Ouch! It Hurts: The Lived Experiences Of Physically And Emotionally Abused Children

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the type of abuse, the lived experiences focus on social interaction and emotional wellbeing of physically abused children who ran away home and presently under the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) General Mariano Alvarez, Cavite, Philippines. This study utilized a qualitative research design, multiple case studies to capture the holistic and meaningful characteristics of their real-life experiences. Five physically abused children by their parents, guardians or caregivers were selected. It revealed that physically and emotionally abused children who ran away home have tremendously affected their social interaction and emotional wellbeing. They are products of dysfunctional family that do not establish a good familial relationship. They were victims of parental neglect, maltreatment, physical and emotional abuse. It is also shown that they have difficulties in trusting other people. They thought that every time they socialize and meet new people, the abuse would happen again. The stigma brought about by abuse flashback to these children who continuously battle to overcome the trauma. Encountering new people triggers their trauma and causing them fear and powerlessness.

Key words: parental neglect, maltreatment, emotional abuse, stigma, trauma, runaway

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse has recently become an essential area in social research. Among the types of child abuse, physical abuse and emotional neglect are the most heart-breaking phenomena. Most of the abused children have difficulty in social interaction as well as expressing their emotions. Social interaction is the compassion of manto connect
himself in his environment. When people socially interact, it determines one’s emotional wellbeing. When social interaction takes place, it is not a simple exchange of information but how the emotions are elicited and interpreted by the receiver to make it more meaningful. A person can create reality by simply communicating and interpreting other people’s experiences and learn through them. Through social interaction, man gives life to his lived experiences and create meaning and reality in this world with a driven purpose.

The Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act or Republic Act 7610 (Art.1 Sec. 3) defines child abuse as maltreatment, whether habitual or not. A person who is below 18 years old or those over but are unable to fully take care of themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of physical or mental disability or condition.

Physical abuse as defined by the law is characterized by physical injury (e.g. bruises and fractures) resulting from punching, beating, kicking, biting, or otherwise harming a child. The injury may have resulted from over discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child’s age or condition. The injury may be the results from over discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child’s age or condition. However, the law also clarified that an injury resulting from physical punishment that requires medical treatment is considered outside the realm of normal disciplinary measures. On the other hand, emotional abuse includes acts or omissions by the parents or other persons responsible for the child’s care and that has caused or could cause serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorder. It the most difficult form of child maltreatment.

In the year 2013, American Humane Association (AHA) defined the child physical abuse as non-accidental trauma or physical injury caused by punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child. Physical abuse is the most visible form of child abuse or maltreatment. Many times, physical abuse results from inappropriate or overcorrection. The outburst feeling of anger of a parent or a caretaker may be unaware of the magnitude or intensity of force with which he or she strike the child. Children who grow up in a violent family affect their relationship and the way they interact to other people. The type of social interaction is accompanied by emotional state of the child.

Physical abuse is any intentional and unwanted contact with self or something close to the body that cause pain or leave a bruise (National Child Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN, 2009. Lea Ylagan on TV broadcast network “UNTV NEWS” reported about the total numbers of physical abused in the Philippines. Based on the data from Philippine National Police (PNP) Women and Children Protection Desk showed that there have been 2,846 in the year 2013, while 5,396 for 2014 (PNP Women and Children Protection Center Chief P/CSuperintendent Juanita Nebran).

The Municipality of General Mariano Alvarez (GMA) is an urban municipality in the province of Cavite, Philippines. According to the 2010 census, it has a population of 138,540 people in an area of just 11.40 square kilometers, making it the second most densely populated city/municipality in Cavite after Rosario. Since there is lack of researches conducted and documented life experiences of physically abused children who ran away home, this study was pursued.
Quarshie (2011) discussed many factors that may affect the way children express their social skills or emotional competencies or the rate at which children acquire social skills or emotional competencies. These factors include 1) environmental risk factors such as living in an unsafe community, receiving care within a low-quality child care setting, lack of resources available in the community or lack of policies supporting children and families, etc, 2) family risk factors such as maternal depression or mental illness in the family, parental substance abuse, family violence, poverty, etc. and 3) within-child risk factors such as a fussy temperament, developmental delay, and serious health issues.

