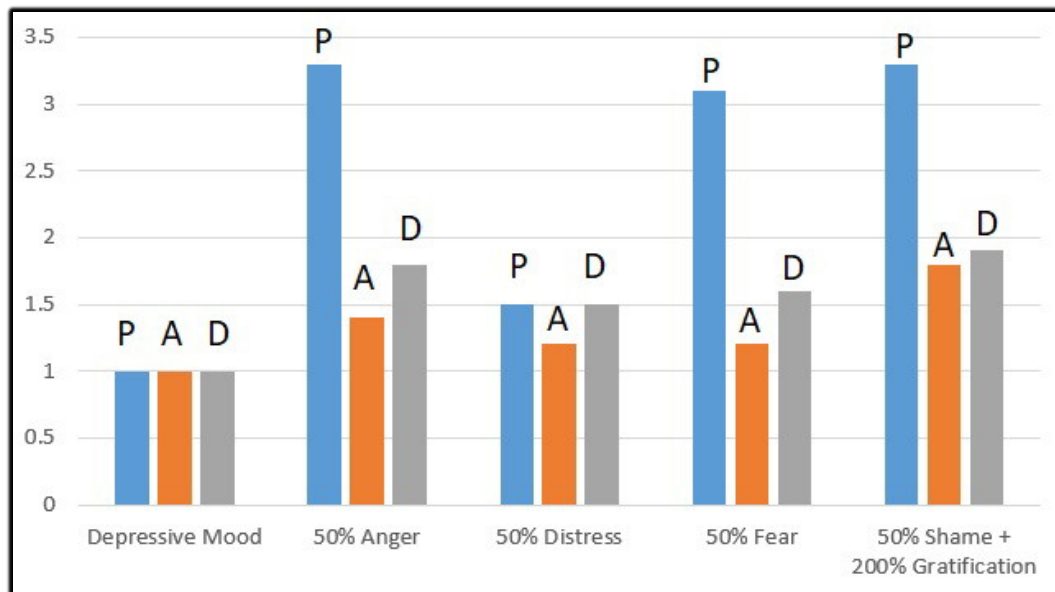


Figure 5: Simulation results of Pleasure (P), Arousal (A), and Dominance (D) components.

Conclusion

This study showed that fuzzy stochastic hybrid Petri nets is a proper mathematical tool to model and analyze psychological systems such as depressive mood disorder pathways. The simulation results validated the mapping from emotion types to PAD components, which had been used in Alma's approach (Gebhart, 2005). Decreasing the levels of anger, distress, and fear emotions were helpful for lifting mood states, but it was not good enough to keep all PAD mood components positive. For example, decreasing the anger emotion's level increased pleasure and dominance component, but could not increase arousal component significantly. In the proposed strategy, decreasing shame emotion along with increasing sense of gratification made all PAD components positive significantly with p-value less than 0.05. Therefore, shame and gratification can be potential emotion regulation altering targets to treat depressive mood disorders. This strategy can be used as psychotherapy, without using drugs and facing their possible side effects.

Clearly, there are many factors which affect PAD components. To include all the factors in the model was out of the scope of this study. However, considering fuzzy parameters and stochastic processes made it possible to neglect factors such as environmental factors.

In future studies, the proposed model can be extended to find novel treatments for depressive mood disorders, and eventually depression itself. Other factors can be integrated in the model, and their roles can be discussed accurately. Such a mathematical modeling helps us to shed light on the way psychological systems work, and find potential treatments for various psychological disorders before trying to run experiments on patients.

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Relational Aggression and the “Mean Boy”: Re-gendering Concepts of Aggressive and Dangerous Behavior

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Abstract

Relational aggression has long been considered the “weapon of choice” for young women seeking to harm others through persistent manipulation or damage to relationships. However, in recent media articles in Australia, young men have been reported to use the same aggressive strategies to target young women. This article explores the themes drawn from a content analysis of 30 newspaper articles that report an Internet website established to “trade” sexual images of teenage girls. We argue that the prevalent forms and functions of girls’ relational aggression, as described in the literature, are also evident in the perpetrating behavior of boys. We contend that the expression of such behavior prompts discussion of a gendered alternative to what is considered as “mean”. The reported actions of young men can be recognized as aggressive and dangerous. It is damaging to dismiss “mean boys” subjectivities as merely “boys being boys”.

Keywords: relational aggression, media, gender

Introduction

In August 2016, the Australian media reported a crisis that triggered a moral panic over youth pornography. An online website was discovered that profiled explicit images of thousands of schoolgirls. Reportedly, students from over 70 schools were implicated with numerous images of nude teenage girls posted online. Many of these young women had their names attached to the images so that the community of social media participants could “rate” them. At the time, the Australian authorities struggled to shut down the website because it was hosted offshore. Over the month that the story was prominent in print media, it appeared that there was little that the young women or the authorities could do to remove the images or close the website.

In this article, we undertake an analysis of media articles to illustrate representations of boys’ relational aggression and in particular the constitution of a “mean boy” subjectivity. The Australian Press texts suggest that “mean boys” relational aggression may occur in different contexts and manifest as different behaviors to that of “mean girls”, yet they can take effect in equally hurtful ways. We use the term “mean” (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002) when it is used as a linguistic construction within the literature. Likewise, we use the subjectivities “mean boys” and “mean girls” when these terms are deployed to describe gendered relational aggression. We are mindful, however, that the exclusivity of these two categories is under contestation (Artz, Kassis, & Moldenhauer, 2013; Ringrose, 2006). We, therefore, use the terms “young men” and “young women” rather than “boy” and “girl” and describe behaviors to avoid where possible the perpetuation of potentially problematic subjectivities. Subjectivities highlight the constructed nature of media representations.

The content analysis in this article suggests that young men may deliberately target young women using the Internet as a mode of aggressive action. This technologically enhanced form of relational aggression highlights the need for a reorientation of definition of “mean”. In past references, “mean” has been deployed to describe relationally aggressive behaviors, once considered to be simply the domain of girls (Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). A question is raised whether the notion of “mean girls” is just another stereotype that frames young women in a deficit way, when the notion of “meanness” can apply to both genders.

The article proceeds with an outline of the definitions of relational aggression, the similarities and differences between “girls” and “boys” and a challenge to the notion that relational aggression “belongs” to girls. Secondly, the role that cyberbullying plays in mechanisms of relational aggression is discussed. Consideration is given to gender differences and the significance of relationships. Content analysis of the media articles provides an illustration of how the reported boys’ behavior is consistent with the dimensions of relational aggression. Finally, we conclude that the new “meanness” is in many ways less specifically gendered than first articulated by research (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016). It appears that young men are using digital technologies as a mode for relational aggression. Unless the misconception that only “girls” engage in manipulative social games is amended, opportunities can be missed to redress wider gender biases that position young women as vulnerable.

Literature Review

Relational Aggression

In the literature, there is a range of variations of aggression. The term “indirect aggression” refers to behaviors that harm a person through exclusion or rejection, where the target may not be directly confronted (Coyne, Archer, Eslea, & Liechty, 2008). “Social aggression” refers to

the manipulation of group inclusion through character “assassination” (Holland, 2015, p.2). There are rejecting behaviors, and actions taken to damage reputations, self-regard and social position (Underwood, 2003). “Relational aggression” utilizes group exclusion as a means of manipulation. There are similarities between the various forms of aggression. These behaviors are all an attack on real or perceived social relations that avoid confrontation if possible. Both covert and overt relationship manipulation can be designed to damage someone’s social position.

Relational aggression has long been regarded as more likely to occur between groups of young women than young men (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). Perceived as feminine, the postulation that girls are more hurt by acts of relational aggression than boys has never been called into question. This is justified in that young women are considered to place more importance on their relationships, especially during the period of adolescence (James, Lawlor, Murphy, & Flynn, 2013). Young women often use social media to manage their friendships and also, conflict between friends and use Facebook as a space to engage in “the frequently precarious management of both” (Ging & Norman, 2016, p.1).

In contrast, other studies have found little difference in the prevalence of male and female relational aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; James et al., 2011). Further, more recent literature has been concerned with the role that young men specifically play which often goes unnoticed. Eriksen and Lyng (2016), for example, provide ample evidence of boys’ acts of relational aggression. Their interviews illustrate how boys can participate in “smear campaigns” directed towards individuals, along with other exclusionary behavior “sometimes unapologetically, sometimes with remorse” (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016, p. 6).

Is “mean” gendered?

To reiterate, there is research to challenge the long held view in the literature that “mean” is the popular construction of girls’ aggression (Artz, Kassis, & Moldenhauer; 2013; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). While the term “mean boys” has generally referred to boys who bully other boys (Luzer, 2015), Orpinas, McNicholas, and Nahapetyan (2015) found that significantly more boys than girls exhibited high levels of relational aggression in the early years of their schooling (Grade 6 compared to Grade 12 boys). In other research, James et al. (2013) reported that relational aggression is regarded by boys as being a “girl thing” and that it was associated with having close friendships and “bitching”. Boys’ methods of exclusion were self-reported to include examples of ignoring people, talking behind someone’s back, spreading rumours and gossip. One marked difference between boys’ and girls’ forms of relational aggression of note in their study was an absence of the subtler forms of relational aggression. These included eye rolling and gestures, which are often characterized as female relational aggression (Besag, 2006). The meaning of “gossiping” can differ by gender. In McAndrew’s (2014) study, undergraduate young men regarded gossiping as a way to develop knowledge, be in charge of information, and improve friendship, whereas gossiping was less likely to be perceived as a friendship quality between women. Johnson et al. (2013) has noted that although both genders describe bullying events as “simply drama”, it has been argued that boys can minimize the perpetration of relational aggression more so than girls. Boyd (2014) writes,

Teens regularly used that word [drama] to describe various forms of interpersonal conflict that ranged from insignificant joking around to serious jealousy-driven relational aggression. Whereas adults might have labelled many of these practices as bullying, the teens saw them as drama. (p. 137)

Technology amplifies the “drama”, making it is easier to distribute information through social media and with increased opportunity for viral dissemination. Interestingly, the idea that teenagers “will grow out of it” (Boyd, 2014, p. 137) remains a pervasive theme in the literature (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Author, 2016). Research into general community attitudes towards stalking behavior, highlights the danger of accepting this stance (McKeon, McEwan, & Luebbers, 2014). Results from this study demonstrate that stalking is more readily endorsed by males than females. This is done through minimizing, justifying and normalizing the stalking behaviors (McKeon et al., 2014). Ultimately, when such behavior is excused, there is the failure to recognize the significance of predatory behavior as dangerous.

