

Characteristics of Male Perpetrators: Based on the Qualitative Study of Personal Experiences and Perceptions in Lao PDR

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Abstract: This study tried to identify and depict the characteristics of the male perpetrators of domestic violence. This study was based on the personal experiences of the perpetrators and their perceptions of domestic violence within their local socio-cultural context. Research area was in a rural village in Sangthong district of Laos which reportedly has a high prevalence of domestic violence according to existing studies. The selected village is considered as an ethnic community with >890% of its total population belonged to the Khmu ethnicity. This study relied on the qualitative methodology; the in-depth interview was conducted with 23 key informants and seven male perpetrators and their wives or victims selected by snowball techniques in one village within the Sangthong district. The results were based on the descriptive contents analysis technique. There are three key findings from this particular study based on the content analysis technique. First, the study found and confirmed that men viewed violence between husband and wife as a non-issue and is to be expected during the lifetime of their marriage. Second, the socio-cultural legitimization of violence in society at large and the gender-based perception of violence in the family, both have a strong probable influence on the ongoing problem of domestic violence. And third, this study also found that all four forms of violence: physical, emotional, sexual and economical existed in various frequencies through the in-depth interview of the subjects.

Key words: Domestic violence, cultural legitimization, gender-based perceptions, forms of violence, large

INTRODUCTION

One Domestic Violence (DV), also commonly known as Violence Against Women (or VAW), is a significant issue at both the global and national level. At the international level, DV is both a social phenomenon and current public issue a pandemic, pervasive threat affecting individuals in every continent, country and culture, regardless of age, economic status, race, religion or educational background. As explicitly remarked by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on 28 November 2012, at the official commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, at the UN Headquarters:

“Violence against women is one of the world’s most pervasive human rights violations. This threat is rooted in discrimination, impunity and complacency. Violence stems from social attitudes that belittle women and girls. It is tolerated through indifference, ignorance and fear of speaking out. And it thrives where families and communities pressure women to

At the national level, based on the public interview of the President of the Lao Women’s Union by the Vientiane Times on November 24, 2009, DV is “hidden and still a new issue for Lao society”. Family violence is considered a private matter a long-standing social problem. According to CEDAW report 2009, there is a high prevalence in Laos due to the “culture of silence” in the society at large. As remarked by the President of the Lao National Assembly in Vientiane Times on November 28, 2012, DV “has now becoming a serious social problem” in society. It is a serious public phenomenon that hindering social and economic progress, rooted in our “long-held traditions, norms, harmful practices, beliefs, poverty, social perceptions towards women and lack of education”.

Given the significance of this problem at both international and national levels, the majority of the researches and interventions to-date has placed tremendous attention on understanding the issue from the perspectives of the victims or women survivor of violence, rather than from the abuser’s perspectives. On the contrary, understanding the abuser’s attitudes and

behaviors how they think or perpetuate violence or how social structures and norms influence their perception is the vital factor to primary prevention; this issue is rooted in power relations among women and men in the family or society in general. And men are the primary perpetrators. The problem is directly linked to dominant notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, the gender relationship. In Laos and throughout most of the developing countries, if we ask people about the prevalence of domestic violence against women in the family, the feedback will most probably be a very low prevalent rate. There may be many reasons leading to this low rate. One potential factor may simply be the lack of definition of violence against women. Other reasons might be the lack of education and the view that domestic violence is a taboo subject. According to a survey study in 2011, by a local nonprofit association the Gender Development Group (GDG), 25% of respondents were unable to comment on what DV is. Another study by the UNDP in Laos in 2009 also found that “most participants did not have the necessary words to define or to describe domestic violence (UNDP, 2010). They were unclear about what constitutes domestic violence, even if they had witnessed or experienced it.” The definition of domestic violence is unclear to most people in Laos. When asked about what constitutes domestic violence, most people would say physical violence that leads to severe injuries that require immediate medical emergency care or involve criminal process.

Objective of the study: Since the majority of past studies and responses to Domestic Violence (DV) in Laos focused primarily on women as victim of domestic violence or female victimization as mentioned in the introduction part, this study from a male perpetrator point of view addressed the root causes of domestic violence and filled the gap of existing literature in Laos, by providing holistic picture of domestic violence within the context of social structure, underlying norms, attitudes and behaviors that are affecting male perpetration in family. There are two main objectives of this study:

- To understand the perceptions of male perpetrators of DV
- To describe the socio-cultural structures influencing the perceptions of perpetrators

Theoretical and conceptual framework: In Laos or throughout most developing countries, if we ask people about the prevalence of domestic violence against women in the family, the feedback will most likely be the very low prevalent rate. There might be many reasons leading to

this low rate. One potential factor may simply be the lack of precise definition of violence against women. Other reasons might be the lack of education and the view that domestic violence is a taboo subject not to be discussed openly in public. According to a study by the GDG in 2011, 25% of respondents were unable to comment on what violence against women is or encompasses exactly. Another study by the UNDP in 2009 also found that “most participants did not have the necessary words to define or to describe domestic violence. They were unclear about what constitutes domestic violence, even if they had witnessed or experienced it.” The definition of domestic violence is unclear to most people. When asked about what constitutes domestic violence, most people would say physical violence that leads to injuries that require immediate medical emergency care.

