| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Helping Uplift the Dignity and Worth of the Vulnerable Persons: Work-life of Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Persons in Cebu City, Philippines

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| ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons in implementing gender sensitivity programs in Cebu City, Philippines. Utilizing phenomenological interviewing, the study examines the meaning and essence of their experiences. Ten barangay-based GAD focal persons were selected through purposive convenient sampling. An interview guide facilitated in-depth data collection across three phases. The study sought to understand the informants' experiences, the challenges they encountered in the implementation of gender sensitivity programs, and their aspirations for service improvement. Findings revealed two themes for positive experiences: *A Journey of Joy and Equality* and *Cultivating a Seed of Change*. Negative experiences were categorized into *Emotionally Drained and Constrained* and *In Pure Dedication Lies Exasperation*. In addressing challenges, two themes emerged: *Dedication Beyond the Call of Duty* and *Calibrating Work and Advocacy*. The informants' aspirations for improving their services were reflected in *Proper Compensation Leads to a Better Service Rendition* and *A Bridge to a Future Needs a Better Infrastructure*. The study recommends increased government and private sector support through appropriating financial and logistical resources to enhance service delivery in barangays. Mental health support is crucial for GAD focal persons to maintain their well-being and effectiveness. Community engagement in reporting gender-based violence should be encouraged. Expanding the presence of social workers can further train GAD focal persons. Additionally, the Philippine National Police Women and Children Protection Desk (PNP WCPD) should collaborate with local government units (LGUs) and GAD focal persons to identify and address areas prone to domestic violence.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, women have served as the cornerstone of societies, weaving the intricate tapestries of human progress. From nurturing future generations as caregivers and educators to driving innovation and social change as leaders and entrepreneurs, their contributions defy quantification. To relegate women to a secondary role is to diminish the very wellspring of human potential, silencing the voices and hindering the talents that propel societies forward. Recognizing the full spectrum of women's contributions, both historical and contemporary, is not simply a matter of equality, but a necessity for ensuring a vibrant and thriving future for all.

Women in much of the world lack support for fundamental functions of a human life. They are less well-nourished than men, less healthy, more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse. They are much less likely than men to be literate, and still less likely to have pre-professional or technical education. Should they attempt to enter the workplace, they face greater obstacles, including intimidation from family or spouse, sex discrimination in hiring, and sexual harassment in the workplace – all, frequently, without effective legal recourse. Similar obstacles often impede their effective participation in political life. In many nations women are not full equals under the law: they do not have the same property rights as men, the same rights to make a contract, the same rights of association, mobility, and religious liberty.

The pursuit of equal rights for women has been a slow process. Several issues which are questionable in describing gender sensitivity are still reflected in the different aspects of human life (Queriones, 2018).

But now, people are slowly breaking these stereotypes where women have entered the realm of business and industry. They are now given opportunities to perform tasks given to men. Despite this change, they still are facing persistent discrimination based on their gender. They are paid less, promoted less often, and assigned to specific jobs despite their qualifications and motivations; and they are made to feel unwelcome, like intruders into an all-male preserve (Kimmel, 2004).

Gender equality remains a critical challenge in the Philippines, despite existing laws. While Gender And Development (GAD) aims to achieve equal opportunities for men and women, its successful implementation hinges on the work of GAD focal persons. Amidst their efforts, women are still made to feel the need to walk the extra mile. Even if they have fought so long for recognition in a world that views them as second-class citizens. That explains the importance and impact of GAD focal persons in enhancing the capacities of both genders in the attainment of developmental goals. This correlated to the purpose of this study, which identified the gaps and challenges with the current policies and programs available, and how they would be addressed to attain a better resolution.

As a criminologist and instructor of future persons in authority, the researcher felt the need to conduct an in-depth study centered on the experiences of GAD focal persons in the implementation of gender sensitivity programs. Given that this relevant topic has limited studies and needs more emphasis to improve the programs and services already offered. This study is not only beneficial for the GAD focal persons, but also to the government administrators, legislators, and the Filipino citizens in the broader community.

2. Literature Review

This study is anchored on Self-efficacy Theory by Albert Bandura (1977) and supported by Competence Motivation Theory of Harter (1978) and Model of Skill Acquisition Theory by Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus (1980).

Self-efficacy theory by Bandura (1977) has conceptualized behavioral change as being mediated by a common cognitive mechanism. Self-percepts of efficacy are concerned with an individual's belief that he/she can successfully execute the behavior required to produce a certain outcome. Efficacy expectations serve to determine an individual's choice of activity, the amount of effort that will be expended, and persistence in the face of obstacles or aversive stimuli. Bandura states that self-efficacy cognitions are situation-specific rather than reflecting a global personality trait.

Self-Efficacy theory relates to the multiple determinants of self-efficacy. The impact of any single source of efficacy information will partly depend on the total configuration of efficacy experiences in which it occurs. Because people have met with different types and amounts of efficacy-relevant experiences, there is little reason to assume that providing one new source of efficacy information will affect everyone uniformly. Extinguishing fear arousal to threats will raise efficacy expectations, but more so in persons who have had occasional performance successes than in those who have consistently failed in their coping attempts (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Self-efficacy may operate as a cognitive mechanism by which controllability reduces fear arousal, receives support from microanalysis of anticipatory and performance arousal as a function of varying strengths of coping efficacy. On tasks for which people judged themselves efficacious, a low strength of efficacy was accompanied by high anticipatory and performance arousal, whereas a strong sense of efficacy resulted in little fear arousal. As they approached the upper bounds of their perceived efficacy with weaker assuredness, they performed threatening activities with a great deal of fear (Bandura et al., 1980).

Maddux (1995) presented that Self-efficacy theory focuses on the cognitive aspects of mastery and effectiveness rather than on more affective constructs such as needs, motives, values, and feelings of efficacy. Yet, to focus on cognitions and expectations is not to diminish the importance of the affective and evaluative aspects of perceived control and mastery. A comprehensive explanation of human behavior and adjustment needs to consider the individual's inherent motivation toward mastery and achievement, the feelings of satisfaction one derives from meeting challenges and overcoming obstacles, the value attached to the specific goal or outcome sought at a given time and place, and the individual's assessment of the likelihood of attaining the goal or goals-an assessment that includes beliefs about behavior-outcome contingencies and beliefs about personal ability.