Function of relational aggression and the “mean boy”

There are common justifications across the genders for engagement in relational aggression (James et al., 2013). Relational aggression has been used as a punishment with or between groups of young people (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Being valued by the peer group is a second common theme in the general relational aggression literature (Author, 2016). Likewise, relational aggression can serve to facilitate relationships with other group members (Werner & Crick, 2004) or be used to diffuse responsibility (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2013).

Rather than being the sole domain of “mean girls” aggressive behaviors have been similarly recounted by boys (James et al., 2013; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2013; Nelson, 2003). Functions of relational aggression also include “getting their own way” (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2006) with exclusion regarded as being a highly effective tool for controlling the group, and a quicker and more effective way of managing friendship conflict than discussing problems (James et al., 2013). Boys who engage in relationally aggressive behaviors were reported to have greater peer acceptance and popularity (Leadbeater, Boone, Sangster, & Mathieson, 2006). Likewise, peer affiliations can influence whether individuals perpetrate aggression (Orpinas et al., 2015). Jealousy can be another reason boys use to explain relational aggression. This jealousy can be triggered by catalysts such as competition in sport, seeking attention from girls, and the drive to be perceived as popular by peers (James et al., 2013). The results from these research studies may explain why high status boys, or boys seeking high status, are motivated to engage in such behavior.

The visibility of sexual aggression

Very recently, sexual harassment has been measured in a significant research study of bullying behaviors (Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2016). Specifically, Shute, Owens & Slee’s study design includes bullying behaviors with scales of sexual harassment. Their results make young men’s sexual victimization of young women, visible (Sills, et al., 2016). The study’s authors report verbal victimization in the nature of sexual name-calling and remarks about young women’s physical appearance. Incidents of abusive comments, spoken loudly and in young women’s faces, were found to be common, as well as indirect victimization such as attacks on their sexual reputation (e.g. Spreading rumour about young women sleeping around too much, or conversely, not enough).

Both moral condemnation and the sanctioning of young women’s reputations construct girls’ sexuality as a problematic, to be surveilled and controlled (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), has been called out in recent years as “slut shaming” (Ringrose & Renold, 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2014). Shute et al.’s (2016) findings provide evidence of “sex rumor mongering” (p. 279) as an integral part of young men’s aggression towards young women. Although rumour mongering is often seen as “typical female” behavior, it has been found that adolescent boys participate in rumour spreading to strengthen their status in the peer group

(Juvonen et al., 2013). Likewise, Page, Shute, and McLachlan (2015) explain the notion of sexual bullying as demonstrations of power by young men over young women.

Cyberbullying as a subset of relational aggression

Digital technologies can be used to support hostile behaviors by individuals or groups (Tokunaga, 2010). Teenage boys engage in relational aggression on the Internet in particular ways and for particular reasons. Cyberbullying, as an act of relational aggression, is a process of engaging in behaviors that are harmful and/or harassing via any means of information technology such as social media. Cyberbullying, also known as “electronic bullying or online social cruelty” (Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013, p. 1036), involves “wilful and repeated harm” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 5). It is inflicted through technology mediums that includes as web pages, text messaging, online forums, and instant messaging.

Social media support new manifestations of aggressor-victim dyads. Different dimensions of covert aggression are carried out to inflict hurt and “the internet is a perfect conduit to achieve these ends” (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2013, p. 67). Examples of cyberbullying include actions that attempt to intimidate and control others, or manipulate the recipient of the bullying by humiliating them. To reiterate, the behaviors are intentional, repeated, and antagonistic (Betts, 2016). Additionally, cyberbullying is characterized by its anonymity and solicitation of the involvement of other people online who do not know and are unknown to the person being targeted. This phenomenon, in which others participate in events that promote relational aggression, is known as a *digital pile-on* (Selvi, Sathyavati, & Ramya, 2016).

The characteristics inherent in online technologies (e.g. Perceived anonymity, pace of exchange and anytime, anywhere transcendence) increase the likelihood that individuals can be exploited for purposes more harmful than “traditional” forms of relational aggression. Links have also been made between cyberbullying and stalking in that both forms of abuse can present in online and physical manifestations of the behavior (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2015). The majority of cyber targets is female (Li, 2007).

Although there is much written about cyberbullying (Bartlett & Coyne, 2014), it is not a new problem. In a 1994 survey of females who participated in an online community, one-fifth of the women reported online sexual harassment (Brail, 1994). At this time, the types of harassment took on a variety of forms and a new language of sexual harassment emerged, including, “flaming” (overt assaults on an individual), “visual pornography” (Soukup, 1999), “electronic stalking”, and “virtual rape” (Herring, 1995). Given that the problem has been around for some time, it seems incongruous that, to date, calls for a dedicated anti-cyberbullying law (Campbell & Zayrnik, 2013; Young et al., 2016) has gone unanswered. However, it is possible that in these circumstances there would already be laws, non-specific to cyberbullying that could be used. For example, in Australian legislation, there are laws in the area of misuse of telecommunication, criminal defamation, and infringements relating to confidentiality breaches (Young et al., 2016).

Research Questions

If steps are to be taken to ameliorate the harm that is being inflicted on young women using the Internet, there is a need for educators as well as policy makers to recognize the seriousness of online relational aggression by boys towards girls. We must consider the ever-changing nature of adolescent lives and the technological mechanisms that they have embraced and accordingly, make the necessary adjustments to the current understanding of relational

aggression. In doing so, we can then argue for a suitable response to the issue of relational attacks on young women, and ensure it is apportioned the significance it deserves. Girls have traditionally been the focus of studies in relational aggression and this has resulted in political agendas that place this form of aggression within a “girls’ world”. This knowledge production has contributed to an invisibility of relational aggression amongst boys.

The new “meanness” framed in the research reported in this article leverages content analysis of 28 articles from Australian newspapers in August 2016. These articles reported the revelation of an online website that profiled explicit images of thousands of schoolgirls. The research explored the following questions:

- (1) In what ways are relational aggression evidenced/represented in specific settings?
- (2) How are the dimensions of relational aggression evident in the representations of the boys described in the Australian Press reports?
- (3) In what ways do these representations of relational aggression differ from traditional relational aggression seen in girls?

Method

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using the 28 newspaper articles that were published online in Australia between August 16 to August 20, 2016. The articles were sourced using an Internet search aiming to extract data or “web scrape” with a focus on the unfolding controversy. The samples were sourced utilizing the Google search engine and entering the key search word/s “school scandal, web site”. From this search, every article pertaining to the website on the dates mentioned above was analyzed. The complete list of articles is provided in Appendix 1.

These newspaper articles were written to address the primary reference of an offshore website that had been established to post sexually explicit images of teenage young women. The newspaper articles also made references to the messages recorded on the website that d” swapping pictures” that referenced the girls as a sexual economic commodity.

The data analysis was guided by a systematic inductive approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The data were imported into QSR International's NVivo 10, an electronic qualitative data analysis package. All newspaper reports were read and interpreted. A coding frame was developed and content coded for analysis. The coding frame was developed by the lead investigator from concepts found in literature pertaining to relational aggression (Crick, 1996; Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo, 2014; Underwood, Scott, Galperin, Bjornstad, & Sexton, 2004). Newspaper articles were independently reviewed for data by three investigators. The content of the newspaper articles comprised statements made by the reporter, quotes from the website itself, and statements reported by police, parents, women and girls as part of the interview.

Results

Dimensions of relational aggression

The themes emerging from the content analysis of the media articles indicated eight dimensions of relational aggression including: 1. Normalizing of aggressive behavior (NAB); 2. Cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment (CCH); 3. Soliciting involvement from others (SFO); 4. In-group and out-group statements soliciting belonging (IOG); 5. Covert actions

(CA); 6. Postings seeking to harm the social standing of a girl (HSS); 7. Making jokes to both minimize the hurtfulness of aggression and to avoid blame (JAB); and, 8. The exercising of control and power (CAP). Table 1 summarizes the results according to each article reviewed online by the themes as coded above.