Interestingly, these non-severe or severe types of violence, as perceived and identified by the locals, fits in perfectly with the definition defined by Johnson MP in 1999 on the common couple violence and the intimate terrorism respectively. According to Johnson, there are four types of violence: Common Couple Violence (CCV), Intimate Terrorism (IT), Violent Resistance (VR) and Mutual Violent Control (MVC). The first type of partner violence CCV identified by Johnson is that which is not connected to any pattern of control. CCV arises in the context of a specific argument in which one or both of the partners lash out physically at the other. Johnson concludes that CCV compared to IT has a lower per-couple frequency is not as likely to escalate over time, is not as likely to involve severe violence and is more likely to be mutual. The second type, IT is the violence motivated by a wish to exert general control over one’s partner. IT involves more per-couple incidents of violence than does CCV is more likely to be escalated over time, is less likely to be mutual and is more likely to involve serious injury. The distinct feature of IT is of behaviors that indicate a general motive to control. The controlling behaviors of IT often involve emotional abuse. Kirkwood provided detailed insights into the processes of emotional abuse that can gradually alter women’s views of themselves, their relationships and their place in the world. Chang’s detailed accounts of psychological abuse also illustrate the processes through which women become demoralized and trapped in abusive relationships. The third type, VR, reflect self-defense. VR is gender asymmetry type of partner violence that focuses mainly on women e.g. battered wife. According to Johnson, VR is perpetrated almost entirely by women in self-defense. The final one, MVC, reflects that both husband and wife are controlling and violent, in a situation that could be viewed as two intimate terrorists battling for control. This

type seems to be rare and is know little about. This study is a gender specific study in scope, rather than a gender-neutral one. The study focused only on one gender-specific category of domestic violence which is only the male-to-female violence in a heterosexual relationship between the married couple with or without a dependent child. Or another word this study focused on the root cause of violence which is on the male perpetration of family violence rather than on the female victimization standpoint. It didn't cover the other categories of domestic violence within a broad spectrum, e.g., the female-to-male violence, the violence in the homosexual or lesbian relationship, the gender-neutral intimate partner violence, violence in a dating relationship and violence committed against children, adolescent or the elderly in the family. These categories of domestic violence deserve their own attention and theoretical reference. Based on this aforementioned scope, only two patterns out of the four patterns of domestic violence as identified by Johnson which includes the Common Couple Violence (CCV) and the Intimate Terrorism (IT). The other two patterns were not included here are the Violent Resistance (VR) and the mutual violent, for the reason that both types focus beyond the study scope or on the female-to-male violence and the latter is rare and little is known about it. In terms of the forms of violence, the study focused on the four common forms within each two specific patterns of violence (CCV and IT): physical, sexual, emotional and economical violence. The study also looked at what are the prevalences and the potential causes these different forms of violence within the context of the current socio-economic transformation in the rural areas of Laos.

In 1986, one of the most comprehensive reviews of the literature on violence against women by LwisOkun pointed out at least 20 distinct theories related to domestic violence. Since then, almost 26 years have passed and many more theories on family violence, intimate partner violence or other types of violence in conjugal relationships have been developed and tested. However, no one conceptual framework can explain adequately what causes violence against women in their own family (Renzetti and Edleson, 2011). Given the myriad availability of perspectives involved and for a practical reason, it makes sense to be selective for this study. Based on their potential relevance to this study, the study selected three theories as the basis for drawing the conceptual framework which includes the intergenerational transmission theory, the feminist theories and the ecological model. Intergenerational transmission theory is one of the micro-level theories that seek to explain violence on an individual level rather than on a structural level (or macro-level). It is one of the