Self-efficacy extend beyond discrete tasks with limited outcomes. It regards as a central mediating mechanism that serves to explain how all treatments produce successful therapeutic benefits. Self-efficacy is apparently seen as the link between successful performance in treatment and generalized treatment (Eastman & Marzillier , 1984).

Competence Motivation theory of Harter (1978) is a conceptual framework aimed to explain an individual's drive to engage, persist, and work hard in any given accomplishment setting. The theory's primary tenet is that people are drawn to participate in certain activities. However, this hypothesis has also been applied to several work-related professions, most notably the police service. People enter a career for a variety of reasons.

Individual evaluations of competence and effect in a certain accomplishment domain are central to the approach of Harter (1978) to motivation. It was argued that positive reinforcement from important individuals for mastering attempts might improve perceptions of competence. Rather than recommending a specific quantity of reinforcement for solo mastery efforts, Harter (1978) advocated that more positive and less negative reactions from socializing agents would promote an innate motivational orientation. This perspective would result in heightened sensations of perceived competence and control, good effect, and motivated conduct. Perception of failure and negative responses from important people, on the other hand, should reduce perceived competence and control, raise anxiety, and reduce the probability of the individual participating in additional mastery attempts in that area.

Competence Motivation theory posits that people will tend to engage in certain behaviors if they believe they are capable of executing those behaviors successfully. The model of competence motivation predicts that participants will gain intrinsic pleasure from experiencing themselves as competent when they try to master a task or activity (mastery attempts). If mastery attempts are successful and significant adults and peers respond with approval and reinforcement, they will experience increased perceptions of competence and control, positive affect, and motivation to continue demonstrating competence (Perry & Hamm, 2017).

Competence Motivation theory focuses on the concept of perceived competence, which is an individual's self-assessment of his or her ability to accomplish the skills necessary to meet environmental demands. Competence Motivation Theory specifies mastery attempts and includes constructs that are salient to the physical domain, thus, many studies have found support for this theory (Zou et al., 2012).

Competence motivation theory also refers to the propensity for demonstrating competence in a particular achievement area; the person high in perceived physical competence, for example, would likely be motivated to participate for physical competence-related reasons, such as the desire to compete and to learn or improve skills. Conversely, the individual high in perceived social competence may likely be motivated by more social reasons such as being with friends and enjoying a team atmosphere (Dweck & Molden, 2017).

Model of Skill Acquisition Theory by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) presented the development of skills in an ongoing and lifelong process. Although these skills are necessary to be effective in their work, individual must progress through each stage of expertise and must draw on their experience of solving problems in the context to reach higher levels of expertise. Each time individuals acquire a new skill, they start at the novice stage where they need to learn the facts and the rules for determining proper course of action.

Model of Skill Acquisition theory believes that skill is an intuitive reflection of the body which is based in experience. However, it also neglected that skillful activity does not consist in mechanically separable movements that are directed toward a physical object, but a certain way of dealing with things and persons involving know-how in respect to contexts of purposes in use. Accordingly, acquiring a skill involves two types of norms, operational norms and social norms. It clearly emphasized in his skill model is only the operational norm of skill. As an ability of knowing-how, skill acquisition, skill transfer, and the judgment of skill are based on social norms (Lyon, 2015).

Model of Skill Acquisition theory posits that by means of instruction followed by experience, is achieved by only a small fraction of the thousands, or in certain domains millions, of individuals who are domain experts. To explain why, it is necessary first to review the five stages leading from novice to expert that we have previously identified. In doing this, we have introduced a subtle, but important, rethinking and rewording of what might be called one's "intuitive perspective" as it enters our account at stage four, proficiency. Mastery, it then turns out, is available only to strongly motivated experts who not only have exceptional natural talent but who are also willing and able continually to enlarge the number of intuitive perspectives and actions that, with experience, come naturally and effortlessly to them (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2008).

Model of Skill Acquisition theory also extended the view that expert professors and lawyers, skilled in a profession that sometimes requires spontaneous responses, have available, if sufficiently dedicated, both the deliberative and the alternative, non-reflective road to mastery that can be used when time permits after the event (White, 2020).

Model of Skill Acquisition theory states that when an expert learns, she must either create a new perspective in a situation when a learned perspective has failed, or improve the action guided by a particular intuitive perspective when the intuitive action proves inadequate. A master will not only continue to do this, but will also, in situations where she is already capable of what is considered adequate expert performance, be open to a new intuitive perspective and accompanying action that will lead to performance that exceeds conventional expertise. Thus, the brain of the master doesn't use any different operational principles while performing at a higher level of skill than that of the expert (Sweeney, 2006).

Republic Act 9710 or the The Magna Carta of Women, is a comprehensive women's human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination through the recognition, protection, fulfillment, and promotion of the rights of Filipino women, especially those belonging to the marginalized sectors of society. The law defines Gender And Development Program (GAD) as the development perspective and process that is participatory and empowering, equitable, sustainable, free from violence, respectful of human rights, supportive of self-determination and actualization of human potentials. It seeks to achieve gender equality as a fundamental value that should be reflected in development choices and contends that women are active agents of development, not just passive recipients of development.

According to Republic Act 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004, VAW is any act or a series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, with or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

Gender-inequalities stem not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments (wealth, income, etc.) between women and men, but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions, that is, the inequalities are also ideologically embedded (Agarwal, 2007).

As observed in traditional ideology women can only be seen at home taking care of the children, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, preparing meals, and looking after the needs of their husbands, while men are expected to provide for their families. Though fathers are said to be the pillar of the house, but mothers are whom we call the light of the home. They are often seen as the source of guidance and support for their families. It may seem to be a simple and small task to fulfill, but such duty creates a substantial effect to the society. For thousands of years since the civilization of man, societies has been long lead and dominated by men; be it in the political arena, academe, sports, arts, and in the world of business (Welter, 1966).

Care is a social good; it not only sustains and reproduces society, but also underpins all development progress. Yet the vast majority of care work is done free, at home; and it is widely seen as a female responsibility. This gender division of labour has profound implications for women and girls – both in terms of their daily lives and options, and their status in society (Chopra & Sweetman, 2014).