Table 1
Summary of Relational Aggression Themes from Reviewed Online Articles

Author	Date	Relational aggression theme							
		NAB	CCH	SFO	IOG	CA	HSS	JAB	CAP
Barry	August 17								
Branco	August 17								
Calcino	August 17								
Carmody	August 17								
Craw	August 20								
Davey	August 17								
Davey	August 19								
Ford	August 18								
Funnell	August 17								
Funnell	August 20								
Kims	August 17								
Hardy	August 17								
Harper	August 17								
Higgins	August 20								
Hunt	September 1								
Langenberg	August 31								
Layt	August 18								
Margan	August 20								
MacDonald	August 19								
McLeay	August 16								
McMahon	August 18								
Moody	August 20								
Rizvi	August 17								
Schliebs	August 18								
Sigston & Paull	August 17								
Stephens	August 17								
Tran	August 18								
Zautsen	August 17								

The young men's behavior described in the Australian Press reports were represented in ways that can be seen as relationally aggressive. Reported were normalizing behaviors among the group who were gathering and disseminating the explicit images. There were assertions of dismissiveness that were designed to make the aggression "typical" of acting "like one of the boys". This normalization is critiqued by Barry (August 19) who stated, there is "an assumption this type of behavior is inevitable and unstoppable, with the discussion focusing around how young women can keep themselves safe, i.e. girls are responsible for what happens to them. Sure, it's terrible, but boys will be boys" (para. 6). Funnell, (August 17) reports that "this group doesn't just normalize the idea that consent is irrelevant and doesn't matter, it actively encourages boys to ignore and violate consent" (para. 32). Likewise, Ford (August 18) points out that "[i]t shouldn't be seen as normal behavior for young boys to be participating in the criminal violation of anyone, let alone the young girls and women who make up their

communities. To defend this as “typical” is to argue that sexual violence is inherent in men’s behaviour” (para. 17).

A second relational aggression constructs is predatory cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment. The articles reported that social media was used to upload sexualized images of young girls who are “hunted”. In some cases, the boys encouraged each other to bombard the targets with the harassment that involved using “technology to track, harass, blackmail and abuse their victims in a way we have not previously seen” (Davey, August 19, para. 23). These actions occurred within a group of on-site users who network with others on the website.

Young men use the site to nominate the specific high school or region they are phishing for nude photos from, along with the full names of the girls they are “hunting”. Hundreds of individual names have appeared on “wanted” lists, including the names of sisters and entire high school friendship circles. (Funnell, August 17, para. 3)

There was ongoing retaliation reported with the young men encouraging others to join in the abuse when the young women requested for the images to be revoked. Davey (August 17) highlights report how “victims had posted to the website pleading for images of themselves to be removed [but] their requests are mostly ignored, laughed at, or in some cases, men retaliate by calling on their ‘bros’ to unearth and upload even more images of the victim” (para. 7).

In-group, out-group belonging was a further theme reported by the press in terms of behaviors that were akin to “a pack of hyenas hunting their prey” (Funnell, August 17, para. 22). These groups were described in the reports of teenage boys and young men colluding with each other to violently degrade women. The rhetoric can be seen as a move to cultivate belonging to an “in-group”. The normative violence can serve to elevate the participants’ status in “the decidedly toxic masculine space in which they operate . . . within the homosexual code of brotherhood” (Ford, August 18, para. 7).

Covert actions, a feature of relational aggression, are evidenced in instances where the young woman is unaware of the violence that is being perpetrated against her. The fact that the images were captured and disseminated “behind her back” and without her consent was an important theme in the media articles. Boys employed codes to make it more difficult for girls to detect their names on the website (Calcino, August 17). Much of the content posted is done “in secret” and it is almost impossible to detect the aggressor (Hardy, August 17).

The reportedly anonymous postings suggest an intent to control and exercise power. Underpinning this issue is the lack of consent to upload images of the young women. One report highlights the commodification of young women within a masculine set of market power relations,

The thrill is not just that they might see the girl who sits next to them in maths class, it’s also that they can put in an order for the girl from maths class. What these boys are really getting off on is the sense of power they feel over these girls, and the idea that they can own and obtain them like objects. (Harper, August 17, para. 7)

Additionally, there is a coercive gendered element to the practice of sharing the visual media among young people. The articles highlighted the pressure on young women to send explicit images. Studies show “up to a third of young people have been asked to send naked images of themselves and more than half of teenage girls who did so said they felt pressure from a boy” (MacDonald, August 19, para. 15).

A further theme characteristic of relational aggression, which became apparent in the articles, was that of deploying humour to minimize the appearance of aggression and avoid blame. This strategy serves to elicit diminished responsibility and accountability for actions associated with relational aggression. One comment in an article by Ford, (August 18) describes this positioning.

When punished for this behavior, these boys and men (and their supporters, of which there are sadly many) claim their actions were taken in good humour and not abuse. How dare they be accused of violence – these things are jokes. And besides, if those girls didn't want their photographs paraded around for men to laugh at and use to vilify them, they shouldn't have taken them in the first place. Because boys must never, ever be forced to account for their actions. Especially not if a girl is there to take responsibility instead. (para. 13)

The media articles in the public sphere attract a similar response from readers who may not recognize the power relations nor find the abusive material problematic. As an illustration, Funnell (August 17, para. 20) reports that “one website user...comments that he finds the matter—including the exploitation of primary school girls—hilariously entertaining”.

Finally, a further dimension of relational aggression in the texts highlight harm to young women's social standing. This was evident in the reports of uploaded sexual images and/or postings that comprised sexual put-downs, such as dismissing girls as “sluts and bitches” (Ford, August 18, para. 5). Photographs that were designed to shame were often accompanied by degrading descriptions of the girls (Ford, August 18).

Gender differences in relational aggression

The second research question investigated the ways that reports of boys' relationally aggressive acts differed from that of girls' as outlined in the literature to date. The distinctions were evident in the media reports, which referred to statements that were clearly the dimensions of relationally aggressive behaviors, but were exhibited in different ways to that of girls. Examples included the theme of boys who went about collecting “friends” to perpetrate sexual harassment online based solely on gender. Ford (August 18, para. 5), for example, reported, “the context of a group made up of literally thousands of their male peers”. MacDonald reiterated the notion of the gendered, dualistic nature of the aggression, “because the fact is that the rating of girls, the trawling and lewd conversations about them, the “slut shaming” that accompany the sharing of the sites means the gap is not generational, but gender based” (August 19, para. 14).

The finding that relational aggression in the “mean boy” can be a gendered act highlights another form of sexual bullying and illuminates a further example of boys' relational aggression. This form of gendered aggression pertains to the manner in which “mean boys” appropriate the Internet and a range of social media applications to cyberbully and stalk young women and girls using repeated and hostile sexualized attacks (Davey, August 19). This

appropriation exists because “what is new is young men now have the technology to share their upskirt snaps with the world” (Barry, August 19, para. 4).

Discussion

This content analysis set out to identify the dimensions of relational aggression evident in the representations of young men described in the Australian Press reports. The newspaper articles were written in response to an offshore website that had been established to post sexually explicit pictures of young women. This article also sought to identify the means by which the young men’s behavior was different from female forms of relational aggression described in the current literature as, the “mean girl”.

Overall, there emerged evidence to support eight dimensions relevant to relationally aggressive behaviors. These aspects were statements related to normalizing of the behavior, predatory cyberstalking and harassment behaviors that included getting others to join in a *digital pile-on* (Selvi, Sathyavati, & Ramya, 2016), in and out group statements, covert actions, postings seeking to harm a girls’ social standing, making jokes to minimize the aggression and avoid blame, and control and power.

Of note, some of the dimensions are intertextual in that they occur in relationship with another. This intertextuality is evident in our results where reports have indicated for example, that power and control is operationalized using covert means where methods of anonymity are deployed and invisibility enables girls’ harassment. Further, power and control can manifest through laughter and the use of humour or predatory cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment. What may be read as “boyish hijinks” devoid of any political effect can also serve to further undermine the target. Referring to Ahmed’s (2004) work, Gannon et al. (2015) observe that “[e]motions circulate unevenly so that particular emotions ‘stick’ to certain bodies, marking them as inferior, dangerous, pathological, or anachronistic” (p. 202). To take abusive humour seriously may be to evoke the “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed, 2010) and this stance can evoke derision from those seeking to sustain uneven power relations.

While there is an interconnection between all of the dimensions, cyberbullying and harassment binds all these aggressive acts together. Ringrose and colleagues (2012) highlight how technology can play a role in aggression through its capacity to support coercion and gendered power relations.

“Visual scrutiny, and bodily objectification was ubiquitous and was a slippery slope between consensual forms of playing that could easily veer into on-going technologically mediated harassment, such as being repeatedly asked for photos. Even when girls refused to participate in the sending of photos (as most girls in the study claimed), this did not mean they were safe from the implications of this practice and routine forms of sexism.” (Ringrose et al., 2012, p. 36)

The findings in the study concur with previous literature regarding boys’ relational aggression. Like Eriksen and Lyng (2016), the research suggests that “mean boys” can conduct relationally aggressive smear campaigns and other exclusionary behaviors. It appears from the media reports canvassed in this study, young men may not only minimize and excuse aggressive behaviors towards young women, but also that social media can amplify these power imbalances. This finding has potentially dangerous implications for young women, as the failure to identify the seriousness of such predatory behavior could impact on future

victimization (McKeon et al., 2014). Further research could be conducted to look at the influence of social media on young people – the role of young men, the positioning of young women, and the influence on policy makers and law enforcement.

The results also showed differences between the reported relationally aggressive behavior of “mean boys”, and “mean girls”. The behaviors that were specific to the “mean boys”, reported in this study, indicate that “friends” can be networked with, and accumulated in order to harass females in online spaces. Thus a sense of belonging is constituted around the central purpose of harassment. Mayeux (2014) concurs with these findings, reporting that typically measured popularity such as “in-group” and “out-group” status is not usually based on gender binaries.

A further difference between “mean boys” and “mean girls” engagement in relational aggression pertains to “mean boys” participation in repeated and hostile sexualized attacks. Gendered aggression appears to have been maximized through boys’ appropriation of the Internet where they cyberbully and stalk young women and girls. The young men reported in the media texts were highly aggressive in the online context. This disputes Orpinas et al. (2015) findings that relational aggression can diminish in prevalence in later years; it is not simply the domain of young boys. The results in the current study may be explained from qualitative studies that shed light on the similarities and differences between young men’ and young women’s perceptions of relational aggression (McAndrew, 2014; Wyatt, 2010). It is a well-documented tenet, that adolescents value peer relationships and both genders identify similar motives of power, popularity, and a desire to fit in with peer groups for RA (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010). It has however also been documented that young men can consider being excluded from groups, due to not demonstrating stereotypical masculine behavior can be an important element in RA (Orpinas et al., 2015). Thus young men may be motivated to engage in online predatory behavior if it is perceived as an in-group masculine norm/ expectation?