micro-level theories most used to explained violence against women (Renzetti and Edleson, 2011). This theory seeks to explain violent behaviors of an individual family member without linking them to the broader context of community and society. It focuses on knowing why individuals vary and makes family violence understandable but not justifiable through various linkages within social context (Barnett and Perrin, 2011). For example, the intergenerational transmission theory argues that a boy is more likely to grow up and become a perpetrator himself if his parents abused him or if he witnessed violence in his family. Through the intergenerational transmission process, a boy learns how to behave both by experiencing how others treat him and by observing how his parents treat each other. He is imitating the behavior he has observed. Therefore, children who grow up in families in which they witness interparental violence or experience child abuse are more likely to imitate or tolerate these behaviors than are children from nonviolent homes (DeKeseredy, 2011). Feminist theory focuses on how broader social forces such as patriarchy contribute to violence against women. There are different definitions of patriarchy but it is referred as a sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege. While there are a variety of feminist theories of woman abuse in adult heterosexual relationships, most of them share the view that men abuse women to maintain power and control over them. Most feminist accounts also assert that gender, power and patriarchy are key explanatory factors (Renzetti and Edleson, 2011). Feminist perspective focuses on power and gender issues when dealing with family violence. The key to this approach is to understand the historical subordination of women to men. The feminist perspective encourages and examination of the societal structure that is designed to condone, perhaps encourage and perpetuate the superiority of men over women. It focuses exclusively on patriarchy as the cause of violence toward women. According to feminist theory, cultural acceptance of violence allows or even promotes violence. In another word, men beat women because they can get away with it in their particular society (Barnett and Perrin, 2012). Ecological model addressee multiple levels of influence and maintains that violence against women should be examined within a nested set of environmental contexts or systems. It includes the following levels: macrosystem (society) refers to broader cultural factors, such as patriarchal attitudes and beliefs about gender relations in intimate relationships; exosystem (neighbor) refers to informal and formal social networks that connect intimate relationships to the broader culture; microsystem (family) refers to the relationship in which violence takes

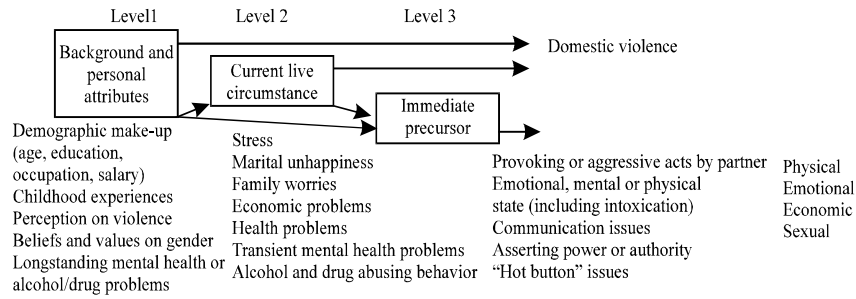


Fig. 1: Three-level model of perceived reasons for domestic violence

place and ontogenetic (individual) refers to a person's individual development and what such development brings to the above three levels. The pivotal references or the conceptual framework for the entire study were mainly drawn from these three selected theories (Fig. 1).

Level 1 involves stable attributes of individuals such as an aggressive personality, attitudes or beliefs conducive to violence and an upbringing or childhood experiences that may make a person generally more likely to be aggressive. This level was labeled as background and personal attributes of the perpetrator or victim. This level of explanation has often been invoked in studies of risk factors for IPV but may also be perceived by perpetrators and victims as relevant explanations for why IPV occurred. For example, these attributes might be used to explain a person's propensity for using aggressive solutions or for being unable to restrain him or herself from aggression in certain situations. Problems with alcohol and drugs and long-term mental health problems can be categorized at this level when they are defined as personal attributes of the aggressor rather than as transitory problems. Level 2 involves current life circumstances such as stress, depression, poor physical health, current alcohol and drug abuse and other life circumstances that might make a person more likely to respond aggressively in intimate conflict because of the stress or other effects associated with these life situations or factors. These broader issues can be seen as producing heightened tension that might directly or indirectly lead to conflict and violence. Level 3 refers to immediate precursors or precipitators that lead to physical violence. This level includes acts by the partner seen as provoking, threat or aggressive; the emotional or mental state of the perpetrator (including intoxication); aggression used as a way of communicating, getting attention or showing feelings; aggression used to control, coerce or exert power over partner and other situational factors or "hot button" issues. Because most knowledge of precipitants is necessarily based on self-report (rather than, e.g.,