Like in other Asian countries, Filipino women are stifled by a patriarchal society emphasizing male dominance in family structures and larger social institutions. Traditionally, Filipino men are household heads and breadwinners; women are deemed subservient, hence economic abuse is common in VAW cases, and a high acceptance of justified wife beating exists. Women's pleasures are considered objects to pursue or control, hence they are regarded as vulnerability. Few women seek help because of expectations to be self-sacrificing, thus giving up safety and security in favor of family reputation. Defying gender norms invites objectification, shame, guilt, and even justification of violence, hence the culture of victim-blaming (Valdez et al., 2022).

As defined by the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), VAW is any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public and private life. Gender-based violence is any violence inflicted on women because of their sex.

Also vulnerable are women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as transgender women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, poverty-stricken women, and internally displaced women. The additional barriers of stigma, discrimination, State neglect, and harassment from law enforcers contribute to their distrust in the system, making them less likely to report to the police (CHR, 2021).

As reported by Philippine News Agency (2024), older women and women with disabilities are subjected to violence but also face specific risks and additional forms of abuse, sometimes at the hands of caregivers or health care professionals, including coercive and controlling behavior, such as withholding medicine, assistive devices, or other aspects of care and financial abuse. But as

partners aged, some women reported a shift from predominantly physical and sexual violence to psychological violence, including threats of abandonment and other controlling behavior.

Additionally, the report on the United Nations Population Fund (2020), health, social, and legal services are largely inaccessible, a situation exacerbated by the diversion of national resources to the pandemic response. Reproductive health services are disrupted by 77-85%. One of the most pressing issues that the Filipino youth are facing today is teenage pregnancy.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world. It occurs in every country, across all segments of society. GBV entails any harm or threat of harm inflicted on a person because of male-female power imbalances entrenched within a society. Sexual violence, intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, child marriage, sex trafficking and femicide are all forms of gender-based violence. GBV can be physical, sexual, mental or economic in nature. While gender-based violence is inflicted on men and boys too, it's women and girls who face the greatest threat. Nearly one in three has been subjected to sexual or intimate partner violence in her lifetime. (United Nations Children's Fund, n.d.).

On the report of World Health Organization [WHO] (2024), gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality.

There is growing global recognition of the intersections between violence against women and violence against children. The current evidence shows intersections between intimate partner violence against women and violence against children by parents or caregivers, but limited evidence is available on the links between other forms of violence against women and violence against children. Both violence against women by their (male) intimate partners and violence against children by parents or caregivers are widespread globally (World Health Organization, 2024).

In the Philippines, results of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that one in every four Filipino women aged 15-49 has experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence by their husband or partner (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018).

In Cebu City, a 32-year-old man threatened to display tarpaulins with intimate photos of his ex-girlfriend and screen captures of conversations between the victim-survivor and her alleged "lover" that were taken by the perpetrator from the victim-survivor's mobile phone. The perpetrator intended to put these tarpaulins up at the victim-survivor's places of work and residence to blackmail her into continuing their relationship after not having agreed with her decision to break up (Ares & Lauro, 2023).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), adopted by consensus in 1995, is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women which also one of the reference framework to analyze the situation of women around the world and to assess the efforts of states in support of women's empowerment.

In response, the state recognizes the role of women in nation-building, and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men, former president Fidel V. Ramos signed Executive Order number (EO) 273 which adopted the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development for 1995-2025.

Women often receive lower pay for the same or comparable work, and they are frequently blocked in their chances for advancement, especially to positions. There is usually an imbalance in the amount of housework and childcare a wife does compared to her husband, even when both spend same amount of time in paid work outside the home. When women professionals are matched with men of comparable productiveness, men still get greater recognition for their work and move up career ladders faster. On an overall basis, gender inequality means that work most often done by women, such as teaching small children and nursing, is paid less than work most when done by men, such as construction and mining (Lorber, 2010).

Furthermore, the Government Offices of Sweden (2014) has added that equality, and states that gender equality is a concept that means that men and women should have the same opportunities, rights, and obligations in all areas of life. Moreover, there should be an equal distribution of both genders in all aspects of society and every man and woman should have the right to balance work and family obligations. Gender equality is also about ensuring that both genders knowledge and experiences are used to create improvements in all aspects of life.

The Philippines is among one of the most gender-equal countries in the Western Pacific region. Nevertheless, it is evident that the sociocultural landscape lags behind: one in four Filipino women has experienced gender-based violence, and 41% of victims do not seek help. Despite existing laws and a widespread local anti-violence against women (VAW) movement, multiple barriers to help-seeking exist, and it is ultimately the economic, sociopolitical and cultural structures in the Philippines hindering VAW victims from seeking support (Valdez et al., 2022).

In the study by UNFPA Philippines et al. (2021), more than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, untold suffering and deaths has now devastated millions of people throughout the world. The gendered impacts of this health crisis are emerging, particularly the constraints placed on sexual and reproductive health needs and an escalation in the incidence of gender-based violence. Yet these need further investigation as the differences vary across subgroups of women and girls. But even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, increasing gender inequality has already been documented. Filipina women are being economically marginalized, politically subordinated, and restrictions put on their reproductive decisions. Women and girls experience multiple and disproportionate burdens of care work, and suffer from gender stereotyping, stigmatization, and sexual shaming. One out of four ever-married Filipina women report enduring physical, sexual or emotional violence.

In the Philippines, through public debasing of women, condoning rape jokes and sexual remarks, openly harassing female supporters, associating femininity with weakness, and encouraging the military to "shoot women 'communist rebels' in the vagina," the current administration under President Duterte personifies sexism, shaping society's perception of women. This misogyny is tolerated by many citizens, including some women of power. Coined "feminists of convenience," these individuals advocate women's rights yet remain silent about the President's behavior for personal and family gains and to avoid political backlash (Kenes, 2020).

As Gender Ombud, the Commission on Human Rights denounces and calls for justice for the recent series of separate heinous violence committed against women in various areas in the country. These grave violations remind us of the continuing vulnerability of women and the prevalence of gender-based violence against them in the hands of intimate partners and strangers alike (Commission on Human Rights, 2023).

There is a need to strengthen the teeth of laws that aim to protect women. Amplifying the need for the strong implementation of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Anti-Rape Act to demonstrate that all cases of violence against women are swiftly acted upon and to deter similar offenses (Commission on Human Rights, 2023).

