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Paglalambing o Pananakit: Sexual Coercion Among Filipino Gay Men in Intimate Relationships

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Abstract: This project is an exploration of the nature of sexual coercion among Filipino gay men in their current or past same-sex relation. Twenty gay men aged 18 years old and above participated survey aimed at revealing the nature, prevalence and dynamics of sexual coercion. In understanding sexual coercion, phenomenology and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) were used. Findings revealed that the nature of coercion may be thought of as being in a continuum with acceptable or normal signs of love on one end and violent and abusive forms on the other extreme. The most prevalent form of sexually coercive act was verbal insistence where the participant was made to have sex when he did not want to. Seduction tactics to persuade the participant to have intercourse was also noted as a common form of coercion. The consequences of coercion varied with some feeling inspired and loved after the incident and the others feeling stressed out and depressed. Coercion occurred as a product of psychological aggression and negotiation tactics employed by the partner. Recommendations offered are geared towards interventions to help gay men manage their romantic relationship and sexual health. Relevant counselor interventions are also discussed.

Key Words: *LGBT; same-sex intimate partner violence; sexual violence; sexual coercion*

INTRODUCTION

There is a substantial number of researches about women's experience on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), however, there is a lesser number of studies examining same-sex IPV

(Murray & Mobley, 2009). Existing research on IPV (e.g. Oliffe et al., 2014; Richards, Noret & Rivers, 2003) indicates that there is an increasing incidence of IPV among men and the LGBT population. The rates of same-sex IPV are comparable to the rates of



heterosexual domestic abuse with about a quarter and a half being as abusive (Murray & Mobley, 2009). As in the case of heterosexual IPV, same-sex IPV also has severe health consequences. And because there remains limited research on this area, there is a dearth of intervention programs that target the incidence of violence among the LGBT population (Kubicek, 2016).

Of the various types of IPV, little research has been conducted about same-sex sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2016). Sexual violence is defined as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim” (WHO, 2016). This definition includes rape and sexual assault and as such can create profound consequences on a person’s physical and mental health (Brown & Herman, 2015).

Sexual violence is contrasted from sexual coercion. Sexual coercion, according to DeGue and DiLillo (2004), involves non-physical tactics to gain sexual contact with a nonconsenting partner. Kalichman and Rompa (2005) argued that among gay men, sexual coercion is a contributing factor in the risk for HIV. This is a cause of concern since existing statistics indicate that gay men continue to be the risk group most severely affected by HIV in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2017). Gay men, as well as lesbian and bisexual adolescents, also have difficulty in accessing medical services after experiences of abuse or violence. This difficulty is caused by fear of rejection, ridicule, “breaches of confidentiality by medical practitioners” (Rakel, 2007) and the dangers of “outing” myself and one’s partner when accessing assistance (Stapel, as cited in Brown & Herman, 2015).

Within intimate partners, sexual coercions may not automatically be viewed as violent. Several researchers argued that coercion should be viewed as being in a continuum of “tolerated to transgressive behaviors” (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottemoeller; Jewkes & Abrahams, as cited in Ramiro, 2005). Ramiro (2005) in her study among Filipino adolescents also found how sexual coercion can be consensual and negotiated. It appears therefore that to thoroughly understand coercion, sexual meanings attached to such experience must be viewed within the social and normative contexts of a particular culture (Ingham, as cited in Ramiro, 2005).

In the Philippines, higher educational institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to promote and develop Gender-Responsive Curricular Programs which seeks “to prevent all forms of gender-discrimination in instruction, research, and extension” (p. 11) under the Commission on Higher Educations (CHED)’s Memorandum Order No. 01,



series of 2015. To accomplish this, LGBT researches must be given attention. Researches about the gay population become even more important since gay men's health issues are usually left out in academic or empirical studies (Oliffe, Han, Sta. Maria, Lohan, Howard & Stewart, 2014); this same advocacy was emphasized by Calton, Cattaneo and Gebhard (2015) when they discovered three major barriers to help seeking among LGBT survivors of IPV including a limited understanding of the problem of LGBTQ IPV, stigma, and systemic inequities.