observation), there is little "objective" knowledge of the specific types of situations that comprise the greatest risks for IPV. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic examination of perceived precipitators can be useful not only for identifying perceived high risk situations but also for developing more objective ways to identify key precipitators and situations that increase the risk of IPV.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is conducted in one village of Sangthong district within Vientiane municipality. The main reason for the selection of Sangthong district as the study area is based on the availability of the known cases of domestic violence as reported in the GDG's 2004 and 2011 studies, especially in Nasaonang village. Sangthong district is situated about 65 km South from Vientiane City, bordering Hinheub district to the north, Sykhotthabong district to the South, Phouphanang mountain range to the East and the Mekong River to the West. Like most districts in Laos, Sangthong district has been affected by the recent rapid economic transformation across the country. Sangthong is the poorest district in Vientiane Prefecture and is listed amongst the 47 poor districts of Laos. According to the 2011 national statistic, there are 37 villages in total which is made up of 4,503 households and has a total population of 23,349 people. Of this, 11,434 are females. While Sangthong district is close to Vientiane city, access was poor until the construction of the new road last year. In the dry season, people leave the district to find better jobs in Vientiane city or across the river into Thailand. The majority of their populations are farmer on rice cultivation. However, its main income generating activity is plaited bamboo sheets to be used for walls. These are sometimes sent to Thailand or otherwise are sold in the village.

The study area for this study is the Nasaonang village which is one of the total 37 villages in Sangthong district. This selected village is only 9 km from the

Sangthong district town called Pialat. According to the interview with the village head, Nasaonang village was established in 1987; it has a total population of 426 people (209 women) with 81 households and >80% of its total population is Khmu ethnicity. Based on this 80% majority pollution makeup, this village is officially considered by the local authority to be a Khmu ethnic village. The Nasaonang village is also considered to be a rural village because of its specific characteristics such as fewer population, less or no traffic and much of its lands have open space and are devoted to agriculture such as rice farming or cash crop farming with less air and water pollution than in an urban area like the district center that is only nine kilometers apart. In comparing to the Nasaonang, the district town is considered to be an urban area which is characterized by higher density of population, buildings and traffic and more commercial stores or business surrounding them. In a rapidly changing economy such as Laos is currently experiencing, many people, especially the working age men and women are being driven to migrate from the rural Nasaonang to the urban areas. In this situation, those village men who found themselves unable to economically support their families in the new environment and unable to live up to their culturally defined role as a bread winner usually develop certain levels of stress as a precondition for committing violence against their spouse.

The qualitative research method was selected and used in this study in order to gain a comprehensive understanding on how and what the villagers perceived as domestic violence and its potential risks of causing violence. There were 23 Key Informants (KIs) participated in the in-depth interviews. The village heads, representatives from the Village Mediation Units and local civil society groups (including the mass organization such as the Lao Women's Union) were purposively selected as KIs. Purposive sampling is very useful for this step of study where it needs to reach persons who could provide rich information for the study (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Moreover, those selected people are primarily accountable persons in preventing violence. With respect to this, the village chief is a key gatekeeper in the community as well as a significant decision maker on overall functions of the community initiatives and efforts. As for the sampling selection, the snowball technique was applied to attain diverse perspectives from community members, such as the male perpetrators. Applying this technique, the researcher asked the key informants to suggest other individuals known to them, who had perpetrated violence and could provide information useful to the study (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, total sample size

for the in-depth interview concerning the community-based issues for this qualitative study was 14 persons: seven male perpetrators and their wives or seven victims. The unit of analysis for this qualitative study is at both individual and community levels. For the data collection, an in-depth interview based on specific interview guideline was applied in order to elicit rich and detailed information concerning the community-based issues. To the study's concerns, the political context of the community including political commitment and support, policy formulation and accountability, formation and enforcement of rule and regulation and the local institutional contexts of the community including distribution of responsibilities and authorities organizational resource organizational capacities and relationships between organization and institutions at different levels are assessed. Moreover, community-based issues such as physical, social-cultural and economical conditions of the victims and perpetrators were investigated. In addition to community-based issue analysis, attitudes and opinions of the community leaders or KIs and perpetrators were reviewed. General basic interview guidelines was created to obtain information from participants at two different levels: the 'What' or direct experience level and the 'Why' and 'How' reflecting on experience level. And questions focusing on probing or sharing direct experiences included: can you say more about this is there anything else you want to add to this, are there any questions about this, could you be more specific or what happened and the questions focusing on thinking level or reflecting on direct experiences included: how did you feel when you are experiencing this, did anyone else feel the same way about that, do you realize that, why didn't you response to that. After the entire data collect process is accomplish, the data from different sources and data collection methods were categorized based on their similarity and themes and then data were analyzed using content analysis technique. All field notes taken during interview were converted into fine notes so that the meaning and essence would not be lose. The key informant's words, observed scenario, documented charts and figures were used to highlight the main points.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated by the arrows in the conceptual framework, Level 1 factors could be perceived as sole explanations for why an aggressive act occurred (i.e., direct link to aggression) but may also be mediated by life circumstances and immediate precursors or precipitators. Similarly, Level 2 factors may be perceived as a sufficient

explanation or be mediated by immediate precursors. In the sections that follow, this conceptual framework was used for analysis of the collected data on perceived explanation for domestic violence and there are three main findings that the study found: violence between husband and wife was perceived by majority of participants as a non-issue and is to be normally expected during the lifetime of a marriage, cultural legitimization of violence in society and gender-based perception of violence in family has a strong probable influence on the existing problems of domestic violence and all four basic forms of domestic violence existed on the ground although in various frequencies and tendencies.