As a party to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, it is also expedient that the government continues to take proactive efforts to raise awareness and amplify campaigns that seek to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against women. The active involvement and vigilance of all sectors of society are also enjoined to truly cultivate a culture of respect and create a safe space for all women (Philippine Commission on Women, n.d.).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in Davao Region has noted an increasing number of gender-based violence cases in the Davao region, which is attributed to the intensive advocacy campaign for women's rights and gender equality. Compared with the data in 2022, there was an uptrend in the cases of all forms of violence against women in 2023 (Concubierta, 2024).

Philippine Commission on Women (2024) said that violence against women (VAW) appears as one of the country's pervasive social problems. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, 17.5% of Filipino women have experienced any form of physical, sexual, and emotional violence from their intimate partners. As of 2021, there were 8,399 reported cases of physical violence, 1,791 on rape, and 1,505 on acts of lasciviousness. It is alarming that despite addressing the concern, VAW persists.

As reported by Sarao (2024), CHR has called on all sectors to cooperate with existing actions against gender-based violence, especially during the digital age. The CHR made the pronouncement as it commended the activation of the AlengPulis with the CyberSquad, a virtual helpline of the Philippine National Police (PNP) for women and children who experience abuse, violence, and concerns related to their safety, protection, and empowerment. According to the CHR, gender-based violence continues to be a "deeply alarming issue," which impacts countless individuals, particularly women and children, especially in the digital age.

An aspect of gender inequality that receives a great deal of attention from academics and policymakers is decision-making power within the household. A woman's say in household decisions is one aspect of her well-being and thus an end in itself, but the keen interest in female empowerment is in large part because it is believed to be a means of improving children's outcomes (Duflo, 2012).

Gender-based violence is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that is experienced differently by women and men. As such, sophisticated approaches in theory and method are needed to conceptualize and study the factors that mediate and moderate the relation of gender to the experience of intimate violence. Such violence takes multiple forms, is rooted in patriarchal social structures and cultural roles of women and men, and is reinforced by media images. The psychological, social, and behavioral effects of such violence on women, men, families, and society are widespread and long lasting, Understanding, predicting, and preventing gender-based violence will require a complex and comprehensive approach that intervenes at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels and that is responsive to cultural difference (Russo & Pirlott, 2006).

In the study of Sanga (2008) it is widely acknowledged that gender is not only a moral issue but also, and more importantly, a development issue. Despite this recognition, insufficient progress has been made in addressing gender issues both nationally and internationally. The lack of reliable gender-sensitive information has been identified as an obstacle to the development of sound policy formulation and decision-making with respect to gender inequalities and the empowerment of women.

Aronsson and Frykberg (2022) confirmed in their study that there is a need for higher female representation in the workforce, especially in top and decision-making positions. While one focus group, containing older participants, were surprised that a study on gender quotas was necessary today, the other two saw it as a matter of fact. It was also made clear in the study that gender quotas are generally perceived as negative by the younger generations, most focus group participants stated that while it is necessary to increase female representation, they would not want a job placement based on gender quotas because it would make them doubt their own skills. The older generation, however, would not care if they received a job placement based on gender quotas, because they would assume that they have the right qualifications anyway. However, they did agree that the gender quota concept had a negative connotation.

Domestic violence is a widespread serious threat to many women, and remains to be one of the pervasive social problems in many parts of the world. It happens to anyone across all race, age, gender, and sexual orientation and occurs within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. It also affects people regardless of economic status and educational background (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.).

With all the theories and related literature, this research aims to delve into the lived experiences of Gender and Development focal person in the implementation of gender sensitivity programs in Cebu City. Gender inequality and gender-based violence can be addressed by amplifying the existence of GAD focal persons to empower women to stand up for themselves. In this study, the researcher sought to explore and understand beyond revelation negative experiences of GAD focal persons, how they address the problems they encountered along the way and their aspirations to improve their services.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Design
This study employed a qualitative method of research with an aid of a questionnaire. To inquire the informant's views on lived experiences of the gender and development focal persons in handling gender sensitivity programs.

 Phenomenology is recognized as the appropriate approach to this present study as it focused on human phenomenon and its importance especially to criminology as a field of discipline. As this is a qualitative analysis of narrative data, methods to analyze its data must be quite different from more traditional or quantitative methods of research. Essentially, you are focused on meaning, the meaning of the experience, behavior and narrative (Paley, 2016).

As to Boeije (2009), phenomenology is sometimes considered a philosophical perspective as well as an approach to qualitative methodology. It has a long history in several social research disciplines including psychology, sociology and social work. Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasizes a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. That is, the phenomenologist wants to understand how the world appears to others. Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action.

Transcendental or psychological phenomenology of Moustakas (1994) is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants. It included the process of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher analyzed the data to identify significant statements or quotes and combined the statements into themes .

In addition, the concept of bracketing of Husserl (1999) is emphasized. The researcher set aside his experience, as much as possible and took a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination based on the description of the lived experience presented by the informants in the research project. The term transcendental means in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time. This state is seldom perfectly achieved but the researcher was aware of the need for bracketing and concentrated as much as possible on the informants' descriptions.

3.2 Research Participants
This study employed purposive convenient sampling to select the informants. The informants were ten (10) Focal Persons assigned in barangays of Cebu City who have served at least three years as focal persons who were individually interviewed (IDI), coming from the barangays of Cogon Pardo, Poblacion Pardo, Tinago, Hipodromo, Guadalupe, Calamba, Sambag 1, Sambag 2, Kalubihan, and T. Padilla. These informants had their experiences and firsthand knowledge of gender development programs and had encountered various situations about the interest of the study. The informants were asked to share their experiences, their strategies in addressing the problems encountered in the implementation of gender sensitivity programs, and their aspirations to improve their services.

During the conduct of the actual interview, the researcher explained to the informants the purpose of the study and how the interview would be conducted. This study is oriented in qualitative research where, before the interview, the informants signed the informed consent form. Qualitative research has been described as a naturalistic study conducted through prolonged contact with field situations, which typically reflect the everyday life and the explicit and implicit rules that govern that life.

3.3 Research Instruments
In gathering of data, the researcher utilized self-made-panel-approached interview guide consisting of the following parts: part I is on Experiences of the informants in implementing the gender sensitivity programs; part II How the informants address the problems encountered in implementing gender sensitivity programs; part III Aspirations of the informants to improve the quality of their services.