Among young people, the development of a healthy sexual self is a critical concern (National Commission on Adolescent Sexual Health). This should be the focus of more research since adolescence and young adulthood are the times for when individuals engage into a more serious intimate relation either with the same or opposite sex that may impact their sexual health (Ramiro, 2005).

In the context of counseling, fully understanding the dynamics and nature of sexual coercion may allow counselors and professionals to provide a more effective helping process and enable the development of a more accessible intervention that is gender-specific (Calton et al., 2015). In a local study of Coballes, Bahni and Torres (2016) about intimate partner violence, it was concluded that further research on IPV needs to delve more into gay men's experiences given the high level of

sexual coercion experienced among the adolescent respondents. This study was therefore crafted to address these concerns.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative research, specifically phenomenology to explore gay men's experience of sexual coercion in their relations. In this study, phenomenology was guided by the assumptions of interpretivism as it tried to discover the meanings attached to participants' lived experiences of sexual coercion. The study used specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to uncover how gay men perceived their experiences relating to sexual coercion, and how they made sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, as cited in Smith, 2003). IPA, according to Smith & Osborn (2015), is an idiographic approach focused on the person who is experiencing a particular phenomenon in a specific context. Because it focuses on the meanings, particular experiences, events, states hold for the participants, it was considered as the best design for the current study.

Participants

There were 20 participants who were purposively selected to participate in this study. Selection was based on this inclusion criteria: they were self-identified gay men, they were in late adolescence or young adulthood stage (aged 18 and above), and have been or currently in a same-sex



relationship at the time of the study. Participants were identified through purposive snowball sampling technique.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in the province of Nueva Vizcaya at the capitol town of Bayombong. Bayombong is a first-class municipality with a total population of 61,000 as of a 2015 census. It has 25 barangays and is composed of several ethnic groups including Gaddang, Ilocano, Tagalog, and Ifugao.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide as well as a demographic profile was used and floated to the respondents. Following the guidelines set forth by Smith and Osborn (as cited in Smith, 2003), the guide included a preliminary part on rapport-building in which questions about the relationship profile of the respondents were asked. The interview guide contained 4 areas that delved into (1) nature of sexual coercion, (2) coercive acts, and (3) dynamics of sexual coercion (circumstances that led to coercion and its consequences).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nature of Sexual Coercion. Sexual coercion was perceived as a form of lust, and a normal expression of aspect of intimate relationship. Words associated with lust were abuse, force, trauma, misunderstanding and pity. Respondents who had this view perceive coercion as something that must be avoided since it is a violation of one's personhood. The other view is that

coercion is normal and expected characterized by non-abusive, non-violent behaviors like gentle persuasion and tactics.

Coercive Acts. The coercive acts experienced by the participants within their intimate relationship included being made to have sex without a condom, verbal coercion like insisting on sex when they did not want to, and seduction coercion like holding sensitive parts of his body.

Dynamics of Sexual Coercion

a. Circumstances. Sexual coercion occurs as a function of psychological aggression specifically emotional abuse which eventually leads to coerced sexual activity. When partners of the participants engage in negotiation tactics like seduction, sexual coercion and eventual sexual activity occur.

b. Consequences. The consequences of sexual coercion are manifested in terms of feelings, thoughts and effects on their daily life. Most felt angry, disappointed and afraid after experiencing sexual coercion. Some felt happy to have satisfied their partner while others felt guilty, and stressed out over the experience.

Programs and Interventions for Gay Men with Sexual Coercion Experiences. Basing on the findings, curriculum review and a program or intervention about managing same-sex relationship is proposed.



CONCLUSIONS

Psychological aggression and seduction precede sexual coercion. Gay men in intimate relationship experience less violent forms of coercive acts that involve seduction and verbal insistence.

Sexual coercion is in a continuum with abusive and unacceptable forms on one end and the acceptable, normal behaviors on the other end. To address sexual coercion, curriculum review and revision as well as interventions for handling same-sex relationships is needed.

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