Domestic violence perceived by the majority as private matter: In Laos, the definition of domestic violence is unclear to and lack of such by most people in general. The 'unclear' or even lack of definition of violence against women or domestic violence might simply be the result of the paucity of educations on this issues in general and the dearth of clear and comprehensive understanding by the local villagers on the issue might be the direct result the typical local view that domestic violence is a taboo subject. This counterproductive view precludes any chance for further discussion or constructive debates necessary for defining and tackling this grave problem. According to a study by the GDG in 2011, 25% of respondents were unable to comment on what violence against women is or encompasses. Another study by the UNDP in 2009 also found that "most participants did not have the necessary words to define or to describe domestic violence. They were unclear about what constitutes domestic violence, even if they had witnessed or experienced it." From these two existing studies, the point is confirmed and directly clear that villagers are ignoring the issue and most seem to see it as part of the private matters or family business that best leaved uninterrupted or intervened by the outsiders or the third parties. Or another word certain violence and most violence that are considered by the local as none severe is view as normal occurrences that are being expected as part of the family life. Such as most of the interviewers agrees or suggests that the fighting between husband and wife are like the "lip and teeth"; something that is expected of from spousal family union. And this is view as none severe violence and usually if not most the times get addressed by the elders or tribal system or the mediation process. The key informants the judges and prosecutors-interviewed in this study and secondary sources also embraced this concept of violence between husband and wife as family private matter. As reflected by a statement by the district justice office in the village:

"Not many or almost none on cases related to family violence between husband and wife. There might be or more but it usually got solved at village level as a non-severe, private matter. The main causes are economics or poverty, no respect for each other or having a mistress. These problems were caused by men usually"

Therefore, it is no surprise, that most and all the cases associated with domestic violence mentioned during the interview are of sensational nature such as the extreme cases of either murders or rape with extreme physical injuries to the point of emergency and most of this extreme cases are perceived as domestic violence cases that need to be reported or recorded or addressed by the legal system as criminal cases. No cases are specifically recorded as domestic violence or family violence in the official records as this study found first hand or from the secondary sources. With this environment of lacking discussion of this perceived private matter, during the interviews the study encountered the situation when asking the interviewers about the number or the cases or the prevalence of domestic violence against women in the family, the feedback or the quick answers will most likely be very low prevalent rate or no cases at all. This point is shown in two studies in the literature review. According to a study by the GDG in 2011, 25% of respondents were unable to comment on what violence against women is or encompasses. Another study by the UNDP in 2009 also found that:

"Most participants did not have the necessary words to define or to describe domestic violence. They were unclear about what constitutes domestic violence, even if they had witnessed or experienced it"

The lack of definition of domestic violence by the local villagers doesn't mean that this problem is not existed in practice. It is just hidden or another word accepted by majority of people in society as normal and acceptable to certain degree and extends. The important things are what are these tolerable or intolerable degrees and extends perceived by the majority in the society. In dealing with this specific context of the lack of clear definition, the study used a more specific action vocabulary to assist in finding out the 'private' disputes; specific action verbs or words from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) for physical violence, like hitting, beating, slapping, pushing, shoving, kicking, choking, hair pulling, dragging, burning and breaking arm, throwing objects that cause bruising and destruction of household property,

threatening and using weapons such as a gun and a knife. For emotional violence, the specific relevant action verbs based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) by Straus in 1979 were used which included insult, angry looks, intimidation, scaring, belittlement, humiliation in front of others, made to feel bad about oneself, threats of harm, threat to find someone else and threat of abandonment. And for sexual violence, CTS covered forced sex and rape. Another good example of this is when asking about domestic violence in this circumstance of lacking clear concept by the local on what constitute family violence or a taboo issue as such, the study coined a phrase that is more suitable for the local to associate with the problem: “yai long sii” in Lao or in translation which is moving your teeth or your chewing machine. All these action verbs from the CTS scale were employed during the qualitative study in order to find out the exact occurrence of the violence situations regardless of whether or what the local villagers name or perceived this phenomenon to be. Under the action verbs based on the CTS scale, the study found that violence acts as described by the CTS do exist in reality.