The interview guide was validated by the research panel to make sure that the contents reflect the statement of the problem and subproblems. The researcher arranged an interview with the informants, explained the matters of confidentiality, prepared consent forms, and asked open-ended questions to the informants. The first part of the questionnaire was composed of biographical questions for the researcher to better understand the informant. This part also aimed to set a friendly atmosphere between the researcher and the informant.

3.4 Data Collection
Prior to the interview, the researcher furnished a transmittal letter duly signed by the adviser and the Dean of the graduate school. The data were gathered through interview and with an aide of the voice recorder. The informants were asked to answer the questions honestly and completely and were given the letter and informed consent form stating that the person was informed of the study. The primary method for data collection in this research involved semi structured interviews used to refine and develop an understanding of the work-life of the informants. Data collection refers to the survey method that is developed and utilized to obtain information. The methods utilized in this study are structured interviews employing close-ended and open-ended questions. Observations conducted by the researcher during interview and visits on the areas. In order to keep a proper record of the observation, a schedule with the following columns were used, time (days, weeks, and months), place type of event, and subjects.

3.5 Data Analysis
Thematic content analysis was utilized to analyze and cluster interview answers in common themes for interpretation. In this research, recorded responses to interviews were analyzed deductively to obtain discrete, key themes that were relevant and specific to individual categories. This inspection and analysis of the content being provided through the interview revealed messages within the content itself. Thematic code analysis was used to inspect themes that emerged during analysis for the purpose of gauging the frequency of themes and similarities between users in the use of themes.

There were steps used in analyzing, like transcription, the first step is used to transcribe the data from the tape into a paper, the purpose was to clean and edit the manuscripts by eliminating typographical errors and contradictions; checking and editing the next step was check and edit transcripts, prepare data for further analysis; analysis and interpretation categories were developed, coding and data reduction was completed, and trends in the data were identified.

During this process, the researcher had taken all the collected data, including field notes and interview transcripts, and began to form a clear understanding of the information. The researcher then coded the data and conducted content analysis by looking for specific words from which themes could be identified. The findings of individual interviews were generalized and differences and

similarities identified, allowing for the development of typologies. Verification during this step, the researcher embarked on a process of checking the validity of interpretations by going through the transcripts again. This allowed the researcher to verify or modify the interpretation.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The identities of the informants were treated with confidentiality, and prior permission was obtained from the participants before the interview was conducted. The researcher complied with the policy on research, namely the informed consent form, before conducting the research. Ethical standard prevented the fabrication or falsifying of data and therefore, promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth which is the primary goal of research. Ethical behavior is also critical for collaborative work because it encourages an environment of trust, accountability and mutual respect among researcher. This is especially important when considering issues related to data sharing, co-authorship, copyright guidelines, confidentiality, and many other issues. The researcher also adhered to ethical standards in order for the public to support and believe in the research. The public wants to be assured that researcher followed the appropriate guidelines for issues such as human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, conflict of interest, safety, health standard and so on.

The handling of the ethical issues greatly impacted the integrity of the research project and can affect whether or not the project receives funding. Because ethical considerations are so important in research, many professional associations and agencies have adopted codes and policies that outline ethical behavior and guide researcher.

4. Results and Discussion

The data gathered were meticulously examined to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Significant statements directly relevant to the research phenomenon were extracted from the interview transcripts. These statements were then analyzed to generate formulated meanings, which were subsequently organized into thematic clusters. The clustered meanings were refined and synthesized, leading to the emergence of overarching themes.

For each sub-problem of the study, two emergent themes were identified. These themes were derived from recurring patterns across the participants' narratives. The succeeding sections present these themes, highlighting the informants' experiences, the strategies they employed to address challenges in implementing gender sensitivity programs, and their aspirations for enhancing the quality of their services.

4.1 Experiences of the Informants in the Implementation of Gender Sensitivity Programs
4.1.1 Positive Experiences
4.1.1.1 A Journey of Joy and Equality

This theme highlights the positive experiences of Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons in the execution of their duties. The informants reflected on their accomplishments, emphasizing that even small successes within their roles are meaningful and worthy of recognition. The successful implementation of gender-sensitivity programs often engenders a sense of triumph, particularly when their efforts contribute to restoring the dignity and well-being of women. This theme emerged from the commonality in the informants' narratives, which frequently centered on success stories that brought them personal and professional fulfillment. Examples include successfully facilitating the prosecution of abusers and mediating conflicts between couples, demonstrating the tangible impact of their work in promoting gender justice and community well-being.

(Someone asked for help and the help extended was somehow achieved, like you were able to give the assistance sought which makes it a proud moment. I was so happy that I assisted and was able to resolve that problem especially with the hospital bill and that they were able to pay, that's the usual help we can extend to them. That's it, Ma'am, I feel happy because their gratitude towards you is never-ending). (Participant 2)

(That feeling when you were able to do something to yourself and to others, and you're like... my course is accounting, it's where my line of work should be, you're not from that field. That's why I feel a sense of fulfillment in this work, imagine? Brgy. Guadalupe is a huge barangay). (Participant 3)

(With every help that I give, it's not just them who benefit, but also me. I've learned the importance of compassion and to always pray that I can do something to help others). (Participant 5)

This theme is supported by self-efficacy theory which explains the centrality of the self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. Self-percepts of efficacy influence thought patterns, actions, and emotional arousal. Self-percepts of efficacy are not simply inert estimates of future action. Self-appraisals of operative capabilities function as one set of proximal determinants of how people behave, their thought patterns, and the emotional reactions they experience in taxing situations. In their daily lives people

continuously make decisions about what courses of action to pursue and how long to continue those they have undertaken. Because acting on misjudgments of personal efficacy can produce adverse consequences, accurate appraisal of one's own capabilities has considerable functional value. Self-efficacy judgments, whether accurate or faulty, influence choice of activities and environmental settings. People avoid activities that they believe exceed their coping capabilities, but they undertake and perform assuredly those that they judge themselves capable of managing (Bandura, 1977).

Internalization is a crucial aspect of empowering women victims of abuse. While it may not always be easy to motivate survivors to participate in support services or legal processes, it is essential for their long-term well-being. GAD focal persons play a pivotal role in fostering internalized values and autonomous motivation among these women.