The importance of including sexual aggression perpetrated by young men in the constructs of relational aggression is that this domain has not typically been central to discussions regarding aggressive acts. A changing focus in the field of cyberbullying is impacting on current research, in particular, the inclusion of scales that measure sexual harassment and make boys’ victimization of girls visible (Shute et al., 2016). The anonymous nature associated with technology facilitates cyberbullying behaviors, and makes it more difficult to prevent. The question of how to prevent online relational aggression or develop appropriate interventions remains to be answered (Li, 2007).

Limitations and Further Research

There are limitations associated with the content analysis, research design. The findings and conclusions drawn in this article are based on textual analysis. Media texts are themselves social constructs, positing arguments for a specific demographic who purchase the media. As texts they do not convey the real world, but rather frame a specific construction of it. Moreover, the texts report events in Australian culture and therefore have limited application to other countries where gender relations may be different, and young people may have limited access to digital technologies. The value of the study is in its explication of dimensions of relational aggression and the consideration of the “mean boy” subjectivity. As with any gender categories, these are co-constituted within particular socio-material frameworks.

Further research could be conducted into the relational aggression of the “mean boy” construction. There is scope for fieldwork with young people to map the terrain and determine

both how these coercive networks function and how the various dimensions of the aggression can be resisted. We suggest the following questions:

- What factors support “mean boy” subjectivities?
- How can young women resist the victimization associating with being positioned as a recipient of “mean boy” aggression?
- To what extent and in what ways are young men targets of “mean boy” aggression?

Ford (August 18) states that “we are approaching a crisis point with the way masculinity is being constructed and excused, particularly the burgeoning kind that is formed in school playgrounds and the hallways of cyberspace” (para. 12). In this new space, the covert and anonymous exclusionary in-group tactics of “mean boys” lends itself to a new understanding of the term “mean”. Discourse constructs social values and legitimates practices. We note that the term “victim” positions women and girls as helpless and it is important that there is critique when this term is used in the media.

Conclusion

The current paper attempts to broaden the empirical and analytical scope to include boys’ relational aggression that may also provide a basis for developing and further enhancing our understanding of relational aggression among girls. It is noted that the gender blindness that marred earlier research in this area has turned into essentializing the differences of gender (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). The impact of viewing the world through the lens of gender-essentializing theories of aggression influences not only research and policies, but legal guidelines. This is no more evident than in the dismissive, normalizing, excusing positioning of responses to the current Internet “scandal”. Including young men as well as young women in future research on relational aggression provides opportunities for exploring gender similarities as well as differences in methods, machineries, dynamics and sources (Eriksen & Lyng, 2016).

Further, it is pertinent to consider the usefulness of deploying the term “mean” for either gender. The previous labelling of girls “mean behaviour” and then broadening this, may limit the potential to focus on the complexities of the issues and associated behaviors of all involved. Such a connotation has a perpetrator and victim subjectivity binary. Critiques of binary subjectivities in both research and media may support more complex readings of relational aggression. With further research, we may facilitate the amelioration relational aggression among both young men and young women.

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Appendix 1

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Sleeping With My Abuser: A Qualitative Study on the Development of Transferred Aggression Expression among Battered Women

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed at understanding the experiences of battered women. Using the grounded theory method, the author generated a conceptual model of transferred aggression expression explaining abused women's perpetration of aggression in intimate relationships. For broader sampling, 18 battered women in a highly populated province in the Philippines were selected as the participants for one-on-one, semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The field texts gathered in the study were subjected to Strauss and Corbin's (2008) grounded theory method of data analysis, comprising open, axial and theoretical coding procedures. Six stages emerged which described women's manifestation of transferred aggression expression, namely *enduring*, *inhibiting*, *placating*, *reciprocating*, *aggressing* and *retaliating*. Results indicated that women who faced intimate partner violence were likely to exhibit transferred aggression expression via passive, passive-aggressive and reactive-aggressive ways. Implications and future directions of study are also offered.

Keywords: transferred aggression expression; intimate partner violence; violence against Filipino women; aggressive women, grounded theory

Introduction

The World Health Organization (2016) has recognized intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence as major public health problems. Due to its high prevalence worldwide and the damaging consequence to children and women's psychological state, IPV has been a topic of interest for many clinicians, policy makers, and researchers (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Women's psychological reactions to battering by intimate partners was explained by Lenore Walker (1979, as cited in Walker, 2000) who proposed the *battered woman syndrome*. This refers to psychological symptoms developed after someone has lived in a battered relationship. The theory proposes that victims of spousal abuse gradually become immobilized by fear and believe they have no other options. As a result, these women stay in the abusive relationship. Battered woman syndrome is a gradual process of conditioning in which the victims feel both helpless and hopeless and, according to Walker, is one of the main reasons that women stay in these conditions longer than people would expect. Walker (2000) also examined the dynamics in spousal abuse and coined the term *cycle of violence*. This described a cyclical pattern consisting of three phases that differ in length and intensity. The first phase of the cycle of violence described battered women's calm and agreeing attitude to husband's demands, avoiding conflict, accepting everything as their fault and becoming nurturing (tension building phase). The abuser loses control and engages in major episodes of assaultive behavior. A battered woman may feel shock, disbelief, and denial. She will respond by attempting to minimize her injuries by staying as much out of her husband's way as possible (explosion or acute battering phase). The last phase is characterized by apologetic acts on the part of the abuser as he understands that he has gone too far. She will reciprocate by accepting his promises that he can change (calm, loving respite phase) and the cycle of violence returns to the first phase again, with tension building. As a result, women develop a hopeless and helpless disposition after prolonged exposure to violence (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2011).

Walker's theory highlighted women's receptive and passive behavior towards battering, but many studies have noted other responses to IPV. In fact, some studies have found that IPV is symmetrical; hence, women perpetrate violence as equally as men (Bair-Meritt et al., 2010; Brown, 2012; Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005; Leisring, 2013; Reckenwald & Parker, 2012; Straus, 2009). Other studies have found that women are more violent than men and likely to use or perpetrate violence more often; they reported physically assaulting their partner and were likely to commit a substantially greater proportion of physical aggression and spousal violence (Archer, 2000; Bowen, 2009; Hester, 2012; Muraskin, 2012; Panuzio & Dilillo, 2010; Thornton, Graham-Kevan, & Archer, 2010, 2012, 2013; Walton et al., 2009; Wright & Benson, 2010; Zacarias, Macassa, & Soares, 2012). Also, Swan and Snow (2002) concluded that some women in intimate relationships were classified as aggressors and indicated that women commit acts of physical violence against their partners, including moderate violence and emotional abuse. Lastly, the study by Saunders (1986) supports that women are also aggressive and indicated that women use violence during the height of battering to defend themselves from their abusers. However, none of these aforementioned studies have looked at whether a battered woman has tried to aggress and/or retaliate to her current partner, or a subsequent partner who is either abusive or non-abusive towards her. Also, Walker's research did not explain abused woman's aggressive responses or her reaction/s to prolonged and repeated exposure to violence. The cycle of violence theory did not address whether a battered woman has attempted to reciprocate or defend herself during her abuser's violent episodes, or whether her anger about the abuse is displaced onto her children. Hence, with a view to address the paucity of qualitative investigations on women's aggression perpetration, this study purported

to answer how and why a select group of Filipino abused women become perpetrators of violence themselves, using the developed transferred aggression expression model grounded in data from battered women's interviews.

Literature Review

A number of studies and theories have proposed to explain the factors that contribute to women's perpetration of aggression. Bandura's *social learning theory* (1986) stated that children adopt behaviors they observe in adults, including aggressive acts. This theory further argued that aggressive behaviors may extend from childhood into adulthood. *Frustration aggression theory* is a concept based on the premise that individuals will react aggressively when some goal is blocked or frustrated. This theory stated that failure to attain desired goals can lead to aggression within the family by the frustrated party (Barnett et al., 2011). Seligman's *theory of learned helplessness* (1975, as cited in Ali & Naylor, 2013) specified that repeated exposure to uncontrollable situations results in the development of negative perceptions and beliefs about one's abilities to deal with such circumstances. The *cycle of violence*, also known as the *intergenerational transmission of violence theory*, asserted that violent behavior is learned within the family and bequeathed from one generation to the next (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010). This notion assumed that family violence persists and is transmitted across generations. It proposed that interparental aggression is associated with perpetration of IPV in subsequent intimate relationships. Specific modeling occurs when individuals reproduce particular types of family aggression to which they were exposed.

Contrary to the general notion that battered women are not typically the aggressor in a relationship (Walker, 1984 as cited by Walker, 2000), women are predisposed in perpetrating violence against their partner (Archer, 2000; Babcock, Miller, & Siard, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Saunders, 1986; Swan & Snow, 2002; Thornton et al., 2010). To date, many empirical studies concerning women's perpetration of violence have been examined globally. Notably, these studies revealed that the reasons that prompted women to use aggression against their intimate partners include the following: self-defense (Muraskin, 2012; Saunders, 1986); revenge and retaliation (Kernsmith, 2005; Leisring, 2013; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Stuart et al., 2006); assault and response to ongoing abuse (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Leisring, 2013); anger or emotional release (Bair-Meritt et al., 2010; Hamberger, 2005; Muraskin, 2012). Stark (2006) also indicated that women often used force to control partners.