Children who grew up in a natural environment develop social interaction quite naturally. They can easily adjust to people and sustain their social interactions without difficulty. In fact, children enjoy interacting with peers as other children are more likely to share the same interests. However, children who lived in distress, traumatic experience may have developed fear and they do not speak out their problems especially children who are physically abused by any members of the family, guardian or relatives. For this reason, this study further investigated the lived experiences focused on social interaction and emotional condition of physically and emotionally abused children.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This study utilized a qualitative research design, multiple case studies to capture the holistic and meaningful characteristics of their real-life experiences. Interview method and audio recorder was used to collect the exact details or information and to easily understand the social interactions and emotional state and evaluate thoughts and feelings of physically and emotionally abused children. This study used codes to protect the children’s privacy.

Participants of the Study
The participants were the direct source of information and were augmented by survey reports, factual studies and other related literature. Five physically abused children by their parents, guardians or caregivers from Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) from General Mariano Alvarez, Cavite were selected. The inclusion criteria: 1. must be at the age range of 8-15; 2. male children; 3. abused for at least one year; 4. ran away from home 5. with assent form or inform consent approved by the DSWD; 6. willing to participate in the study. Male children were selected because boys often suffer from physical abuse than girls. Girls usually suffer more from sexual abuse than physical abuse.

RESULTS
Table 1 shows the five cases of male physically and emotionally abused children describing their social interaction and emotional wellbeing and immediate
behavioural response after the abuse was experienced. Below are the following narrative cases.

Table 1. The social interaction, emotional wellbeing and behavioural response of the children after the physical abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE</th>
<th>SOCIAL INTERACTION</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL WELL BEING</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAC01</td>
<td>PAC02</td>
<td>PAC03</td>
<td>PAC04</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Limited social interaction; 2. developed shyness during conversation
3. Shy; 2. distrustful to people; 3. confused; 4. fear of being hurt by other people
1. Tend to play alone; 2. Ran away home

PAC01
PAC01 is 11 years old, the eldest among six children. He was a Grade 4 student but he stopped his schooling when his father died. His mother is a sampaguita (flower) vendor. Since his father died, he was left under the custody of his grandfather. He used to be full of fun, hanging around with friends all day long. However, his grandfather wants him to confine in the house, he does not want him to play outside. If he escapes to play with his friends, his grandfather gets angry, beats him up and hits him with any object like belt and handle of a broom that leaves him bruises all over his body. These visible bruises made his friends mocked and teased him, since then on, his social interaction to people have dramatically changed. “Mag-isa na lang po akong naglalaro sa bahay” (“I play alone inside the house”). For this reason, he ran away from home. He eventually became shy to be seen by former friends especially when he was brought to DSWD. He developed distrust to people that he might be hurt again. However, during his stay in the DSWD, he became happy and learned to trust people again. According to him, “Nagtiwala po ulit ako, para maging masaya at matulungan ko po ang sarili ko.” (I trust again to be happy and to help myself”) He described himself happy under the care of the staff of DSWD, but he also feels sad because he is away from his family and his father died. The death of his father brought a tremendous impact on his life. He was constantly saying that if his father is still alive, he would not be brought to DSWD. Presently, his emotion is a mixture of happiness and sadness and adjustment to his new environment.

PAC02
PAC02 is 11 year old, the youngest among four children. He did not finish his elementary education due to their financial problem. His parents were separated. But he lives in his father’s house. His father is a chain smoker and an alcoholic. Every time he arrives home, he always experience being beaten up by his father especially when intoxicated. His father also hit him with a water pipe and plank of wood. According to him, “Umalis po ako dahil binubugbog lang ako, kaya gusto ko sa labas na lang para hindi na ako bugbugin ng ama ko. (I usually get out of the house,
because I am constantly beaten up, that is why, I get out of the house so that father could not beat me”). He sometimes prefers to play alone inside the house to avoid being hit, “Binubugbog po kasi ako, kaya tinitis ko na lang. Kaya minsan, gusto ko na lang mag-isa. Tinitis ko na lang” (I was beaten up and I endure the pain, sometimes, I want to be alone, I endure that”). He added, “Pinapalo po ako ng tubo, ngkahoy, dapat nga dati masasaksak pa ako ng ama ko, tapos hinawakan yung dalawang balikat ko nang mahigpit na mahigpit.” (“I was beaten by a water pipe, plank of wood. I was supposed to be hit by a knife by my father, he hold my shoulder very tight.”) He was able to escape, for this reason, he ran away home. He lived in the street until he was found by DSWD staff and he was brought to the institution. He initially developed fear that he might be hurt again by the DSWD staff. While inside the institution, his father got sick and eventually died. He finds happiness in the street not in his home. Inside the institution, he creates fear in his mind that all people might hurt him without any valid reason. For a child, this situation is unbearable, but he could not get away with it. His social interaction is very restricted and cannot be able to freely express his emotions. Eventually, he became happy inside the institution and he can functionally interact to people. He developed trust because according to him, people in the institution are helping him. According to him, “Nahikayat po ako kasi, sila po yung makakatulong sakin para maging masaya ulit ako.” (I was convinced because they can help me to become happy again).

