Women Empowerment and its Relationship to Spousal Violence:
Evidences from the 2017 Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey

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Abstract:

The Philippines has made significant strides in elevating awareness on gender equality as evidenced by women empowerment in the country. Results of the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) showed that a large majority, almost eight in every 10 women age 15 to 49 years make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care. This is a positive development especially in relation to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (Target 5.6.1). This is in line with Goal 5 of gender equality and empowerment all women and girls under the of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Using data from the NDHS 2017, the study further looked at the characteristics of women gaining empowerment and correlated it spousal violence. Twelve thousand five hundred twenty currently married women age 15-49 who completed the domestic violence module were identified for this study. A composite Women Empowerment Index (WEI) was developed based on nine variables: (1) education, (2) employment for cash, (3) control over one's own cash earnings, (4) control over men's earnings, (5) ownership of house or lot, (6) has and uses a bank account, (7) mobile phone ownership, (8) household decision-making, and (9) attitude towards wife-beating. The WEI was classified into three empowerment levels, whereby 42, 24, and 34 percent of married women were in high, moderate, and low empowerment levels, respectively.

Fourteen percent of women reported having experienced spousal violence (either physical and/or sexual) during their lifetime. Bivariate analysis shows that as women empowerment increases in level, the odds of having experienced spousal violence significantly decreases, even after adjusting for age, residence, wealth and number of living children. Programs and policies should also look into the economic status and fertility levels of women as evidenced by the effects of wealth and number of living children on spousal violence.

This study has examined the relationship between women empowerment and spousal violence. High levels of empowerment may result in a lower or the absence of spousal violence. Hence, policies and programs that promotes women empowerment and reduce spousal violence will have a substantial effect on Filipino women and children.

Keywords: NDHS 2017, Women Empowerment Index, Philippines

I. Introduction

The 2017 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) included a module on domestic violence to measure the prevalence of gender-based violence experienced by women of reproductive age in the Philippines at the national and regional levels, by background characteristics of the women, frequency of violence, the onset of marital violence, injuries to women due to spousal violence, help-seeking to stop violence, and sources where women sought help. However, the 2017 NDHS report did not offer a detailed assessment of how the empowerment levels of women influence gender-based violence. Studies carried out in India and African countries have established relationships between women empowerment and gender-based violence. However, women empowerment is contextual and multidimensional in nature, the association between women empowerment, and the experience of violence might or might not follow the same patterns in the various countries studied. Hence, it is important to study these relationships in the Philippine context. This further analysis of data from the

2017 NDHS, therefore, examines the relationship between women empowerment and spousal violence in the Philippines.

The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) Woman's Questionnaire collects data on the general background characteristics of female respondents (e.g., age, education, wealth, and employment status). Moreover, the Woman's Questionnaire also contains data on receipt of cash earnings, the magnitude of a woman's earnings relative to those of her husband, control over the use of her own earnings and those of her husband. These data are all known correlates of women empowerment and gender-role attitudes (Hindin, 2003). In particular, age, education, media exposure, and employment for cash are all potential sources of empowerment, whereas marital and household characteristics, such as age at first marriage, spousal age difference, nuclear family and urban residence, and wealth, are aspects of the setting for empowerment because they reflect the opportunities available to women (Kishor, 2000).

Since 2008, the NDHS have been collecting information on three sets of women empowerment variables that qualify as evidence of empowerment in Kishor's framework (2000): one that measures women's participation in decision-making and two others that measure women's acceptance of gender-role norms that endorse the control of women by men.

There are several cogent and pressing reasons for evaluating, promoting and monitoring the level of women empowerment in a country, not the least of which is that household health and nutrition are generally in the hands of women. Hence, women empowerment is necessary for ensuring their own welfare, as well as the well-being of their households. Empowerment of women is also critical for the development of a country because it enhances both the quality and quantity of human resources available for development. (Kishor and Subaiya, 2008)
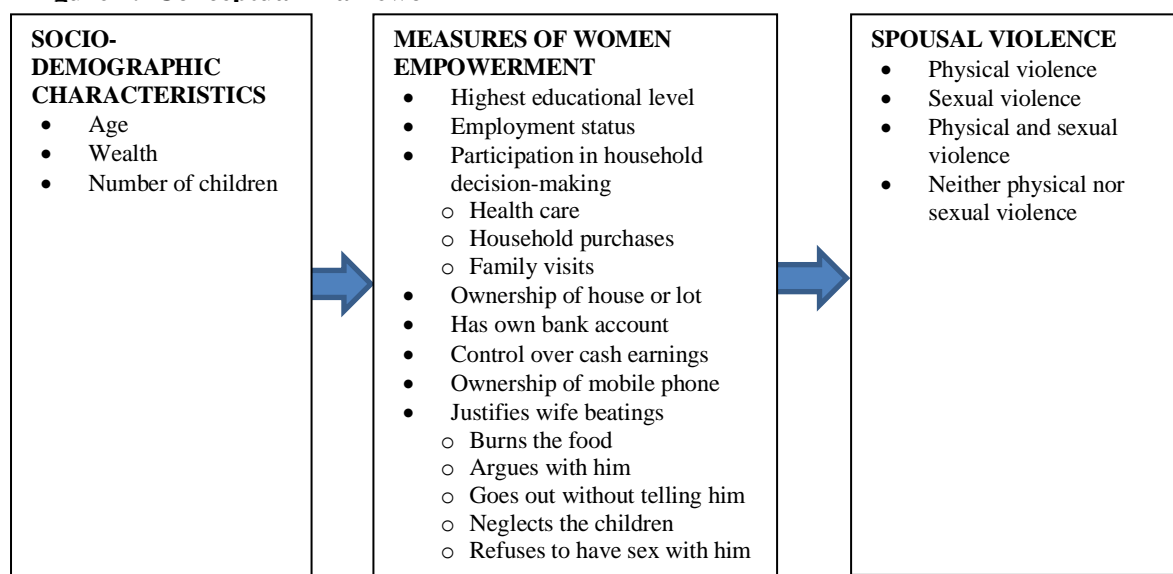
II. Methodology