Several studies have found that women in IPV become equally aggressive as men and are capable of perpetrating aggression (Archer, 2000; Bowen, 2009; Daigle, 2012; Hamberger, 2005; Hester, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Kernsmith, 2005; Maneta, Cohen, Schultz, & Waldinger, 2012; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Snow, & Sullivan, 2008; Swan, Gambone, Lee, Snow, & Sullivan, 2012; Thornton et al., 2013) and are even more violent than men (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). As well, the findings of Babcock et al. (2003) identified women as the primary aggressor and reported higher incidence of perpetration of severely violent behaviors that caused their partners more injury. They concluded that women in intimate relationships are physically and psychologically abusive towards their partners. However, these studies did not investigate the processes of women's aggression perpetration, the strategies, actions and interactions, including inaction, and the consequences of their action in terms of violence perpetrated against an intimate partner, subsequent partner and/or children. Hence, the present study explores IPV perpetration among Filipino battered women using grounded theory.

Method

Design

The technique and procedure in developing grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (2008) was used in this study. This method focuses on the actions or interactions, causal conditions, consequences and strategies of the research participants with their abusive partners. The goal was to discover a theory to explain battered women's perpetration of aggression grounded on the views of how Filipino battered women experienced this phenomenon within their homes.

Participants

Participants were 18 battered women living in the Philippines who met the following criteria: (a) cohabitated or married to an abusive partner; (b) with at least one child or more; and (c) willing to share their experiences.

As shown in Table 1, the participants were 18 to 53 years old, mostly separated from their partners, and with three children on an average. They had been living with their spouse for 11 years on average, experiencing violence and abuse for almost 7 years. Eight of them were high school graduates, one had attended vocational courses, and nine participants had attended college. The majority of the participants were employed. All women reported abuse to the Women's Desk Commissioned Office; 13 of them had permanently left their abuser after the report. Six (6) battered women had a history of IPV from their former partner and nine (9) women had a history of physical abuse experienced in their family of origin during childhood. Based on the interview, these 9 women reported that their parents and/or siblings had used physical and verbal violence. They also reported having violent fathers who verbally and physically abused them, and were also violent to their mothers. According to them, experiences of violence in their family of origin had significantly affected them. They specified that they cohabitated with their partner because of the violence in their home, while some married had early to get out from violent situations. Six women faced abuse from their former intimate partners.

Table 1*Selection Characteristics of the Participants*

Respondent	Age	Marital Status	Number of years living together	Number of years in an abusive relationship	Number of children	Educational attainment	Employment status	History of abuse experiences (from family of origin and/or former partner)
R1	33	separated	3	1	2	college graduate	unemployed	none
R2	37	separated	9	9	4	high school graduate	factory worker	family of origin
R3	18	separated	1	1	1	high school graduate	unemployed	former partner
R4	39	married	19	5	2	high school graduate	factory worker	none
R5	31	married	4	4	2	high school graduate	unemployed	both
R6	33	live-in	5	4	2	college undergraduate	food vendor	former partner
R7	46	separated	1	1	1	college graduate	theater production	none
R8	25	separated	3	1	3	high school graduate	factory worker	none
R9	38	married	12	12	3	high school graduate	unemployed	both
R10	47	separated	20	17	6	college graduate	office/accounting	none
R11	45	separated	20	13	4	college graduate	teacher	family of origin
R12	53	married	28	25	4	college graduate	unemployed	family of origin
R13	33	separated	12	1	2	high school graduate	beautician	none
R14	35	separated	13	3	3	high school graduate	unemployed	family of origin
R15	38	separated	17	10	3	vocational course	meat vendor	family of origin
R16	51	separated	22	6	4	college undergraduate	trainer	former partner
R17	34	separated	10	10	3	college graduate	recruitment specialist	family of origin
R18	35	separated	12	7	2	college graduate	government office	both

Note. Each line contains the characteristics of one of the study's participants.

Instrumentation

To account for abuse experiences of the participants, a two-part interview was conducted. First, *robotfoto* or demographic profile was used to describe the characteristics of the participants in terms of their age, marital status, number of children, number of years in an abusive relationship etc... Second, an *aide memoir* or semi-structured questionnaire was developed to cover IPV disclosure events that focused on the women's abuse experiences, events and incidences of battering, ways of relating to their partner and children, changes in themselves, and the impact of the abuse in their lives. The developed *aide memoir* was translated in Filipino and then back-translated into English to avoid contextual distortions. It was pilot-tested on three women in a battering relationship to define the degree of clarity of questions, check appropriateness of questions to the target population and ensure reliable results (Borders & Abbot, 2011; Cone & Foster, 1993).

Data collection, procedure, and ethical consideration

The study was conducted in Southern Tagalog Mainland. This is the most populated province in the Philippines, and is considered one of the most industrialized and fastest growing provinces in the country (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). It was selected for its broad range of sampling. After obtaining ethical clearance from the Graduate School of the University of Santo Tomas, permission was sought from the women's desk office that handles reported domestic violence cases of the region. The researcher was directly referred to the participants who had reported the battering. An informed consent signifying their intention was

secured after explaining the objectives, risks, and benefits for participating in the study. Responses were recorded with their permission. Precaution was taken to ensure that the interviewees affirmed their participation. They were assured that all gathered data will be given confidentiality. They were given the right to obtain the results of the study. The interviews were conducted between August 2015 and June 2016 in the women's homes, and meetings were arranged according to what was convenient to them as to time and location.

To obtain sufficient and quality data, a three-step interview process (Seidman, 2013) was utilized. First, rapport-building phase was established to minimize sense of formality. It was reiterated to the participants that they had to simply share their story using their own terminologies and what was comfortable to them. The questions mostly centered on the life history of these battered women. Next, in the exploratory phase, questions were concentrated on the details and complexities of their lived experiences. Lastly, the third phase of the interviews covered the meaning of the experiences for the participants. At this point, follow up and clarification of accounts for interpretations was given consideration. The justification for this interview strategy was aimed at getting the nature or essence of the lived experiences of women in a battering relationship.

Data analysis

The completed recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to three types of coding processes based on the techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, as cited in Walker & Myrick, 2006), namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The data were coded in every way possible to gather series of information and were analyzed line-by-line. These codes were then grouped together to create clusters which were classified under core categories and subcategories. At this point, subcategories were established according to major themes that emerged from the data, for example, battered women's struggling with emotional distress, tolerating physical, verbal and sexual aggression, and withstanding the day-to-day battering for the core category of enduring stage (See Figure 1).

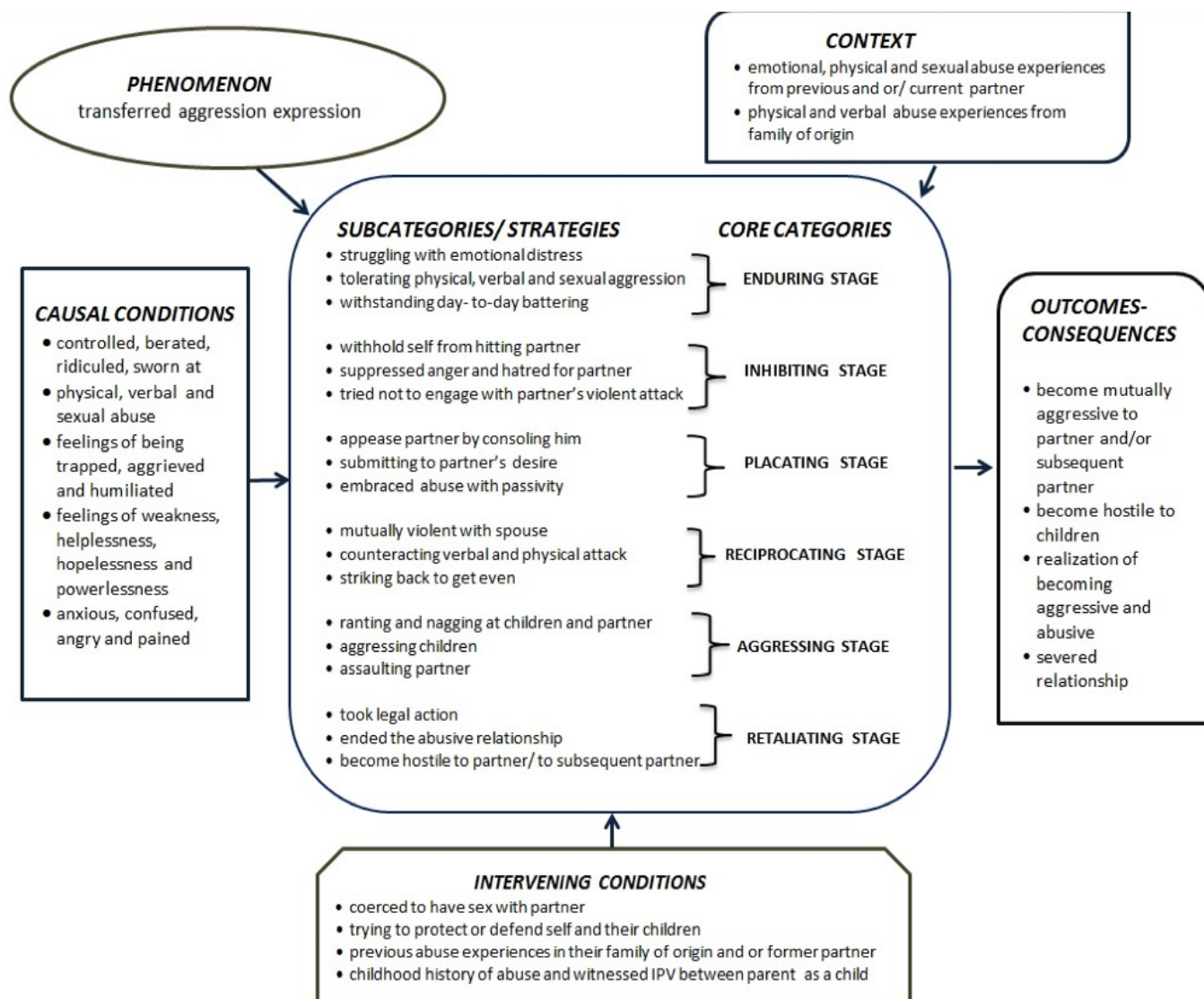


Figure 1. The coding processes for transferred aggression expression grounded in data from battered women's interview.