PAC03
PAC03 is a 10 years old. He did know his mother’s whereabouts. He was left under the custody of his father. He was supposed to finish grade three but he was forced to stop. Instead, he spent most of his time to play with his peers. PAC03 was a naughty kid. He does not want to stay at home. That is why his father always hit him. According to him, “Hinahampas niya po ako ng tubo sa katawan.” (I was hit by a water pipe in my body.”) Since then, he was afraid to go home and he developed fear towards his father. He was emotionally disturbed, he ran away home and he was discovered by DSWD staff that he was physically abused by his own father. During his stay in the DSWD, he was so quiet and behaved. He was no longer a naughty child because of fear that people might hurt him dangerously. According to him, “Dati po kasi makulit ako, pero nung pinapalo po ako ng papa ko, tahimik na lang po ako. Baka po kasi kapag makulit ako, baka po may manakit sakin.” (I used to be naughty, but when I was hit by my father, I tend to be quiet. Because when I get naughty, someone would hit me.”) His social communication is too limited and he always mentions the fear and shyness because of what happened to him. He added, “Nahihiya po ako, natatakot na po ako sa ibang tao. Baka po kasi awayin nila ako tapos sakitan.”(I am shy and fear of other people because they might fight and hit me.)

PAC04is a 10 years old, the only son. He was abandoned by his parents. He was left at his uncle’s custody. No one takes care of him. He was in grade three but he needed to stop studying because his uncle does not have enough money to pursue his education. His uncle punished him dangerously. Every time he goes outside their
house to meet his playmates, his uncle would burn his feet using a hot ladle. He was threatened that his feet would be amputated if he did not want to stay at home. According to him, “Tuwing lumabas ako pinapalo nya po ako. Sabi pa nya nga dati pag lumabas ako popupulin raw nya paa ko.” (Every time I go out, he always beats me. He even told me before, if I go out, he would cut my feet”). He too, ran away and was found by DSWD. He stayed in the institution for several months. At first, he was too shy to interact with people. He was shy because the reason for being there was his cruel uncle who loves to beat him and burn his feet. Later, he became adjusted and felt comfortable inside the institution and he does not want to go home anymore. He feared his uncle might hurt him again.

PAC05
Lastly, PAC05 is 10 years old. He is the third child among the five children. He does not know his parents’ whereabouts. He did not finish his elementary education for he needs to collect bottles, plastic and newspaper to support his daily needs. He was left under the custody of his uncle who does not have a permanent job. This condition led PAC05 to keep himself working the whole day. As soon as he arrives home, his uncle solicits his money and he is beaten up if he was not able to produce money. According to him, “Binugbog po ako ng tito ko kasi hindi ko po agad binibigyan ng pera, sinasapak din po ako sa kaliwang mukha ko po.” (I was beaten up by my uncle, because I did not give him my earned money, he slapped my left face.”). He ran away home and he was found by DSWD staff and stayed in the institution. He interacts very fearful and shyly to people. He has no idea of what do DSWD staff would do to him. He stated, “Nung kinuha po nila ako natatakot po ako, hindi ko po kasi alam kung ano gagawin nila sa akin. Tapos nahihiya na din po ako” (When they (DSWD staff) got me, I feared alot because I did not know, what they would they do to me. Then, I was also shy”). When it was explained to him, why he was there, he eventually understood that they wanted to be of help. Sooner, he became friendly and accommodating to people. He too, does not want to come back home. He feared that he would be hurt again. He wants to live a happy life. His seemed to be happy in the institution and he wants to stay there for long.