Supporting basic psychological needs can significantly enhance internalization. In the context of assisting women victims of abuse, GAD focal persons can vary in their ability to fulfill these needs. Understanding how their actions can influence survivors' need satisfaction and frustration, GAD focal persons can create a supportive environment that promotes autonomy and empowerment.

4.1.1.2 Cultivating a Seed of Change
This theme highlights the informants' passion for uplifting the lives of women subjected to violence. Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons emerge as beacons of hope for women who endure domestic violence in silence, demonstrating the critical role of committed individuals in fostering social transformation. Such transformation necessitates collective action and concerted effort, where even small initiatives can contribute meaningfully to achieving goals that may initially seem unattainable. The impetus for change often originates in modest seeds of hope and determination, which, when nurtured, can catalyze broader societal impact. Within this context, the implementation of gender-sensitivity programs at the local level has long been a cornerstone of local government advocacy for a just and equitable community. Through their dedicated efforts, GAD focal persons have advanced women's empowerment, enhancing their visibility, amplifying their voices, and increasing their participation in social and institutional structures.

(When you're able to help someone who's hopeless like the VAWC victims, so if they're given help, you feel happy that help is underway that they're able to reflect like "has it always been like this? Did the barangay have this service? We thought there's none"). (Participant 4)

(I'm also happy, ma'am, because as a woman myself, I feel a sense of accomplishment. I realize that I've played a part in improving her situation, like sending her abuser to prison). (Participant 7)

(It's not like... It's not like it's hard, what's hard is when you're just starting out, but once you have willingness, you have passion in your work, you have love; you have dedication to work, not something that's forced on you. In other words, it's only natural for you. You can really fulfill everything and the work is just easy, but if you don't have willingness, you don't have those then it will be hard). (Participant 10)

This theme finds support in Social Cognitive theory where it is founded on an agentic perspective. To be an agent is to exert intentional influence over one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions. Social cognitive theory subscribes to a casual structure grounded in triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 2006).

According to Luszczynska & Schwarzer (2015), Social Cognitive theory posits that behavioral change is made possible by a personal sense of control. If people believe that they can take action to solve a problem instrumentally, they become more inclined to do so and feel more committed to the decision. Perceived self-efficacy pertains to personal action control or agency. People who believe that they can cause events may lead more active and self-determined lives. This 'can do' cognition mirrors a sense of control over one's environment. It reflects the belief of being able to master challenging demands by means of adaptive action.

4.1.2 Negative Experiences of the Informants in the Implementation of Gender Sensitivity Programs
4.1.2.1 Emotionally Drained and Constrained
This theme encapsulates the informants' emotional responses to the challenges and negative experiences encountered in the performance of their duties. The narratives reveal a central focus on distress and emotional strain, reflecting the affective burden inherent in their roles. The theme is particularly salient for Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons, who frequently navigate complex and emotionally charged contexts, including providing support to victims of domestic violence, advocating for gender-sensitive practices, and implementing related programs. Such responsibilities are inherently demanding and emotionally taxing, highlighting the significant psychological and affective dimensions of their professional experiences.

(There will always be people who will approach you and because of their number, you might forget some. You won't be able to fulfill their needs, you'll be blamed, I just accept it; Senior citizen, I might make mistakes, I'll be blamed, I'll just laugh it off. It's impossible for us to get angry. Sometimes you might get discouraged, tired from working). (Participant 1)

(It is so stressful but in the first place, going back the first time, I told myself I quit, I filed a resignation to Doc, why? I felt like I'm unable to adapt the ambiance, the surroundings, and then that was it. I was like, "are my colleagues like this?" that was one of the reasons that prompted me to resign but my resignation was not approved). (Participant 5)

(There are times that I went home and it's 7 o'clock in the evening already... I take a rest for a while and then a Tanod would call because somebody is assaulted, it's midnight and they're calling, so my time is really stressful). (Participant 9)

This theme is supported by Self-efficacy theory where it emphasizes the dynamic interaction between people, their behavior, and their environments. The capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life is the essence of humanness. Human agency is characterized by a number of core features that operate through phenomenal and functional consciousness. These include the temporal extension of agency through intentionality and forethought, self-regulation by self-reactive influence, and self-reflectiveness about one's capabilities, quality of functioning, and the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits (Bandura, 2001).

Burnout, another important concept examined here, is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and it is defined by the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Van Emmerik et al., 2005).

Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being drained by other people. To the extent that burnout, as reflective of chronic long-term stress, can negatively affect variables associated with intrinsic motivation, it is appropriate to assume that such feelings of exhaustion along with depersonalization and a diminished sense of professional achievement exert a negative effect on employees' willingness to put extra effort into their work or to volunteer beyond the call of duty (Sesen et al., 2011).

4.1.2.2 In Pure Dedication Lies Exasperation

This theme reflects the informants' profound sense of frustration arising from the reality that, despite their steadfast efforts to support and uplift women experiencing abuse, some victims still choose to remain with their abusers. Such decisions, often shaped by complex social, economic, and psychological factors, were perceived by the informants as a nonobservance of the women's rights and well-being, leaving them feeling that their interventions had been rendered less effective. The theme captures the nuanced emotional landscape that accompanies their work: while deeply committed to promoting gender equality and assisting survivors of domestic violence, informants frequently encounter discouraging circumstances that challenge their resolve. The relentless nature of their responsibilities, combined with the recurring setbacks inherent in gender-based violence interventions, contributes to recurring feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion. Despite their unwavering dedication, moments of despair emerge as they confront barriers that impede their ability to create meaningful and lasting change in the lives of the women they serve.

(It is really painful to see, injury here and there, gashed caused by striking of hammer. I have a friend who's like that. But still we helped send her husband to prison. There's nothing we can do because she keeps going back). (Participant 1)

(The truth, Ma'am, is that we can't force women to leave their husband or partner. It is up to them to leave the situation or not. On my part, Ma'am, I am left to extend assistance to them whenever they need help just like filing of cases or the issuance of BPO). (Participant 8)

(It happened to us when we've reached the point of filing a case against him. However some women have decided to stop pursuing the case). (Participant 9)

This is supported by self-efficacy theory which explained that an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task influences their motivation, effort, persistence, and ultimately, their performance. In essence, self-efficacy is a person's belief in their capability to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977).

