

Breaking the Silence: Barriers Faced by Abused Filipino Women in Pursuing Legal Action

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the barriers faced by abused Filipino women in pursuing legal action and the strategies they employed to cope with and recover from relational abuse. It sought to describe survivors' lived experiences, identify personal, social, institutional, and procedural factors that shaped decisions to pursue, withdraw from, or discontinue legal action, examine perceptions of existing legal protection mechanisms, and develop a practical response based on the findings. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Thirteen adult Filipino women from Lucena City who had experienced intimate-partner abuse and had sought assistance from the Violence Against Women and Children Desk participated through purposive sampling; data collection ended when thematic saturation was reached. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were

conducted from March to April 2026 using an expert-validated interview guide. Audio-recorded narratives were transcribed and analyzed through the seven-step Colaizzi method, supported by manual coding and member checking. Twenty-four themes were generated across four areas: lived experiences and factors discouraging legal action, institutional and procedural influences, perceived effectiveness of legal frameworks and support systems, and coping and recovery mechanisms. Fear of retaliation, family preservation, economic insecurity, emotional attachment, trauma, and competing survival responsibilities constrained legal engagement. Conversely, responsive law enforcement, specialized services, fair judicial processes, family and community support, employment, distancing from harm, counseling, self-care, and motherhood supported safety and recovery. The study concludes that access to justice depends not only on legal remedies but also on survivor-centered institutional, economic, psychosocial, and community support. These findings informed EmpowerHER, an integrated community-based action plan for legal empowerment and recovery.

Keywords: *abused Filipino women, barriers to legal action, help-seeking, intimate partner violence, survivor empowerment, violence against women and children*

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence and violence against women and their children remain serious social, public health, and criminal justice concerns because their effects extend beyond immediate physical harm to psychological well-being, economic security, family relationships, and access to justice. Although protective laws and formal services exist, survivors do not always pursue or sustain legal action. International evidence consistently identifies fear of retaliation, stigma, economic insecurity, social pressure, and mistrust of institutions as factors that inhibit disclosure and formal help-seeking (Disanayake, 2025; Heron & Eisma, 2021; Wright et al., 2022). These barriers demonstrate that the availability of legal remedies does not automatically translate into their practical use by survivors.

In the Philippine setting, the problem is similarly shaped by the interaction of relational, cultural, and structural conditions. Studies on Filipino women have documented how economic dependence, concern for

children, family expectations, and fear of social consequences can delay reporting or contribute to case withdrawal (Ledesma et al., 2024; Parcon & Makani, 2024; Valdez et al., 2022). Other research has emphasized the continuing relevance of gendered power relations and intergenerational patterns of intimate-partner violence in understanding women's exposure to abuse and their subsequent decisions (Kibtiah & Tuharea, 2024; Puno et al., 2023). Thus, decisions about legal action are rarely a simple choice between reporting and remaining silent; they are often negotiated within complex conditions of safety, attachment, family responsibility, and survival.

The legal environment is also important. Republic Act No. 9262 provides protection from physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse and creates mechanisms through which women may seek legal protection and government assistance. However, research on implementation and case attrition indicates that the practical accessibility of protection depends on how survivors experience police assistance, prosecution, courts, legal support, and community-based services (Castillo, 2024; Pas-iwen & Cawi, 2025; Salem et al., 2024). Trauma-sensitive and respectful institutional encounters may encourage participation, whereas procedural burden, repeated narration of traumatic events, economic costs, or unsupportive responses can discourage continued engagement (McKinsey et al., 2022).

Lucena City provides an important local setting for examining these concerns because women experiencing abuse interact with barangay mechanisms, social welfare services, and the Women and Children Protection Desk while simultaneously navigating family, livelihood, and safety concerns. The present study therefore focused on the lived experiences of abused Filipino women in Lucena City who sought assistance but did not pursue or later withdrew from legal action. It examined the barriers that shaped their decisions, the institutional and procedural conditions affecting access to justice, their assessment of existing legal protection, and the coping and recovery strategies they used. By centering survivors' accounts, the study sought to clarify the gap between formal protection and actual justice-seeking and to provide an evidence base for a survivor-centered action plan.

Literature Review

Help-seeking and barriers to legal action

Help-seeking after intimate-partner violence is a process shaped by how survivors assess danger, available support, expected consequences, and the perceived responsiveness of institutions. Systematic and population-based studies show that survivors often move between informal and formal sources of support rather than immediately entering the legal system (Fanslow et al., 2025; Stiller et al., 2025). Disanayake (2025) likewise identified fear, social consequences, practical constraints, and perceived institutional limitations as recurring barriers and facilitators. The decision to report therefore reflects a continuing assessment of whether formal action will improve safety without producing new risks.