The study used the dataset from the 2017 NDHS, the sixth demographic and health survey conducted in the Philippines as part of The DHS Program and the 11th national demographic survey conducted since 1968. The NDHS was a nationally representative, cross-sectional, household survey of demographic and health indicators of women, which was implemented by the Philippine Statistics Authority, with technical assistance from ICF in Maryland, USA. A two-stage cluster sampling design (1,250 clusters, 16-25 household per cluster) was stratified by urban and rural residence in 17 regions of the country. The 2017 NDHS also included a Woman's Safety Module designed to collect information on domestic violence. Only one eligible woman per household was selected to receive this module. In households with more than one eligible woman, one respondent was randomly selected. The module can be administered only if complete privacy can be obtained; among the women eligible, less than one percent could not be interviewed because privacy could not be attained.

The focus of this study was information from the domestic violence module of the 2017 NDHS. The survey sample includes a total of 12,520 currently married women age 15-49. The sample was restricted, however, because some indicators used to calculate the women empowerment index are only available for currently married women, and only those who were successfully administered the domestic violence module. The study results include descriptive statistics, and the estimation of the odds ratio (OR) and the 95% confidence interval (CI) calculated with multivariable logistic regression analyses and a confounder's adjustment for the sampling design.

A. Conceptual Framework and Key Variables

This study uses the lifetime experience of spousal violence among currently married women age 15-49 as an outcome of women empowerment.   Figure 1 is the conceptual framework used in this study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	MEASURES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT	SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

• Age
• Wealth
• Number of children
	• Highest educational level
	• Employment status
	• Participation in household decision-making
	  o Health care
	  o Household purchases
	  o Family visits
	• Ownership of house or lot
	• Has own bank account
	• Control over cash earnings
	• Ownership of mobile phone
	• Justifies wife beatings
	  o Burns the food
	  o Argues with him
	  o Goes out without telling him
	  o Neglects the children
	  o Refuses to have sex with him
		• Physical violence
		• Sexual violence
		• Physical and sexual violence
		• Neither physical nor sexual violence

This study also uses a binary summary measure to capture the experience of spousal violence, comparing women who ever experienced either physical or sexual violence to women who have not experienced either. More specifically, violence committed by the current husband/partner (for currently married women) and by the most recent husband/partner (for formerly married women) was measured by asking all ever-married women if their husband/partner ever did the following to them:

- *Physical spousal violence:* push you, shake you, or throw something at you; slap you; twist your arm or pull your hair; punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you; kick you, drag you, or beat you up; try to choke you or burn you on purpose; or threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon;

- *Sexual spousal violence:* physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to, physically force you to perform any other sexual acts you did not want to, or force you with threats or in any other way to perform sexual acts you did not want to.

All variables used in the assessment of women empowerment and spousal violence were based on the Woman's Questionnaire of the 2017 NDHS.

B. Development of the Women Empowerment Index

In the development of the women empowerment index for this study, the following questionnaire items and variable names were used to derive the measurement or score: education (seduc), employment for cash (V741), control over one's own cash earnings (V739), control over men's earnings (V743f), ownership of a house or land (V745a and V745b), has and uses a bank account (V170), mobile phone ownership (V169a), women's participation in household decision-making (V743a, V743b, and V743d), and attitudes toward wife-beating (V744a-V744e).

For each of the indicators above, a binary system was developed, with code "0" for the null value, and a code "1" for the empowerment score. Instead of assigning equal weights to each of the indicators, xtile command from STATA software was employed. Xtile creates a categorical variable that contains categories of nearly the same number of observations corresponding to quantiles. For this study, tertiles or quantile of 3 is used. The analysis yields a factor score for each woman. The resulting score was ordered and used to divide women into three women empowerment index (WEI): 1 "Low", 2 "Medium", 3 "High", representing their relative empowerment level with respect to other women in the study.