Coding, sorting, and comparisons were repetitively done until the data were saturated enough to furnish the theory paradigm. Writing memos and diagrams were also employed to sort out and organize data until the theoretical framework was developed (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Constant comparison analysis processes were applied, wherein data were reviewed for fit and relevance; data were categorized and subcategorized which allowed categories to build up until theoretical saturation was achieved (Haggbloom & Moller, 2007). Saturation point (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) was reached and completed as no additional data contributed to the emerged transferred aggression expression theory (See Fig.2). Finally, to ensure that the grounded theory design was utilized appropriately, member checking was observed for the consistency, accuracy, and reliability of data (Oktay, 2004). This was completed by conducting follow-up interviews, telephone calls, and video calls. The participants were provided oral and written summary descriptions of their responses for rectification, verification, and clarification. The women confirmed and acknowledged that the researcher's interpretation was accurate when compared to their experiences (Collaizzi, 1978 as cited in Dowling, 2006).

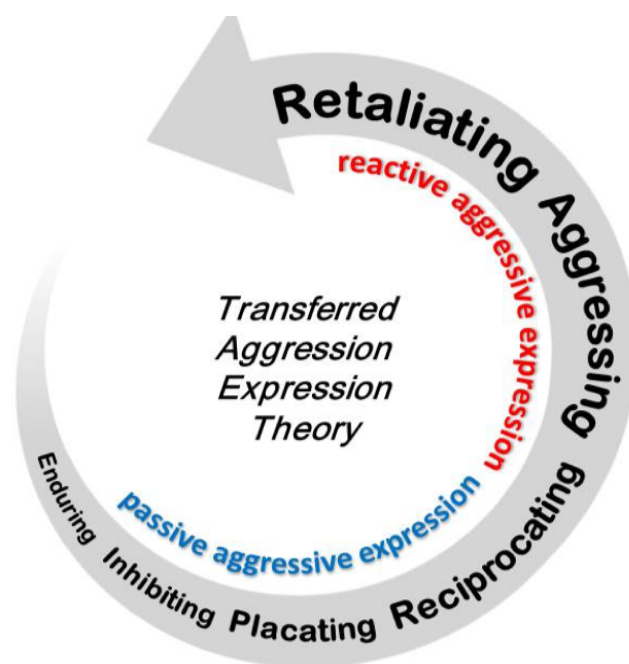


Figure 2. TAN'S Transferred Aggression Expression Theory

Results

Based on the analysis of data obtained, this investigation unfolds a process of how battered women express, displace, and/or perpetrate aggression. The proposed theoretical model of transferred aggression expression characterizes behavior of women exposed in a battering relationship with childhood history of abuse and/or previous IPV experiences. It comprises six (6) stages, namely: *enduring*, *inhibiting*, *placating*, *reciprocating*, *aggressing*, and *retaliating*. In the enduring stage, the woman responded to violence and abuse with passivity and as the battering continued their reaction progressed into a passive aggression expression in inhibiting and placating stages. They responded to IPV with passivity, habitually tolerating verbal, physical, and sexual violence, withstood day-to-day battering, and suppressed anger and hatred for a partner. However, reactive aggressive expressions were exhibited in reciprocating, aggressing, and retaliating stages. During these phases, women reported mutually assaulting their partner, counteracting partner's verbal and physical attack, striking back to get even, and showing aggression, not only on their partner but even their children (see Fig. 1 for coding processes on subcategories and core categories). The majority of the women said that they learned to retaliate by taking legal action, leaving the partner and becoming aggressive, abusive and retaliative to their current and/or subsequent partner.

Figure 2 describes a theoretical model on how transferred aggression expression progressively develops among abused women expressed via passivity, passive aggression and reactive aggression. The gyrating arrow represents a continuing sequence of transferred aggression expression exhibited by battered women. As the six (6) themes get bigger and bolder in typeface from the enduring to the retaliating stage, women's expression of transferred aggression correspondingly becomes prominent and more intensified. Hence, at the beginning, they frequently endured and responded to violence with passivity and restrained anger. As time proceeds, they become more uncontrollable, argumentative, assaultive, and risky in expressing their aggression. They impulsively hit their children when frustrated and report treating their children in a hostile and abusive manner. These women are more likely to perpetrate minor or severe violent acts without fear and are more inclined to show aggression and/or injure their

current partner or subsequent partner. Accordingly, the longer a woman stays in a battering relationship entwined with abuse experiences from her family of origin and/or previous IPV experiences, the likelihood of becoming the aggressor herself grows.

Enduring Stage

As the name of this phase indicates, the women had endured battering in the early stage of their relationship. They shared that they had been battling IPV with fear and confusion. The women reported having varied feelings from anger and compassion toward partner to self-blame. Instead of being angry, they said that they habitually tolerated the abuses inflicted on them. As the women described:

Even I could not understand what my husband is doing to me. I hate him, but he said he love me so I forgive him. It is my fault too. (R14)

I allowed him to beat me and do whatever he wants. I obeyed him for ten long years. (R17)

The women expressed their emotional struggles in dealing with the situation. One woman recollected how she dreadfully chose to end her suffering, “I poured gas on my head to finally end this battering. Tomorrow he will hit me again, ceaselessly. I am tired.”(R5) Despite the abuse experiences, women opted to stay. Being trapped was their reason for not leaving their abuser; hence, they continued to endure their spouse’s abusive treatment, as confided by one woman, “I can’t do anything. I’ve been here . . . nowhere to go. I have tortured myself for 25 years.”(R12) By and large, the women reported extreme feelings of weakness, helplessness and powerlessness. They recalled not fighting back or protecting themselves from the assaults because of fear and anxiety. As a result, the women chose to withstand the day-to-day battering, as demonstrated in these testimonies:

Like in a target shooting, I was standing between those knives ingrained in the door. He was slapping, kicking, dragging me . . . begging him to stop. I could not do anything. (R9)

I cannot hit a man holding a gun. For not immediately attending to his needs he would use it to threaten me and my children. (R11)

In their persistence to keep their family intact, fear of possible separation, and hope for a behavior change in their abuser, the women tried to manage their daily lives – beaten, berated, humiliated, abused, and controlled (see coding process for causal conditions, Fig.1) – eventually resulted in passivity, as epitomized in this statement: “I couldn’t live without him. I am doing my best to keep my family together. I hope that he will change you know . . . I allow him to abuse me.”(R14) Women with early exposure to violence shared that they could stand all forms of abuse inflicted by their partner since they already experienced abuse from their own family. One woman described her reaction to IPV: “Battering became part of my life. I thought after I left home, I was finally free from all sorts of abuse only to find out I moved to hell. I learned not to care for myself. I became callous.”(R2)

Inhibiting Stage

As the women struggled with emotional distress, passivity, and powerlessness in the initial stage, the second stage describes how women dealt with anxiety. The women’s feelings oscillated between wanting to fight back and fear. They described that instead of fighting back,

they responded with a restrained anger as they chose not to reciprocate partner's aggression to avoid a fight escalating. They were furious at one end, yet tried to suppress their anger on another because of fear, as illustrated in these verbalizations:

While he is bothering me, I am controlling myself from fighting back, but deep within me I am enraged. I am wishing for his death. (R18)

I wanted to fight back, but I am afraid of him . . . he is like a monster . . . continued beating me.(R7)

This stage is characterized by withholding the expression of hatred toward their partner despite feelings of antagonism. The majority of the women expressed that they usually managed their husband's violent attack by avoiding, ignoring, and not engaging in the fight, as one woman expressed, "I accepted every blow. I hate him and wanted to hit him too, but tried to hold back. I tried to stay away from him."(R8) During this stage, women expressed their aggression covertly. Eleven women revealed that they had contemplated killing their spouse out of their hatred while the others entertained thoughts of physically injuring, harming or assaulting their partner. Venting their bottled-up anger and releasing it on the partner were the women's reasons for trying to commit suicide, as revealed in these excerpts:

Because I am very angry, it's not just him whom I wanted to kill, I wanted to kill myself too. I tied my neck and locked myself in the bathroom. (R1)

I am very angry at him I tried to kill myself instead by overdosing; I thought that if I die it might hurt him too. (R15)

The women with a history of abuse in their childhood and women with IPV accounts indicated being conditioned to violence. They said that although they desired to retaliate, they learned to suppress their anger, as demonstrated in this description: "I get used to being beaten, my parents abuse me . . . nothing is new to me . . . been wanting to get even with him but I learned to withhold my anger. I would curse him to death."(R2)

Placating Stage

The repressed aggression that the women feel during the inhibiting stage is substituted with strategies to deal with violence in the next stage. Thus in this phase, women learned to pacify their enraged batterer. They described that as they were conditioned to the battering, they learned to mollify their batterer, which became their immediate and habitual reaction, as reflected in this excerpt, "I get used to it. For 12 years I have lived with a man who berates me, batters me and sexually abused me. I know how to stop him."(R9) Although women were enraged, they declared that to console the spouse was their only option to stop from being beaten further. As a result, they usually gave in to their husband's erratic demands. The women with previous IPV experiences indicated that as they were habituated to the battering, immediately satisfying him was the only possible choice. All women reported pacifying their batterer by being affectionate, nurturing and accommodating, as reflected in these testimonies:

While he was beating me I would tell him I love him, embrace him . . . I should do what he asked or I will receive more blows. (R3)

Being manipulated and beaten by my ex I do the same now. I learned how to play him. To give him what he desire is always my best solution. (R18)

At this stage, all women believed that fighting back would not change their situation. They hoped that their spouse would change their hostile treatment. As a result, women resorted to doing everything to appease their partner, as demonstrated by one woman: “I cooked to show him as if I care. . . . do everything that pleased him to the extent of doing sexual act I found very disgusting. If I fight back, it would not matter.”(R3) The women were also worried about the possibility of being killed during the battering incidents. They reported that they tried to placate the batterer by being nice, quiet, or giving in to his desire despite wanting to fight back and retaliate. Regardless of the women’s effort to mollify the partner, they reflected that it was ineffective because the battering continued, as evidenced in these women’s confessions:

I wanted to fight back, but I allow him to do whatever he wanted to do to me. How could I fight against an angry man holding a gun? I pretended nice, but deep within me, I wish for his death. (R11)

I did my best I can to stay out of his way to calm him but he remained uncaring. He tirelessly beat me up. (R18)

Reciprocating Stage

The women’s passivity in the enduring stage and passive aggression expression in the inhibiting and placating stages developed into a reactive aggressive expression in the reciprocating stage and continued throughout the last stage. It is in the reciprocating stage when women’s anger heightened as they realized that despite efforts to pacify their partner, the battering did not cease. They recognized that they were no longer afraid of their husband’s assaults as they were motivated by their desire to protect and defend themselves and their children. As noted by one woman, “I slapped and kicked him, if it would mean severe beatings I don’t give a damn! I need to protect myself and my children.”(R18) Further, the women admitted that they learned to perpetrate physical and verbal aggression like kicking, hitting, slapping, threatening, nagging, and cursing in the same manner their batterer treated them. During the reciprocating stage, the women would counterattack by “giving back what is given to me” for every battering they received. They usually expressed their anger by throwing or destroying things at home which fuelled the violence between the couple even more. The examples illustrate how women reciprocate:

I ignored him before. My silence for 25 years is over. If he hit me, I hit back, we batter each other now. (R12)

I don’t surrender in our fights. We batter each other. Anything accessible to my hands, I would destroy it and it makes him crazy but I don’t give a damn! (R6)

The majority of participants admitted that they could no longer control the anger they had been suppressing; thus, the partners became mutually assaultive. These aspects were epitomized in the following statements:

I learned to beat him as hard as he beat me; if my hands and my legs are tired I use my teeth. I do not care if I die as long as I beat him back. (R6)

I was shocked when I stabbed him. He was bleeding. I can’t control my anger anymore. (R1)

The women with previous IPV experiences and a history of abuse in their family of origin reflected that they reciprocally assaulted their partner to put an end to the battering and to prove to him that they can be aggressive too. They also echoed not tolerating or repeating another abuse in their lives:

I am not going to allow to be beaten again. By this time he should know I can be aggressive also. I warned him to be careful or else . . . (R18)

I started assaulting him . . . giving back what has been done to me before. (R3)

I have suffered worse abuses from my family and again from my ex-partner. I do not deserve more. I started hitting him back. (R9)

Aggressing Stage

In the aggressing stage, women's expressions of aggression become more intense, deliberate, and risky. The study's participants admitted that they completely lost control over their behavior and became impulsive. At this stage, women observed certain changes in their behavior. They described they were short-fused and their hostility to the partner was triggered by even minor incidents. The women further indicated that the children were affected by their angry outbursts. Consequently, they revealed that their children have become the outlet for their anger. The excerpts are seen in these verbalizations:

I am aggressive to my child now. I wasn't like this before. (R14)

The battering that my husband has been doing to me I also do to my own children. I was not furious to my child, but to his father. He was jobless. I am so upset. (R2)

This period is also characterized by assaulting the partner. All the women exemplified extreme feelings of aggression. Some women resorted to using a weapon in attacking their partner, but justified this behavior. They said that they expressed their aggression by becoming verbally and physically aggressive against the partner, as articulated by the women:

I stabbed him with a knife that he bled. He pushed me to do it. It is his fault. (R1)

If I hit him with something and it doesn't get through him, I use my mouth to hurt him. I yell, curse, and utter all the bad words I know. (R18)

In the aggressing stage, majority of the women disclosed that they learned to be aggressive as they perpetrated severe violent acts without fear and remorse. Some women verbalized their relieved feelings while violently quarreling with the partner and seeing if their partner was seriously hurt, as evidenced in these expressions:

I hurt him brutally. I did what I have to do. I told him that I am also capable of becoming like him. (R13)

Fighting him means receiving more beating. My hatred has been here for years . . . as I hit him badly I felt I was able to express my anger. (R14)

While all women with IPV history and violence in their childhood emphasized that although they knew they will be beaten if they respond to their partner's violent behavior, at some point

they indicated being able to release the anger they had been repressing. They also confessed they became abusive to their own children and admitted having some feelings of lightness and relief as they displaced their anger to their child, but acknowledged their guilt after realizing that they hit their children impulsively, as echoed by these women:

I just had to vent, before I even realized it I hit my child really hard. I did not mean it . . . it just happened . . . this is exhausting.” (R17)

When I saw him bleeding and he ran away from me like a coward it gives me a good feeling. I feel that I won the fight. (R12)

Retaliating Stage

As the name of this stage implies, retaliating is characterized by women’s motivation to assault the partner to get revenge. The battered women realized that after years of suffering, it was high time to retaliate. All participants reported to the women’s desk. They stated that their reason for taking legal action was to retaliate for past abuses they had endured, and to break free from the abusive relationships, as emphasized in these articulations:

Before, I just obeyed him and kept quiet. I am retaliating . . . I know I should. (R15)

I have allowed him to abuse me for 25 years. I wanted to get out of this situation. The only way to get revenge is to see him in jail. (R12)

The accounts of all the participants of this study revealed similar reactions in terms of getting even with their partner. They would refuse to have sex with him, oppose his demands and neglect responsibilities at home. Thirteen (13) of the women decided to leave their batterer permanently after reporting to the Women’s Desk Commissioned Office. They stressed that leaving their abuser was their way of exacting revenge, as illustrated in the following narratives:

I intentionally leave the house disorderly, pretended busy so I can refute him. I blatantly reject his sexual advances. I reported him to women’s desk. When I leave I did not look back. (R11)

Seventeen long years with him has been calvary. When I left him I felt I was able to fight back. (R10)

It is interesting to note that the women were conscious that they were retaliating. They admitted becoming hostile and displaying violent behavior, but rationalized their aggressiveness. They believed that their partner deserved to be beaten. Participants with a new partner also described their uncontrollable aggression, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

I noticed I become aggressive now. I hit him . . . he bleeds. He beat me up so he deserved it. (R1)

I am anxious I might be beaten again . . . he’s erratic you know. I think that I should also know how to hit. (R17)

I am not going to tolerate another battering. I am living with the man who beat me . . . abuses me. I have all the reason to retaliate. (R18)

In the retaliating stage, women revealed that they were surprised about their transformation – from a woman who was passive and habituated to abuses, to a woman who can fight back. The women with prior IPV experiences and abuse in their own family also described the changes in themselves. They admitted becoming domineering, argumentative, and manipulative. They also feared abuse possibly occurring again, and highlighted not hesitating to assault the current partner if they sensed any sign of battering. They added that prior abuse taught them to become aggressive and abusive like their batterer. These behaviors were illustrated in the following statements:

I am striking back. I beat him like how he batters me. I am aggressive now. (R15)

I told my new partner I can manipulate you in my palm . . . leave you penniless. He will sink like a boat if he's ever going to hurt me. (R17)

I have become abusive now. He created a monster in me. (R2)

Discussion

The result of this study on transferred aggression expression unfolds six processes describing how a select group of Filipino battered women displaced and perpetrated aggression. Initially, in the *enduring stage*, the women struggled with IPV with passivity due to confusion and fear. They tolerated the aggression perpetrated on them, and continued to endure the abuses to survive (Bhandari, Bullock, Anderson, Danis, & Sharps, 2011) to secure the welfare of their children (Damant et al., 2009; McDonald & Dickerson, 2013) and keep their family intact (Bhandari et al., 2011). The women developed a sense of helplessness (Barnett et al., 2011; Bhandari et al., 2011), powerlessness (Koci & Strickland, 2009; Walker, 2000) and weakness (Barnett et al., 2011; Koci & Strickland, 2009). The current result on battered women's passivity and powerlessness disposition in the initial stage validates Walker's battered woman syndrome (1977, as cited in Barnett et al., 2011). As women tolerated battering, they described having varied feelings from being angry to being compassionate and blaming the self (Damant et al., 2009; Oweis, Gharaibeh, Al-Natour, & Froelicher, 2009) for the abuses, rationalizing that they made their husbands angry. The *inhibiting stage* was characterized by a women's attempt to stop violence from escalating, to break free from the abuser and end their suffering. During this stage, women expressed anger in a passive aggressive manner. Their feelings oscillated from wanting to fight back on one end and inhibiting the anger on another. This behavior eventually resulted in women's suppression of anger and hatred for a partner, as also revealed by Maneta et al. (2012). Freud emphasized that aggression is unexpressed, repressed and suppressed. The individual has a tendency to unconsciously displace it in another direction to resolve conflict, anxiety or frustration (Feist & Feist, 2009). Using this position, women in this study lost control over abusive situations. The battering and abuse experiences from previous and/or current partners – as well as childhood exposure to violence – entwined with their feelings of being trapped, aggrieved, berated, pained, humiliated and controlled (coded as context and causal condition, see Fig.1) living with the abuser. Subsequently, women's unconscious and suppressed hostility toward the partner was likely to be transferred and displaced to the self and/or to children. Some women had attempted to commit suicide to release and express their bottled-up resentment. They underscored that they were confused, anxious and overwhelmed by their situation; they only wanted to vent their frustration. The results of the current study reinforced previous studies indicating that women in violent relationships are likely to attempt suicide (Barnett et al., 2011; Haggbloom & Moller, 2007; Oweis et al., 2009).