Research further demonstrates that the perceived reportability of abuse and survivors' confidence in institutions influence whether they seek police or legal assistance. Juarros-Basterretxea et al. (2024) found that perceptions about whether intimate-partner violence is appropriate to report are associated with help-seeking, while Wright et al. (2022) documented barriers to care in cases of intimate-partner sexual violence. Heron and Eisma (2021) similarly showed that disclosure may be hindered by fear, shame, lack of trust, and uncertainty about how services will respond. These findings support the need to examine legal action as an experience embedded in safety concerns, emotional readiness, and anticipated institutional treatment.

Cultural, family, and economic influences

Cultural expectations and family relationships can substantially influence decisions about abuse and justice. Philippine and Asian studies have noted that gender norms, family preservation, and the social meaning attached to intimate relationships may reinforce women's tolerance of abuse or reluctance to expose family problems to outside institutions (Kibtiah & Tuharea, 2024; Puno et al., 2023). Public stigma toward women experiencing intimate-partner violence may further intensify fear of blame and social judgment (Murvartian et al.,

2023). Within such contexts, legal action may be experienced not only as an individual decision but also as a decision with consequences for children, extended family, social standing, and community relationships.

Economic dependence is another persistent constraint. Abuse can limit employment, control access to money, and increase the practical cost of leaving or maintaining a legal case. Mellar et al. (2024) showed that economic abuse is closely connected with women's socioeconomic circumstances and mental health, while Ledesma et al. (2024) identified financial and relational considerations among reasons Filipino survivors did not pursue VAWC cases. Economic vulnerability may therefore make legal remedies appear difficult to sustain when participation requires transportation, time away from work, childcare, or the loss of financial support from the abusive partner. These realities help explain why survival needs and justice-seeking frequently compete.

Institutional response, legal protection, and support systems

The effectiveness of laws depends heavily on the quality of implementation and the way survivors experience formal support. Research on the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act has emphasized the importance of translating legal provisions into accessible, responsive, and coordinated services (Castillo, 2024). Studies of Women and Children Protection Desk personnel similarly demonstrate the central role of frontline officers in receiving complaints, providing immediate assistance, coordinating referrals, and supporting survivors during periods of crisis (Salem et al., 2024). When institutional responses communicate respect and validation, survivors may perceive the justice system as a source of protection rather than another source of stress.

Conversely, institutional processes can become barriers when they are lengthy, fragmented, difficult to understand, or emotionally burdensome. Trauma-focused judicial practice emphasizes that repeated retelling, adversarial procedures, and insensitive interactions may contribute to re-traumatization if services are not designed around survivors' needs (McKinsey et al., 2022). Local research on case disengagement also highlights the importance of continued victim assistance throughout legal proceedings rather than only at the initial reporting stage (Pas-iwen & Cawi, 2025). Community-based coordination is therefore essential, because law enforcement, social welfare agencies, barangay officials, legal aid providers, and health and psychosocial services often address different dimensions of the same survivor's situation.

Recovery, resilience, and empowerment

Recovery from intimate-partner violence extends beyond case filing. Survivors may require psychological healing, stable social relationships, economic independence, safe living arrangements, and opportunities to rebuild control over daily life. Herman (2015) emphasized the importance of safety, remembrance, and reconnection in trauma recovery, while Schucan Bird et al. (2025) synthesized evidence on interventions designed to strengthen informal social support for victim-survivors. These perspectives are consistent with the view that recovery is both personal and relational, and that supportive networks can influence whether women remain isolated or gain the confidence to seek assistance.

Empowerment is also closely tied to the availability of practical choices. Women who can access livelihood opportunities, counseling, legal information, and reliable institutional support are better positioned to make decisions based on safety and preference rather than dependency or fear. Philippine research has linked help-seeking with women's health and rights and has underscored the importance of coordinated interventions that address both immediate protection and longer-term well-being (Barra, 2024; Valdez et al., 2022). For this reason, survivor empowerment should be understood as a process that combines legal agency with psychological recovery, social support, and economic capacity.