There is a literature on these two categories of severe or nonsevere violence in other countries or other broader scope not just limited to Laos. In a quick and general sense, it is believe the in a society where people's lives are still depend on subsistence system of living, there is a potential for accepting the norms that discriminate the rights of a woman or a wife when it comes to domestic violence. In such case, there is a norm that certain types of violence are tolerable or accepted and usually are call none severe violence and certain types of violence are unacceptable and usually these are called severe violence. The roles of women or wives as a housekeeper in this subsistence community are required such as taking care of children and cooking for the family. If she is not performing these required roles which is very important in the subsistence society, it is acceptable for a husband to punish her. It is also said that a civilized or more urban society or society that is developed, the roles of women are changed and their rights in the event of domestic violence are relatively protected. In the rural areas of Laos which are mostly belonged to subsistence living system, certain violence are tolerated as indicated by the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006 by UNICEF which found that about 80% of women believe that husbands are justified in beating their wives evidences the high level of social legitimization of violence against women. And in the GDG study in 2004, it was found that in a number of cases, women do not take any action in cases of domestic violence.

Cultural legitimization of violence in society: The social legitimization of violence against women seems to start at an early age in Laos. According to a youth perception study of 169 girls and 186 boys between 13-18 years old by the Lao Youth's Union (LYU) and Save the Children UK in 1997, 63% of the girls and 45% of the boys agreed to this statement: it is all right for a man to hit his wife if she makes some mistakes. In addition, it seems that this perception of violent action against women has no direct association with the education level of an individual. In a study conducted by the UNDP in 2009, it noted that some educated men and men who are in leadership positions are also likely to indicate that at some occasion it is acceptable for men to hit their wives. This reflects gender relation and women's relative subordinate position which have been a part of Lao's culture and society for centuries. The manifestation of this historical gender relationship reflects in the roles men as leader and women as subordinate play in society.

For example, it is commonly accepted that men are the head of the family and rule the household and dealing with public issues outside of the family. In one household interviewed, both the husband and wife agreed that the husband has the rights to make decision on ‘big’ issues involving selling of their farmland or education of their children. In this particular case, the particular piece of land belongs to the wife or from direct inheritance from her parents. But nevertheless, she agrees and confirms that her husband has the rights to make the final decision on whether to sell her land or not. The decision to buying a new land is also decided by the husband in this case. The wife has the role in cooking and taking care of their two primary school age children. Due to societal high expectation of their roles as a wife or mother, Lao women have a relatively subservient attitude regarding domestic violence. The high rate of tolerance on domestic violence especially by women themselves is a clear reflection of both women's subservient attitude and their fear of retaliation and social stigma. This indicated that there is the process of social or cultural legitimization of violence occurs in manner that influence people's perception of or acceptance of domestic violence.

Existing forms of domestic violence

Emotional violence: Based on the interviewed, the key informants, both men and women, mention cases of adultery or infidelity as one of the main context or the cause of family violence. When the participants were asked if they know or experience family violence, the common answer is usually very few cases of family violence or none. They usually link the word family violence to the extreme physical or verbal violence in the

family only which have been very rare cases. And, when further probed about in what context these few known cases of extreme violence or criminal cases occurred, infidelity by husband is usually identified as one of the common causes along using alcohol, poor education and poverty. From this experience, it is understood that the villagers might not see adultery or infidelity by itself as one form of domestic violence or emotional violence. In their perception, infidelity is not considered as family violence. As reflected by a statement by the district justice office:

“Not many or almost none on incidences related to family violence between husband and wife. There might be or more but it usually got taken care of in village through reconciliation, by viewing this problem as private matter. The main causes are usually on economics or poverty, no respect for each other or having a mistress. These problems were caused by men

Another statement by another officer at the same justice office also reflect this same perception of infidelity as a cause rather than an act of violence itself:

“Usually, most if not all cases got solved at the village level. There were only two family cases this year that we heard of. Cases usually are about divorce, usually the wife wanted to divorce. The main causes for family disputes are adultery, laziness of men or husbands having a minor wife”

The above examples are just to show the point that participants might not see infidelity as a form of family violence. Which mean, if the interview asking for the violence case, a small number might be given. If directly ask about, infidelity, the number of violence case will be much more. An interesting question is why most people don't related infidelity directly to family violence. This could be explained by the concept of cultural violence, in which society has legitimized certain acts as normal, including infidelity. People in society both men and women have been culturally except this form of violence or other words, society has structurally legitimized this emotional form of violence. But this is just a conjecture point remained to be proven. This form of emotional violence or adultery or infidelity are mostly done by husbands or locally known as 'mere noi' or a minor wife problem. Some men in the village acknowledged knowing of or even perpetrating such abuse themselves. And, also most KIs interviewed in this study confirmed knowing or directly experiencing infidelity in family relationship, regardless of whether they perceive it as violence or not

as the early point demonstrated. Following are a reflection directly from the interview with the male perpetrator regarding infidelity:

“I loved my wife. I don't want to and will not divorce her for my minor wife. After all, we have been legally married for 30 years with two grown up children. Besides, my minor wife knew her position and she won't ask for more.”