Meanwhile, as women realized that their strength is no equal to their abuser, their inhibited anger was substituted with a strategy on how to deal with violence, manifested in the *placating stage*. Women's placatory techniques aimed to prevent their batterer's aggression from mounting. In this phase, the women did not express their anger openly. Although they would want to strike back during their husband's angry outbursts, they would please and appease their batterer instead. Such placating behavior on part of the participants is congruent with Walker's cycle theory of violence, suggesting that a battered woman normally attempts to calm her partner, agrees to his demands and accepts her batterer's faulty behavior (Walker, 1979, as cited in Carderelli, 1997). Hence, participants in this study became more affectionate and nurturing, immediately obeyed what their husband demanded, and stayed out of their way to prevent fights. Although erratically beaten and angered by the battering, the majority of the participants remained acquiescent for long years. Not wanting to leave their partner for the security of their children and to keep their family intact were women's reasons for pacifying their batterer. As reported by Riddell, Ford-Gilboe, and Leipert (2009), this study demonstrated that women were more likely to use a placating strategy rather than separating from, or leaving, an abusive partner. One woman described her behavior at this stage as 'walking on eggshell' to prevent future violence. This reaction is a typical behavior developed in victims of spousal abuse, according to Walker's cycle of violence (2000), taking place in the tension building phase. As the participants in this study attempted to minimize their injuries, they tried to refrain from situations that could precipitate violence to avoid their batterer exploding in a fit of rage.

As the aggression progressed, women's placatory strategies became less and less effective. It was in the *reciprocating stage* where women's tolerating behavior reached its threshold. They learned to fight back and admitted becoming aggressive in responding to the partner's provocations, as Swan and associates (2008) also concluded. During this stage, women's aggressive tendencies manifest themselves. They would perpetrate verbal and physical aggression to counteract the partner's assault. In the reciprocating stage, aggression amplified aggression. Current results corroborated the findings of Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, and Saltzman (2007) indicating that violence in IPV is reciprocal and most domestic violence is mutual (Hamel, 2009). Aside from the participants' reason that they lose self-control (Seamans, Rubin, & Stabb, 2007), the same findings from previous studies (Babcock et al., 2003; Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Flemke & Allen, 2008; Kernsmith, 2005; Peled & Gil, 2011; Stuart et al., 2006; Swan et al., 2008) transpire in the current investigation, proving that defending themselves and protecting their children were women's motivations for perpetrating aggression. All women exemplified extreme feelings of anger in this period. The violence between partners escalated since neither would give up, which fueled aggression between the couple even more. This type of violence was labeled by Johnson (2006) as *mutual violent control* where both partners were violent and controlling. As well, the women in this study do not withhold their hostility; they strike back to get even and equally batter the partner. Current findings further confirm the results of previous IPV studies indicating that women use severe violent acts to reciprocate husband's abuse (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Whitaker et al., 2007). Accordingly, women in this study with prior IPV experiences and childhood history of abuse admitted physically injuring partners. They disclosed that their motivation was to end the battering and to prove to their partner that they can be aggressive too.

In the reciprocating stage, women became mutually aggressive, whereas in the *aggressing stage*, women's aggression expression elevated into a more intentional assault. The aggressing stage is the most dangerous stage. The women no longer withheld nor inhibited their hostility. They were more likely to trigger violence by becoming argumentative and antagonizing. They would oppose a husband's command and threaten to hurt or kill him. Their motivation was to

aggress and deliberately assault their batterer. The present findings confirm previous results indicating that women's motivation for committing either minor or severe physical aggression to a partner was to express anger, to get back or retaliate for both the physical and emotional abuse they experienced (Kernsmith, 2005; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Seamans et al., 2007; Straus, 2011; Swan et al., 2012), and to release pent-up emotions (Bair-Meritt et al., 2010). The women who were abused by their parents reported using a weapon to hurt the partner, causing their batterer some injury. As intergenerational transmission of violence theory posits, children who have been victims of violence are at risk of becoming perpetrators of violence themselves or victims of violence as adults (Black et al., 2010), act out violently, and inadvertently increase their aggression and acts of IPV in adulthood (Wood & Sommers, 2011). Consequently, the women in this study were not only victims of violence but perpetrators as well. They acknowledged committing severe violent acts without fear and realized they have become hostile, but justify their aggressive acts in their own minds with the assertion that they were provoked by the partner. During this stage, the children were likely to become the recipient of the women's anger originally directed to their abuser. As the aggression within the couple heightens they had lost control over their behavior and the children become the immediate target. Some women described feelings of relief after displacing their anger to their children. However, some participants reflected that once their anger was transferred at their children they became regretful (Damant et al., 2009; Peled & Dekel, 2010) and sympathetic. Others described their hostile way of relating to their children as being unlike them. The abused women in this study further reflected that they were no different from their batterer since they themselves are abusing their own children.

In the final phase of this theory, the *retaliating stage*, women reflected that from being aggrieved at the beginning they became retaliative, aggressive and abusive. In this stage, the participants' aggression expression is motivated by revenge for the existing and/or previous abuses and for the battering they had endured. The recent results are consistent with previous researches suggesting that responding to prior abuse and retaliation for emotional hurt and past abuses were women's motivation for perpetrating aggression (Bair-Meritt et al., 2010; Flemke & Allen, 2008; Kernsmith, 2005; Leisring, 2013; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Seamans et al., 2007). In this stage, the women thought that it was high time to leave their partner, as one participant labelled 'waking up from her nightmare'. All participants averred that they would definitely respond aggressively to get even if the battering continued. As Evans and Lindsay (2008) inferred, women do not heal from IPV but rather incorporate the abusive past into their current lives. Accordingly, women in this study with prior IPV accounts who are living with a new partner described that they were anxious, traumatized, and often reminded of their abuse experiences. They described becoming overly sensitive and vigilant for any signs of violence while others anticipate being assaulted. Women who left their partner, but were not in an intimate relationship, noted that if they sense any violence occurring in their future intimate relationship, they will not hesitate to hit. As reported by Perilla and associates (2003, as cited in Belknap, Larson, Abrams, Garcia & Anderson-Block, 2012), this study demonstrated that a battered woman with prior IPV experiences is more likely to project onto her new male partner symbolic retaliation for the past abuse by a different man. As the participants learn about IPV by experiencing it, they learn to retaliate for their past victimizations when they encounter opportunities to be aggressive and or abusive toward a new man, who might or might not have abused them. As described by Belknap et al. (2012), this study confirmed that women committed violent offenses against men using the new men as proxies for the batterers who victimized them in the past. Freud theorized that individuals are predisposed to repress, suppress or displace aggression (Feist & Feist, 2009). Using this notion, the participants' negative histories of abuse in their childhood including the previous and existing IPV

experiences that they had tolerated, were possibly repressed. Consequently, women's accumulated and suppressed anger was likely to be transferred or displaced onto their partner and/or succeeding partner through a retaliative behaviour. The present results also supported the findings of Simmons, Lehmann, and Cobb (2008), indicating that women showed an elevated likelihood that they will continue to use violence in their intimate relationship. As Osthoff (2002) suggested, people can change from being battered to being a batterer, especially in subsequent relationships.

In conclusion, this study suggests that battered women may suffer the brunt of abuse fourfold; from their family of origin, current intimate partner, former intimate partner and/or subsequent partner. Based on the findings, the author generated transferred aggression expression theory describing women's likelihood of transferring, displacing and perpetrating aggression to their children, current partner or succeeding partner.

Limitations and Implications of the Study

This study documents battered women's responses to repeated episodes of domestic violence from an intimate partner using the developed, transferred aggression expression theory, but it is clear that several issues have been raised by the findings that warrant further study. First, the experiences of IPV only came from women who were willing to share their experiences; the stories of women unwilling to share this have never been told. Second, the result of this investigation provided partial findings on abused women's abusive behavior toward their children. Richer data could have been obtained if the children were also interviewed. Another important limitation involves the study's methodology. The results of this qualitative study using the grounded theory method cannot be generalized to the population of women; therefore, quantifying transferred aggression expression using a bigger sample is a possible consideration. Further research is also needed to gain insights into women's experiences in different cultures and societies, since this study was based solely on a select population of abused women in a developing country like the Philippines. This study pulled a heterogeneous sample. The female participants ranged in age from 18 to 53. Some were exposed to violence in their childhood while others did not have a history of abuse. Also, there were women with previous IPV history while others experienced IPV only from their existing partner. A homogeneous sampling, therefore, is recommended as they may have varying experiences that may contribute to how transferred aggression expression will be displayed, including its severity and intensity. The study was limited to the women's perspective; men's perceptions of violence were not included. The male perspective would have contributed to the validity of the study. However, the findings in this investigation provided support for the phenomenon of transferred aggression expression in relationships involving IPV. Lastly, the results may be useful to health professionals in identifying signs of transferred aggression expression in abused women, and in designing programs and interventions to address their needs.

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