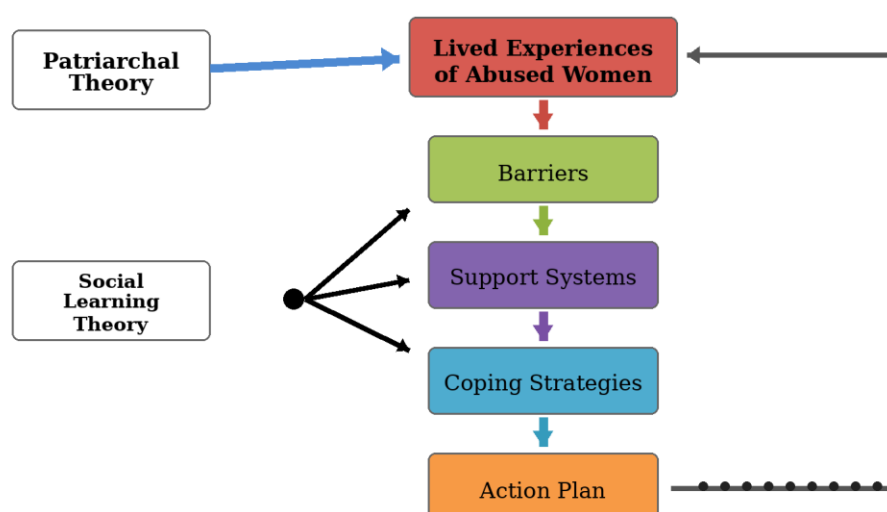
Theoretical and conceptual integration

The study was informed by Social Learning Theory and Patriarchal Theory. Social learning provides a lens for understanding how responses to abuse may be learned, modeled, normalized, and reinforced through family and community environments. In abusive relationships, repeated exposure to patterns of control, silence, reconciliation, or tolerance can shape expectations about what responses are possible or acceptable. The study

used this perspective to interpret how social experiences and observed responses can affect decisions about disclosure, help-seeking, and legal action.

Patriarchal Theory complements this perspective by locating individual experiences within unequal gender relations and cultural expectations that privilege male authority or pressure women to preserve relationships despite harm. The study therefore conceptualized survivors' legal decision-making as an interaction among lived experiences, barriers, support systems, and coping strategies, all operating within social and structural conditions. These interacting elements formed the basis for an action plan intended not only to respond to identified barriers but also to strengthen women's agency, protection, and recovery.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Paradigm of the Study*



METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the essence and meaning of abused Filipino women lived experiences and the factors that shaped their decisions not to pursue or continue legal action. The design was appropriate because the research sought to understand how participants interpreted relational abuse, institutional responses, legal processes, and their own coping and recovery. The phenomenological approach enabled the study to identify shared meanings across individual narratives while preserving the context and complexity of each participant's experience.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Lucena City, Quezon, with attention to cases handled through the Lucena Component City Police Station and selected major barangays, namely Gulang-Gulang, Dalahican, Cotta, and Isabang. The locale was selected because these communities are served by the primary local law-enforcement mechanisms responsible for receiving and documenting reports of violence against women and because the setting allowed the study to examine barriers to legal action within an urban Philippine context where Republic Act No. 9262 is implemented through police, barangay, and social-support structures.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants were 13 Filipino women aged 18 years and older who had experienced physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or economic abuse by an intimate partner, had sought assistance from the Violence Against Women and Children Desk in Lucena City, and had either chosen not to pursue or had withdrawn from legal action. Purposive sampling was used to select women who could provide direct accounts relevant to the phenomenon. Twenty-five potential participants were initially identified through referrals from WCPD personnel, barangay officials, and social-welfare personnel. Interviews continued until thematic redundancy was reached; after the thirteenth participant, no substantially new codes, meanings, or themes were generated, and data collection was concluded on the basis of saturation.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed structured interview guide used to facilitate in-depth, open-ended interviews. The questions were based on the study objectives and the literature on relational abuse, legal action, institutional barriers, support systems, and coping. Each research question was represented by a principal interview question with follow-up probes so that the interviews remained consistent while allowing participants to elaborate on sensitive experiences. The instrument underwent content validation by three police officers with substantial experience in handling VAWC cases. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by detailed field notes to preserve the accuracy of the narratives.