### Table 2. The type of abuse, the perpetrator, concept formed, goal-setting and the statements of physically and emotionally abused children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE</th>
<th>TYPE OF ABUSED</th>
<th>PERPETRATOR</th>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>GOAL-SETTING</th>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAC01</td>
<td>Physical abused, Educational Neglect, Emotional abused</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Get a job, Be happy</td>
<td>“Kapag lumaki po ako magta-trabaho ako para po makahanap ng bahay.” (When I grow up, I will look for a job so I can get a job)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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“Para po may tirahan na ako at para po din sa pamilya ko.”
(“So that I can have a place to live and also for my own family.”)

“Para po masaya pati po para hindi nila maranasan yung nararanasan ko.”
(So that I will be happy and so they will not experience the way I had experienced.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAC02</th>
<th>Physical abused</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Righteousness</th>
<th>Be kind</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Neglect Emotional abused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Magpakabait lang para hindi na mabugbog.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(“Just be kind not to be beaten up.”)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAC03</th>
<th>Physical abused</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Righteousness</th>
<th>Do not be naughty</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Neglect Emotional abused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Huwag na lang po silang makulit para hindi po sila mabugbog.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(“Do not be naughty so that they will not be beaten up.”)</td>
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<tr>
<th>PAC04</th>
<th>Physical Abused Emotional abused</th>
<th>Uncle</th>
<th>Righteousness</th>
<th>Get a job Buy a house</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Neglect Emotional abused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Magtratrabaho po ako ng mabuti pagdating ng panahon para po magka-bahay na po ako.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(“I will get a good job, sooner, I can buy a house.”)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAC05</th>
<th>Physical Abused Emotional abused</th>
<th>Uncle</th>
<th>Righteousness</th>
<th>Be courageous Study to</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Neglect Emotional abused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Lakasan lang po nila loob nila.”</td>
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</table>
|       |                                  |       |               | (“Just be
Table 2 shows that all children experienced physical abused, emotional abused and educational neglect. Only PAC05 experience child labour, being beaten up if he was not able to provide money earned in the street for his uncle. These male children were beaten by a male adult who has authority and control over their life where they experienced child maltreatment, both verbal and physical. Despite their plight, they showed hope of becoming righteous; they have the courage to change their own life as they set their goals. Three out of five participants, wanted to get a job and get a house to have a place to live. Only PAC05 expressed to go back to schooling because he sees that education will serve as his key to success. To get a job and buy house is an indicator of being successful. Three of them expressed their eagerness to have their own house because they were all deprived and experienced to live in the street. They also longed to have their own families someday and they perceived that this would make them happy.

These children have dreams and they have visions in the future for other children to whom they would like to address their piece of advice such as to be kind, be courageous and not to be naughty not to experience being beaten up. They have this concept of righteousness but due to present condition, they are refrained to exercise it.

**DISCUSSION**

Physical abuse of children is considered as the most common type of abuse, generally it involves inflicting injury through physical violence (Tower, 2013 as cited by Dangan, 2011). Physical abuse is a form of maltreatment. In general term, it refers to the infliction of physical harm on a child by a parent or anyone. It is added that physical abuse is an abuse involving contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical suffering or bodily harm (Dobson & Schick, 2001 as cited by Dangan, 2011).

Based on the foregoing cases, five children experienced physical violence: beating, hitting, slapping, burning and punching from their own father, grandfather and uncle. The reason for doing so is that they always stay outside the house and hang out with...
friends except for PAC05 who was forced to work in order to produce money to give his uncle. Meanwhile, to avoid being hit, they tend to play alone inside the house as what happened to PAC01 and PAC02. There is evidence to suggest that people who are excessively isolated and lonely may be more prone to negative feelings, such as sadness and depression and may also deteriorate physically and intellectually (Mell & Dallos, 2000).

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust which is not accidental injury inflicted by a caregiver. The child may have bruises, welts, broken bones and burns and may also manifest behavioral indicators such as withdrawal and compulsivity. The child is believed to be the victim, while the parent, the perpetrator or accomplice is the one who abused to their child (Tower, 2013). It showed that all of the participants suffered physical abused as early as eight years old and was able to bear the pain for years. In addition, physical abuse often occurs simultaneously with other forms of child maltreatment. An unfortunate but common example of this is when a boy is hit with closed fists by his father while also being little and verbally insulted. In this case, the boy would be considered to have experienced both physically and emotionally abuse (Dobson & Schick, 2001 as cited by Vidallo, 2010). Child abuse not only traumatizes children, but also deprives them of healing interactions (Cozolino, 2002). When the pain was unbearable, they decided to ran away, and live on the street, so they were seen by the DSWD team. When they had seen, children developed fear, and trauma that they would be hurt again by them. Initially, they feel shy and aloof to people, and they avoid to talk about what happened to them and why are they in the street. Rapport is hard to establish because they do not look straight to the eyes, they prefer to look down when talking.