According to Lent & Brown (2008), self-efficacy is a central concept in self-efficacy theory, describing an individual's beliefs about his or her basic capacity to achieve and is usually assessed as one's self-appraisal of competence to successfully deal with job demands. Self-efficacy is regarded as a key factor directly affecting patient outcome and influencing job satisfaction. Individuals

with higher self-efficacy are more likely to take an active approach when confronted with stressful work conditions and to implement solutions compared with individuals who have lower levels of self-efficacy.

We often receive persuasive information from others that we are capable of performing a task (e.g., "You can do this"). Such positive feedback can enhance self-efficacy, but this increase will be temporary if subsequent efforts turn out poorly. Individuals also acquire efficacy in information from physiological reactions (e.g., heart rate, sweating). Symptoms signaling anxiety might be interpreted to mean one lacks skills (Schunk, 1995).

4.2.1 Addressing the Problems Encountered in the Implementation of Gender Sensitivity Programs
4.2.1 Dedication Beyond the Call of Duty
This theme elucidates how the informants navigated undesirable experiences in the performance of their duties and the strategies they employed to continue fulfilling their responsibilities. Their narratives reveal a strong sense of professional commitment, wherein going beyond formal job descriptions has become a normative practice. The theme encapsulates the adaptive measures and perseverance demonstrated by the informants, underscoring their unwavering dedication to their roles. Despite encountering various challenges, they consistently exerted effort beyond expected parameters, illustrating a high level of resilience and duty orientation. Ultimately, this theme highlights the informants' capacity to sustain their work through steadfast commitment and strategic coping mechanisms, even in the face of adversity.

(That's why we report to duty at 9 in the morning and sometimes clock out at 7 o'clock in the evening. By midnight there's something that… provided that it's really important. Just like with our VAWC, if there is a couple quarreling and the fight's getting physical that's when we call over them. That's the kind of our job, us VAWC and GAD. We are around the clock, though I don't know about the other GAD. That's really our job). (Participant 2)

(That's really my goal, to help her and free her from that situation, so no matter how late I finish, even if it takes a long time because I have to go with them to assess, do medical check-ups, and figure out where to bring them, I don't mind. It's not like I can say, 'I'll go home at 5 pm.' There's no time limit when you're a GAD focal person. There's no limit, even if you're called in the middle of the night because there's a fight. That's just the life of a GAD focal point). (Participant 5)

(In VAWC [office] there were times of successive occasion like for instance this evening we are called because someone was beaten so we are on call from the evening until dawn. Fortunately now, there is someone who can take turns in assisting). (Participant 6)

Also supported by self-efficacy theory, where individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce desired outcomes influence their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The informants' dedication to their duties, even in the face of undesirable experiences, suggests a high level of self-efficacy. They believe in their ability to overcome challenges and fulfill their responsibilities, regardless of the difficulties they encounter (Bandura, 1986).

Competence Motivation Theory posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to seek out challenges and master new skills. The informants' willingness to "go above and beyond" their job descriptions indicates a strong desire to demonstrate their competence and mastery of their roles. They are driven to excel and contribute to their organization's success, even if it requires additional effort or sacrifices (White, 2019).

4.2.2 Calibrating Work and Advocacy
This theme underscores how the informants navigated the challenges inherent in their roles and the strategies they employed to manage their workloads and responsibilities as Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons. It highlights the various methods and approaches they adopted to effectively implement gender-sensitivity programs despite the complexity of their tasks. The informants demonstrated a sustained commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusivity within their communities, even in the face of persistent constraints. By utilizing holistic strategies and seeking support from colleagues and partner agencies, they were able to overcome obstacles and maintain the momentum of their initiatives. This theme therefore illustrates the adaptive capacities and resilience of focal persons as they strive to fulfill their mandates.

(I will just adjust my time, try to manage my time. As much as I can, as long as I can do). (Participant 1)

(I don't let stress get into me. I just divert it to something else, I'm not the type to contemplate stress like "what am I going do with it?" I just won't focus on it. If I reach to that point, I just go back and forth with the cases. Unlike with others, I noticed that their stress is too much, they carry their stress into their home thus getting drained). (Participant 6)

(I used to get stressed before, but now, I no longer brood over stress because it's just the same, you feel bad for the complainants. What we do here is just assist, issue a BPO if ever and record it in the blotter book. We only assist VAWC victim if ever she wants to file a case against her husband or we accompany her to a medico legal and what not. At the same time we rescue her if ever). (Participant 9)

Skill Acquisition Theory suggests that individuals acquire skills through practice and feedback. The focal persons' ability to effectively manage their complex workloads and responsibilities can be attributed to their development of specific skills and strategies for implementing gender sensitivity programs. Through experience and practice, they have likely acquired the necessary skills to navigate challenges, prioritize tasks, and maintain momentum in their efforts (Ericsson et al., 1993).

Self-Determination theory also explains that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in activities that are self-determined, autonomous, and related to personal growth. The focal persons' relentless commitment to promoting gender equality and inclusivity suggests that their efforts are driven by intrinsic motivation. They are likely motivated by a desire to make a positive impact, contribute to their communities, and align their work with their personal values (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

4.3 Aspirations of the Informants to Improve their Services
4.3.1 Proper Compensation Leads to a Better Service Rendition
This theme highlights the informants' call for fair, competitive, and timely compensation, emphasizing its centrality to their effectiveness as Gender and Development (GAD) focal persons. Adequate and punctual remuneration is recognized as a critical factor that enhances motivation, strengthens morale, and sustains professional engagement. When GAD focal persons perceive that their work is valued and that they are compensated appropriately, they demonstrate higher levels of commitment to their roles and are better positioned to deliver responsive and effective services. This underscores the broader implication that equitable compensation practices are integral to strengthening the overall performance and sustainability of GAD initiatives.

(We requested to the vice mayor that there should be an increase of 2,000 pesos to our monthly (pay) and then he said that they will review it perhaps on the next year). (Participant 2)

(A councilor earns 24,000 pesos while I only make 8,500. I sometimes feel jealous because he doesn't even work as hard as I do but he makes more. But that's all I can do, there's nothing more I can do). (Participant 3)

(Our salary should be increased, why? Because our pay is only little. Here in the barangay, we have a salary of 6,000. We have a honorarium from the city amounting to 8,000 pesos. It's a small amount but it's been long delayed). (Participant 10)

Competence motivation theory emphasized that individuals are intrinsically motivated to seek out challenges and master new skills. When employees feel valued and compensated appropriately, they are more likely to believe in their abilities and feel competent in their roles. This sense of competence can motivate them to strive for excellence and provide better service (Harter, 1978).