Data Gathering Procedure

Formal permission was secured from the Chief of Police of the Lucena Component City Police Station before participant recruitment. Eligible women were invited individually, and the study purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protections, and right to withdraw were explained before informed consent was obtained. Face-to-face key-informant interviews were conducted in private and mutually agreed safe locations between March and April 2026. Each session lasted at least one hour. The researcher used follow-up questions where clarification was needed, monitored participants' comfort throughout the interview, and transcribed recorded interviews verbatim after data collection.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis guided by the seven-step Colaizzi method. The researcher first became familiar with the transcripts, extracted significant statements, formulated meanings, clustered related meanings into themes, developed an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, and synthesized the fundamental structure of the experience. Manual coding was used to organize recurring patterns, and data were grouped according to the four major research areas. Data saturation was used to determine the final sample size. Member checking was conducted after preliminary themes and the exhaustive description had been developed; available participants reviewed the interpretations and were invited to identify statements that were incomplete, inaccurate, or unclear. Their clarifications were incorporated where necessary to strengthen credibility.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical safeguards were applied throughout the research because participants were survivors discussing potentially traumatic experiences. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent; participants could decline to answer any question, pause an interview, or withdraw without penalty. Interviews were conducted in private settings, and pseudonyms or participant codes were used in transcripts and reporting. Audio files, notes, and transcripts were securely stored in password-protected or locked locations. The researcher maintained a neutral and empathetic stance, avoided coercion, monitored emotional distress, and provided support or referral options when needed. Cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, non-maleficence, and accurate representation of participants' accounts guided data collection and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived experiences of abuse and factors influencing non-pursuit of legal action

The first cluster of findings showed that relational abuse was experienced as a direct threat to safety, dignity, and survival. Participants described fear of further harm or retaliation alongside the physical and psychological consequences of abuse. Their decisions about legal action were shaped by the need to protect themselves while also considering children, family relationships, economic survival, emotional attachment, and obligations to maintain household stability. Seven themes captured this tension between protection and competing relational or survival concerns.

Table 1. *Themes on Lived Experiences and Factors Influencing Legal Action*

No.	Emergent Theme
1	Experiencing Violence as a Threat to Safety, Dignity, and Survival
2	Fear for Personal Safety and Fear of Retaliation
3	Negotiating Between Self-Protection and Family Preservation
4	Struggling Between Economic Survival and the Pursuit of Justice
5	Caught Between Self-Protection and Emotional Attachment
6	Psychological and Physical Consequences of Abuse
7	Negotiating Between Justice and Family Obligation

These themes show that non-pursuit of legal action cannot be interpreted simply as acceptance of abuse. Rather, women assessed legal action against the possibility of retaliation, loss of economic support, disruption of family life, emotional bonds, and the immediate welfare of their children. This pattern is consistent with Philippine studies reporting that fear, dependency, family considerations, and emotional attachment may contribute to delayed reporting or case withdrawal (Ledesma et al., 2024; Parcon & Makani, 2024; Valdez et al., 2022). The findings also align with research on public stigma and cultural expectations, which can intensify the social consequences survivors anticipate when disclosing abuse (Kibtiah & Tuharea, 2024; Murvartian et al., 2023).

The significance of the psychological and physical consequence's theme is equally important. Trauma may affect concentration, decision-making, trust, and perceptions of future risk, making legal action only one part of a broader struggle to regain safety and functioning. Herman (2015) emphasizes that recovery requires the re-establishment of safety before sustained processing and reconnection can occur. The participants' narratives support this understanding: decisions about justice were inseparable from their capacity to protect themselves, preserve essential relationships, and manage the emotional effects of abuse.

Institutional and procedural factors affecting willingness and ability to pursue legal action

The second research area revealed that the participants' ability to remain engaged with legal processes was shaped by the practical demands surrounding justice-seeking. Five themes reflected the ways economic survival, emotional attachment, ongoing threats, everyday responsibilities, and family unity interacted with institutional procedures. Although these themes extend beyond formal institutions, they show the conditions under which procedural requirements are experienced: court attendance, repeated follow-up, documentation, transportation, and time commitments can become difficult when women are simultaneously maintaining employment, childcare, housing, and personal safety.

Table 2. *Themes on Institutional and Procedural Factors*

No.	Emergent Theme
8	Balancing Economic Survival and Access to Justice
9	Emotional Attachment, Compassion, and Hope for Change
10	Living Under the Threat of Retaliation and Harm
11	Balancing the Pursuit of Justice with Everyday Survival
12	Striving to Preserve Family Unity Despite Abuse

The findings highlight that procedural accessibility is not solely a matter of whether services exist. Economic limitations can affect transportation, time away from work, childcare, and continued independence from the abusive partner. This reinforces evidence linking economic abuse and socioeconomic vulnerability with women's well-being and capacity to seek assistance (Mellar et al., 2024). It also supports research showing that formal help-seeking is shaped by practical constraints alongside perceived safety and institutional trust (Disanayake, 2025; Fanslow et al., 2025).