According to Stohlman, (2003) one of the reasons of runaway youth is economic problems: some youth become homeless when their families fall into difficult financial situations resulting from lack of affordable housing, difficulty obtaining or maintaining a job, or lack of medical insurance or other benefits. These youth become homeless with their families, but later can find themselves separated from them and/or living on the streets alone, often due to shelter or child welfare policies.

According to National Conference of State Legislature website, the National Runaway Switchboard estimates that on any given night there are approximately 1.3 million homeless youth living unsupervised on the streets, in abandoned buildings, with friends or with strangers. Homeless youth are at a higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health disabilities, substance abuse, and death. It is estimated that 5,000 unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide.

Furthermore, in a research undertaken by the U.P Canter for Women’s Studies Foundation INC. for CPC IV WID-LAC with funding assistance from United Nations Children’s Fund as cited by Dangan (2011), the reasons why family does violence, especially those directed to the child are the following: (1). Lack of alternatives; children may be economically dependent on the abusers. They may feel too powerless to escape language or cultural barriers may isolate victims from help; (2). Fear and shame, victims may feel helpless, guilty or worthless. They may feel ashamed and
may not trust those who could help them; (3). Isolation, victims often have nowhere to turn, so the abuse remains hidden, (4). Lack of protection; police and courts have often been unable to provide much protection for abuse children, especially those abuse within the confines of their homes; (5). Ignorance; victim may be unaware of the help that is available or may not know his/her rights and does not realize that there are alternatives to living in a violent home; and (6) Hope and love; many people in violent homes love each other and enjoy some good times together. Victims may feel that it is better to suffer that to be separated from loved ones. They keep hoping for improvement. But without help, violence gets worse. The child’s life continually becoming negatively affected not only physically but emotionally and mentally as well (Dangan, 2011). As supported by South Eastern CASA (2012), child physical abuse damages children both physically and emotionally. The longer exposures to physical abuse the more serious the consequences. The initial effects of physical abuse are painful and emotionally traumatic for the child. The long-term consequences of physical abuse impact on the child in their adult life, on their family and on the community. Gluck (2012) declared that the effects of child physical abuse may last a lifetime and can include brain damage and hearing and vision loss, resulting in disability. Even less severe injuries can lead to the abused child developing severe emotional, behavioural, or learning problems. Injuries to a child’s growing brain can result in cognitive delays and severe emotional issues – problems that could adversely affect his or her quality of life forever. Physically abused children who ran away home are products of dysfunctional family that do not establish a good familial relationship and stable economic resources. They were victims of parental neglect, maltreatment, physical and emotional abuse. According to Mararia (2011) relation of family members with each other and how they express their emotions affects the emotional behaviour of the child. On the other hand, despite the parental neglect, the emotional and physical pain, the trauma they experienced, they still see the brighter side of their life. That one day, everything will be better with the collaborative team effort of the DSWD program.

CONCLUSION
Based on the foregoing discussions, it was found out that physically and emotionally abused children who ran away home have tremendously affected their social interaction and emotional well being. They are products of dysfunctional family that do not establish a good familial relationship. They were victims of parental neglect, maltreatment, physical and emotional abuse. It is also shown that they have difficulties in trusting other people. They thought that every time they socialize and meet new people, the abuse would happen again. The stigma brought about by abuse flashback and these children continuously battling to overcome such trauma. Encountering new people triggers their trauma and causing them fear and powerlessness. They do not wish to go back home and encouter the perpetrator who caused them pain. With the help of social worker’s intervention program, children gradually recovered from the trauma and increased their trust to other people. Thus, the active social interactions of abused children had significantly heightened. In fact,
they enjoy each others’ company and based on their self-report, they are all happy under the care of the institution that according to them, help them, take care of them and make them a better person. They became optimistic and they have their own positive views in the next years to come.

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