According to Locke & Latham (1990), Goal-Setting theory posits that specific, challenging, and achievable goals can enhance performance. Front liners like social service fairly compensated, they will set ambitious goals for themselves and work harder to achieve them. This motivation can lead to improved service rendition and overall job satisfaction.

Attribution Theory of Weiner (1986) explains how individuals perceive the causes of their successes and failures. When workers attribute their successes to their own abilities and efforts, they are also motivated to continue performing well which boils down to their salary. Fair compensation can reinforce this internal attribution and boost employees' motivation to provide excellent service.

4.3.2 A Bridge to a Future Needs a Better Infrastructure
This theme elucidates the informants' aspirations by framing infrastructure development as a foundational mechanism for promoting gender equality and enhancing the agency of women and girls. The informants articulate a vision in which expanded and equitable access to essential services, particularly dedicated facilities for livelihood initiatives and adequately resourced healthcare centers which serves as a critical determinant of women's overall well-being. Their perspectives underscore the premise that strategic and gender-responsive infrastructure investments are indispensable to advancing women's empowerment. By strengthening access to key social and economic services, such initiatives have the potential to support women in disengaging from abusive environments, seeking institutional and community assistance, and fostering greater autonomy and self-reliance.

(We really have a hard time because we don't have any place to fund the women's livelihood. Our barangay is small; we don't have a place, for example, if we ask the government for a machine, a sewing machine. Where will we put it? I attended a DSWD seminar and they were asking which barangay is qualified, but I hesitated to join because I wouldn't be able to achieve it. Where would I put it? Right? We need our own place). (Participant 1)

(For us, the improvement of the services that can help them (abused women). And the health center for abused women are currently overwhelmed, we're really having a hard time where to place them especially when they don't have any family in the city, it's the number one problem of GAD- that is where we can place them because I think there's no space left in Cebu City. Perhaps there is but only a few is left). (Participant 2)

(You know ma'am, ever since I became a GAD focal person, I've only asked for one thing, even when Sir Redan was still the in-charge of Pari-an drop-off center in the city. I suggested to Sir Redan, because he's good at speaking, now that he's assigned in Lapu-Lapu, I expressed for Cebu City to have a holding center). (Participant 3)

This theme is supported by competence motivation theory explains that individuals are intrinsically motivated to seek out challenges and master new skills. Improved infrastructure can create new opportunities for women to develop their skills and talents. Access to education, training programs, and job opportunities can empower women to feel competent and capable, fostering a sense of agency and self-determination (Perry & Hamm, 2017).

Self-Determination theory suggests that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in activities that are self-determined, autonomous, and related to personal growth. Providing access to essential services, infrastructure development can support women's autonomy and self-determination. This can empower them to make informed choices about their lives, pursue their goals, and contribute to their communities (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Conversely, Expectancy-Value theory explains that social workers are believed to succeed at and that they find valuable of their job by improving access to essential services, infrastructure development can increase women's perceived value of self-worth, carrier, and healthcare. This can motivate them to pursue these opportunities and achieve their goals (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992).

5. Conclusion

There were eight (8) emergent themes derived from the responses of the participants. From the inquiry's findings, the following recommendations, suggestions, and measures for implementation may be useful.

Gender And Development (GAD) focal persons require sustained support from both government agencies and private sector stakeholders to effectively establish intersectoral linkages that enhance the accessibility and delivery of gender-responsive services at the barangay level. Central to this support is the provision of adequate budget allocations to ensure the full implementation and sustainability of GAD programs. Given their critical role as first responders in cases of domestic violence, GAD focal persons are routinely exposed to emotionally taxing and traumatic situations that may compromise their psychological well-being and professional performance. Accordingly, the institutionalization of comprehensive mental health support systems is essential to safeguard their mental health, promote resilience, and ensure consistent and effective service delivery.

Community as primary stakeholders in the promotion of justice and protection at the grassroots level, community members play a vital role in safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. To take an active stance in reporting incidents of abuse, violence, or exploitation within the barangay, communities can implement confidential reporting mechanisms where it provides secure, anonymous options for residents to report incidents such as suggestion boxes, hotline numbers, or digital reporting tools to encourage people especially victims or witnesses who may fear retaliation to come forward safely. Furthermore, conducting regular educational sessions, forums, or house-to-house campaigns to inform residents about the signs of abuse, existing laws, and the dissemination of appropriate channels for reporting, such as the barangay, the PNP WCPD, or the DSWD.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should prioritize the recruitment and deployment of additional licensed social workers to underserved barangays in order to enhance the operational capacity of the Gender and Development (GAD) focal system at the community level. These social workers will play a critical role in supporting case management, facilitating access to welfare services, and strengthening gender-responsive interventions. In parallel, GAD focal persons must undergo continuous and specialized training on gender sensitivity, intersectionality, and rights-based program implementation to ensure the effective execution and sustainability of gender equality initiatives within their respective localities.

The Philippine National Police Women and Children Protection Center (PNP WCPD) must work jointly with the GAD focal persons to identify places prone to domestic violence. This could be done through developing a shared database that consolidates data

from the police blotter, social welfare offices, health centers, and barangay reports to track trends in domestic violence. This data can be disaggregated by age, gender, location, and economic status to pinpoint high-risk areas.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) must mandate the integration of gender sensitivity training for all personnel at both national and local levels to ensure that public officials and employees are fully equipped to implement gender-responsive programs and policies. Local government units (LGUs) should be required to conduct regular gender audits and submit Gender And Development (GAD) Plans and Accomplishment Reports in compliance with the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710). To assess the effectiveness of these initiatives, the DILG must establish standardized gender indicators, such as the number of women in leadership positions, resolution rates of gender-based violence cases, and proper utilization of the GAD budget, and implement a centralized monitoring and evaluation system to track LGU performance.

In addition to these structural and programmatic reforms, the DILG must also address the financial welfare of GAD focal persons. Given their critical role in mainstreaming gender across local governance and responding to gender-based issues, it is essential to standardize and increase their salaries or honoraria. Ensuring adequate and equitable remuneration, the department enhances motivation, retention, and the overall effectiveness of GAD implementation at the local levels.

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