The persistence of family-unity and emotional-attachment themes also indicates that legal processes take place within ongoing intimate and family relationships. Some survivors continued to hope for change or considered the possible effects of legal action on children and household stability. For justice institutions, this finding suggests the value of survivor-centered case navigation that recognizes ambivalence without equating it with consent to abuse. Trauma-focused judicial practice and sustained victim assistance can reduce the burden of participation and help survivors make informed decisions without unnecessary re-traumatization (McKinsey et al., 2022; Pas-iwen & Cawi, 2025).

Perceived effectiveness of existing legal frameworks and support systems

The third cluster presented a more enabling side of the justice and support environment. Participants described experiences in which responsive law enforcement, specialized services, fair judicial processes, and legal protection contributed to feelings of validation, empowerment, and safety. Family and community support also influenced how women evaluated their choices, sometimes strengthening the decision to seek protection and, in other circumstances, complicating decisions through family influence. Six themes represented these perceptions.

Table 3. *Themes on the Effectiveness of Legal Frameworks and Support Systems*

No.	Emergent Theme
13	Experiencing Protection and Validation Through Responsive Law Enforcement
14	Experiencing Empowerment Through Specialized Support Services
15	Experiencing Justice Through Fair and Supportive Judicial Processes
16	Drawing Strength from Family and Community Support
17	Navigating Family Influence in Decisions About Justice
18	Experiencing Legal Protection as a Pathway to Safety and Recovery

These findings demonstrate that participants did not uniformly perceive the legal system as ineffective. Positive encounters with police, specialized VAWC services, and judicial personnel were experienced as sources of protection and recognition. This is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of frontline WCPD personnel and coordinated VAWC responses in supporting survivors (Salem et al., 2024). It also complements implementation research on RA 9262, which indicates that the value of legal protection is realized through accessible and consistent local implementation rather than through statutory provisions alone (Castillo, 2024).

Support outside formal institutions also mattered. Family and community members could strengthen resilience, provide practical assistance, or encourage legal engagement, although family influence could also reinforce pressure to preserve relationships. The mixed role of informal support is consistent with evidence that survivor outcomes depend not merely on the presence of social ties but on whether those ties provide safety, affirmation, resources, and respect for the survivor's decisions (Schucan Bird et al., 2025). The results therefore suggest that effective protection is relational and coordinated: legal institutions, specialized support services, and informal networks can reinforce one another when survivor safety and autonomy remain central.

Coping, recovery, and mechanisms used when legal action was perceived as effective or ineffective

Participants used multiple strategies to continue functioning and recover from abuse, regardless of whether formal legal action was viewed as effective. Their children frequently served as a source of purpose and motivation. Work and productive engagement supported independence and routine, while physical separation or distance from the abuser created opportunities to regain safety and control. Counseling, self-care, and social support contributed to emotional recovery. Some women relied on endurance when they perceived limited alternatives, whereas others considered reconciliation when they observed changes in the abuser and believed renewed stability was possible.

Table 4. *Themes on Coping and Recovery Mechanisms*

No.	Emergent Theme
19	Finding Strength and Purpose Through Motherhood
20	Rebuilding Life Through Work and Productive Engagement
21	Creating Distance to Reclaim Safety and Control
22	Reclaiming Emotional Well-Being Through Healing and Self-Care
23	Enduring Abuse as a Means of Survival and Stability
24	Finding Hope and Stability Through Perceived Change and Reconciliation

The themes demonstrate that coping was dynamic rather than uniform. Strategies changed according to safety, resources, children's needs, emotional state, and the survivor's assessment of the relationship. Employment and livelihood were particularly important because they supported practical independence, while distancing helped reduce exposure to immediate harm. Counseling and self-care reflected efforts to recover emotional well-being. These patterns are compatible with trauma-recovery perspectives that emphasize safety and reconnection and with evidence that social support can strengthen survivors' capacity to recover and seek help (Herman, 2015; Schucan Bird et al., 2025).