When two people are making a vow to be both husband and wife either in a traditional or formal marriage they are morally and legally committed to fidelity within a marriage. This commitment based on love, trust and the law, is subjected to change and deterioration when a husband or a wife fell in love and having an affaire with the others. In the above case, the husband violated this code of marriage by having an extramarital affair with another woman. He violates both his legal responsibility as a husband and moral commitment to the marriage vow. But surprisingly, from his statement, it doesn't show any remorse of his infidelity. The fact that he think he could keep both his first and second wife reflect much of his perception and society's perception of this infidelity issue which usually gives privilege to men. It would be interesting to find out the potential treatment if a woman broke the same vow and what kind of stigma or punishment she might face.

Economic violence: Another form of violence also found during the field data collection is the economic violence in which men try to limit women's economic independence or trying to monopolize family property. In Laotian tradition, the youngest daughter usually inherits the land and house from her parent because she is taking care of the parents in old age. And when married, she brought her husband into her family. The following statement from a husband, who naturally and fully acknowledged that he had made a decision to sell his wife land:

“We divided our roles and duties equally. My wife cooks for family and taking care of our two children. I work on our 1 ha rice field we recently bought. During the off-season, I work as a construction worker. I gave the money earned from working to her. But I made the decision on the major spending or important issues like selling (her) 6 ha lands and buying new 1 ha rice field”

The role of making major decision in this family lies with the husband. The husband mentioned he supported the idea of allowing her to join meetings and functions organized by the community. However, both the husband and wife together confirmed that for minor expenses like foods and clothing, the wife can made decision. The wife

acknowledged that when attending meeting she can't make decision. She has to come back home and ask him first. But for the husband, when attending meeting, he usually made a decision without the need to consult his wife first. But he will inform her later. Like in this case, he decided to sell the six ha land of plantation that belonged to her without consulting her first. During the interview, the wife seemed to be at peace with her subordinate role when it comes to who makes the major decision. But this is not unique for this family. Actually, most family in Lao are registered with the husband as the head of a family. This is not required by the Lao but it is more of a cultural norm. And with that registration, the husband has the sole privilege to make decision on major issues in practice, regardless of the fact that he moved into his wife family or house.

This cultural norm of men taking on the role of the leader and its impact on the original ownership of parental property of the wives is also being showed in a study by the Lao Women Union. The finding from the LWU's study indicates that the wife lost her entitlement to her own land to her husband during the process of land registration or selling and buying of land process. In reality, very few households have the female as the head of household. Even when a husband dies, the older son usually takes on the role of the head of household, especially in rural village. This taking away the original rights of the land from women is an abusive action. But in village, this practice was considered acceptable and culturally appropriate and it was accepted by family and society at large. The original definition in this study regarding economic abuse related to land ownership in this case must be redefined to reflect this point accordingly. In this same family, the husband and wife are harmoniously accepting their gendered roles and division of labor within their family. As a statement by the husband regarding his lost of temper due to her not cooking for their children:

"I support her to work for community as long as she take good care or cook for the family. I kind of getting very angry when finding out that our children are hungry or their mother didn't prepare the meal for them to eat properly"

And, following is a reciprocate statement by his wife:

"It is my responsibility as a wife to cook for the family. But I don't like when he raised his voice in anger usually because of a misunderstanding. He thought I failed to cook for our children. But he should have asked me first. Sometime, kids lied or forgot to properly communicate"

These two statements not only reinstated the strong existence of gender roles and expectation of a husband and wife, it also demonstrates a trigger point for verbal violence or quarrel and shouting or even leading to a physical once. This involved the children as one of the factor in family violence. As many studies have shown that number of children is one of key factors in domestic violence. However, how and why and to what extent it affects the relationship, it remains to be studied and tested in the next phase of this study.

Physical violence: Family violence in general is considered as private issues and not to be reported outside family. When asked if there is physical violence or family violence in the village, the quick answers are usually no. This is mostly due to the norm or culturally legitimized of family violence in society as a family private issue. People will only consider or pay attention to violence in the extreme form the criminal acts or the severe violence. The categorization of moderate and severe violence is divided according to the likelihood of the violence causing physical injury and is based on the WHO and CEDAW definition.