Endurance and reconciliation require especially careful interpretation. Within the participants' narratives, these approaches functioned as coping responses in circumstances where women perceived constraints, competing responsibilities, or behavioral change in the partner. They should not be treated as evidence that abuse was harmless or resolved. The findings instead underline the importance of risk assessment, informed decision-making, continuing access to protection, and nonjudgmental support regardless of whether a survivor separates, pursues a case, pauses legal action, or reconciles. This survivor-centered perspective preserves agency while maintaining attention to safety.

EmpowerHER: integrated community-based action plan

The study translated the 24 themes into EmpowerHER: An Integrated Community-Based Action Plan for Legal Empowerment and Recovery of Abused Filipino Women. The plan was designed to reduce the barriers identified in the narratives while strengthening the enabling conditions that participants associated with safety, justice, and recovery. Its general objective is to empower abused Filipino women by addressing obstacles to legal action, strengthening support systems, improving access to justice, and facilitating recovery and reintegration.

Table 5. *Key Components of the EmpowerHER Action Plan*

Priority Area	Core Response	Primary Stakeholders
Safety and retaliation	Safety planning, protection assistance, rapid referral, and emergency response	WCPD, PNP, LGU, social workers
Family and social pressure	Family counseling, community education, and survivor-centered decision support	Social workers, barangay officials, community groups
Economic constraints	Livelihood support, employment referral, skills development, and financial literacy	LGU, DSWD, PESO, partner organizations
Legal awareness and participation	Rights orientation, legal aid, case navigation, and support during proceedings	WCPD, legal aid providers, prosecutors, courts
Psychological recovery	Trauma-informed counseling, support groups, self-care, and resilience-building	Psychologists, counselors, social workers
Inter-agency coordination	Referral networks, case monitoring, regular coordination, and service follow-up	LGU, PNP, DSWD, WCPD and partner agencies

The action plan reflects the study's central conclusion that legal empowerment requires more than information about laws. Women may need coordinated safety protection, economic options, psychosocial recovery, sustained legal assistance, and responsive community networks before legal remedies become realistically usable. The monitoring framework in the thesis therefore included indicators related to perceived safety, legal awareness, psychological recovery, economic independence, service utilization, stronger support systems, participation in legal proceedings, and inter-agency referral completion. In this way, the proposed intervention responds directly to the multifaceted barriers and recovery mechanisms identified by participants rather than treating justice-seeking as an isolated legal event.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that abused Filipino women's decisions regarding legal action are shaped by a complex interaction of danger, trauma, family responsibility, economic survival, emotional attachment, social expectations, and experiences with formal institutions. Relational abuse threatened participants' safety, dignity, autonomy, and well-being, yet the decision not to pursue or continue a case often reflected an effort to manage immediate risks and competing responsibilities rather than a rejection of protection or justice. Fear of retaliation, family preservation, financial dependence, emotional bonds, and the practical burdens of everyday survival were central to the women's decision-making.

At the same time, the findings show that legal and support systems can become meaningful pathways to safety and recovery when they are responsive, respectful, accessible, and coordinated. Positive experiences with law enforcement, specialized services, judicial processes, family and community support, livelihood, counseling, and self-care strengthened women's sense of control and capacity to recover. The study therefore contributes a survivor-centered understanding of access to justice: protective laws are necessary, but their effectiveness depends on the conditions that allow survivors to use them without sacrificing safety, economic security, family responsibilities, or psychological well-being. EmpowerHER operationalizes this contribution by integrating legal, economic, psychosocial, community, and institutional responses into a coordinated action plan.

Recommendation

Women experiencing abuse should be provided continuous access to WCPD and VAWC services, legal aid, counseling, safety planning, and community-based support without being pressured toward a single legal or relationship outcome. Law-enforcement personnel, prosecutors, courts, barangay officials, and social workers should sustain victim-centered practices, including prompt response, respectful communication, trauma-informed

interviewing, clear case orientation, protection-order assistance, proactive follow-up, and efficient referrals. Local government units and partner agencies should strengthen livelihood, employment, skills-development, and financial-literacy programs because economic independence directly affects survivors' capacity to make and sustain safety-related decisions.

Psychologists, counselors, and social workers should expand trauma-recovery services, peer or survivor-support groups, and resilience-building activities, while family and community education should address stigma, victim-blaming, and pressures that discourage legal action. Agencies involved in VAWC response should formalize inter-agency referral and case-monitoring mechanisms so that survivors do not have to navigate disconnected systems independently. Future research should examine comparable experiences in other Philippine localities, include women who never reached formal reporting mechanisms, explore intimate-partner sexual violence more specifically, and evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the EmpowerHER action plan over time.

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