But if ask in specific terms like if there is any fighting, hitting, pushing, etc., between husband and wife, the answer is yes and many. The following interview is by the village head regarding this particular extreme physical violence done by a husband to his wife and their three boys:

"There is one case very serious. The husband physically injured his wife and children on a regular basis. We arrested him but the next day the wife came to police and requested for release of her husband. Sometime, I think they deserve each other. She is also a unique woman with loud voice and very outspoken"

From this statement, it reflects that the victimized woman and her three children are in great risk for some time and there seems to be no solution to her predicament. The statement even showed the sense of blaming the wife as having a loud voice or being an outspoken person or with a character that invites violence on to self. Talking to the neighbors reveals that the husband has a nice and friendly personality to neighbors and it might be of his jealousy when seeing his wife talking to other men or male customers in her grocery store. From discussion with neighbors, it also reveals that this issue has been going on for years and people make various jokes or comical comments about the plight of this woman and her children. But the point here is where the safety net for her and her children or if there is any public resources where

she can access to. From previous literature review, it is known that women tend to stay in the abusive relationship because of lack of necessary supports and resources or insecure or fear for safety and well being of her children. This case reflects all these during the interview. Following is a statement by this victimized wife with her three children:

“I do all the house chores and taking care of my three boys. I am also taking care of our small grocery business and also work as a hired labor for extra money to feed our family. My husband didn't help much anyway. He is away most the time working outside the village. Things are better when he is away from home”

From the above statement, it shows that she seems to be independent and should be secured enough to leave the abusive relationship. But this is not the case, because she is alone. Unlike the other case mentioned earlier, she is moving from her ex-husband in another province to live with the family of her current husband. Reportedly the in-laws or the husband parents are not fond of her and her children and are taking side of their physically abusing son. This case shows one key factor related to domestic violence which is the distance of family and friends live close by the victims can be of help and support to the victims. In this case the woman is apparently has none of this support. And this might also be a factor contribute to her husband frequency and intensity of violence against her. He can do whatever he wants to with her because she is helpless so to speak. Another potential factor is the fact that she was married before; this is another stigma for women in general and might be a factor contributing to violence of and by itself.

Sexual violence: One form of domestic violence that is not recognized by law or society is sexual violence in the form of marital violence. The law says that anyone rapes or having sex with others other than his own wife without consent or willingness, is subject to punishment by the law. This stipulation implies that a man can rape his own wife; or raping your own wife is not illegal. This law, in addition to the cultural norm of silence and taking family as private issue, directly and indirectly prevent public to recognize and discuss about this sexual violence. In Lao culture, anything related to sex is not appropriate to be discussed in public. Marital rape is a totally new concept to Lao society in general not just the study villages. As regarding sexual violence, this study found that people are reluctant to comment on this form of violence. However to confirm the existence of this form of violence, a survey questionnaire could be designed to avoid

sensitivity in direct face to face setting, in order to capture this neglected issue for better holistic understanding of the whole issue of domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

This study used individual-level data from the qualitative, in-depth interview of 37 participants to identify the local perception of domestic violence, the existing forms of violence and the relationship between domestic violence and the socio-cultural context where they occurred. Examining the perception of domestic violence at the individual level, it was found that majority of participants perceived violence as a private family issue with could be categorized into severe or nonsevere violence. The local has defined domestic violence simply as either severe or nonsevere violence. And in simple terms, what is identified as severe violence is usually getting addressed through legal system and vice versa, what is regarded as nonsevere case is usually considered as family matter. None severe cases are mostly treated as private matter and solved through the reconciliation and mediation. The key, interesting and practical question is how the local see and defined as severe and nonsevere. This study found that the distinction between these two categories is ambiguous at best and future research on this issue should focus on clarifying this ambiguity. With regard to socio-cultural influence on perception or on gender perception of domestic violence, the study found that social legitimation of women's subservient roles in society at large or in family in particular began at an early age of a child. From this study, it is confirmed that socio-cultural aspect has certain influences on the perception of violence and on gender roles. However, there are two interesting unknown that came up during this qualitative study that post the following two logical question which could well be the next focus or for future focus in future researches:

- Is there any change happening to this norm regarding women's stereotyped role as the sole home caretaker or the ubiquitous attitudes that it is ok for men to have a mistress?
- If there is, how and in what direction is this change taking place such as moving this or seeing this issue as a social or development issues instead of a private personal issue?

As regard to existing forms of violence, the study found all basic forms of domestic violence, namely, physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence

and sexual violence. The study found that villagers both men and women have been culturally accept emotional violence such as infidelity as normal or another words the community has structurally legitimized this particular form of emotion violence. For recommendation for further study, it would be interesting to find out the potential treatment if a woman broke the same vow. What kind of stigma or punishment she might face. For physical violence, the study found that it existed and the number of children a family has could have some influence on domestic violence; however, how and why and to what extent the number of children or size of family could affects the relationship of the couple is remain to be studies and tested in future studies.

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