C. Statistical Methods, Analysis and Limitations

We utilize percentages, percent distributions, and cross-tabulations for the descriptive analysis, and exploratory regression analyses to show relationships between the indicators and the covariates of empowerment. For the multivariate analysis, a binary logistic regression model is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous, such as women's participation in decision-making. Using STATA, data analysis was carried out in multiple phases. We include the following set of covariates in each regression: age, wealth, and the number of living children.

Aside from that the only data source used is the 2017 NDHS, a limitation of the study is based on a cross-sectional survey conducted at only one point in time. Data from the 2013 NDHS is available and can be used for trend analysis for future study. An additional limitation is that this study is confined to women currently in union at the time of the survey but excludes the spousal violence experience of ever-married women not currently in union. Thus the results cannot be generalized to ever-married women. Furthermore, the analysis does not include emotional violence perpetrated by husbands/partners but instead focuses only on physical and sexual violence.

III. Result

A. Empowerment-Related Characteristics

Sixty-seven percent have completed at least grade 12 level of education (Table 1). Only nine percent own a house or lot; 87 percent earns cash or in-kind; 23 percent have their own bank account; 84 percent own a mobile phone. Forty-three percent of the women sample has control over their own cash earnings. With regards to their participation in household decision-making (if they make decisions alone or jointly with their husband in all three (3) of the following areas: (1) their own health care, (2) major household purchases, and (3) visits to their family or relatives), 85 percent are involved with all household decisions. Only two percent were not involved in any household decisions. In terms of their attitudes to five circumstances that lead to women justifying wife beatings, only 11 percent says beatings were justified with at least one specified reason.

B. Women Empowerment Index

Based on the above scoring methodology, Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of 12,520 women by their level of empowerment. Forty-two percent of women were considered to have a low level of empowerment; 24 percent to have a moderate level, and 34 percent to have a high level of empowerment.

Women below age 35 are in the low level of empowerment compared with women age 35 and

Table 1. Empowerment-Related Characteristics
Percent distribution of currently married women age 15-49 by selected background characteristics: Philippines 2017

Background characteristics	Percentage of women	Number of women
Highest educational attainment		
No education/preschool	1.0	119
Grades 1-12	66.6	8,335
Post-secondary	4.7	594
College or higher	27.7	3,472
Owns house or lot alone or jointly		
Yes	9.1	1,140
No	90.9	11,380
Has own cash earnings		
Yes	87.4	10,939
No	12.6	1,581
Has own bank account		
Yes	23.2	2,902
No	76.8	9,618
Control over cash earnings on their own or jointly		
Yes	42.6	5,336
No	57.4	7,184
Own a mobile phone		
Yes	83.9	10,501
No	16.1	2,019
Involvement in household decision making		
3 decisions	85.0	10,640
1-2 decisions	12.7	1,593
None	2.3	287
Justifies wife beatings with at least one specified reason		
Yes	11.2	1,407
No	88.8	11,113
Total	**100.0**	**12,520**

older. There is about equal distribution of women in the moderate level of empowerment in all age groups. As expected, women belonging to households in the lowest wealth quintile are more likely to be in the low level of empowerment (60%). Women in the highest wealth quintile have higher

empowerment level (69%). Women who have more than six (6) children are less likely empowered compared to women with less than three children.

C. Prevalence of Spousal Violence by Women Empowerment Index

Based on this study, a total of 10,778 women experienced spousal violence in their lifetime. The lifetime experience of physical and sexual violence among currently married women by their husband/partner shows was 14 percent. Among these women, 12 percent experienced physical violence only, five percent experienced sexual violence only, and three percent experienced both physical and sexual abuse in their lifetime (Table 3).

Table 3 also shows that lifetime experience of any one of the two (2) forms of spousal violence studied was lowest (10%) for women at the high empowerment level compared with

Table 2. Women Empowerment Index by Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Percent distribution of currently married women age 15-49 by their level of empowerment, according to selected background characteristics: Philippines 2017

Background characteristics	Level of empowerment			Number of women
	Low	Moderate	High	
Age group				
15-19	75.2	20.9	3.9	300
20-24	56.0	22.7	21.3	1,364
25-29	46.8	24.0	29.2	2,390
30-34	39.4	23.5	37.1	2,503
35-39	35.8	23.1	41.1	2,440
40-44	35.6	25.7	38.8	1,862
45-49	39.2	22.9	37.9	1,661
Wealth quintile				
Lowest	60.3	23.8	15.9	2,694
Second	49.6	24.9	25.6	2,611
Middle	45.3	27.5	27.2	2,535
Fourth	34.0	26.3	39.7	2,515
Highest	16.5	14.3	69.2	2,164
Number of living children				
0	34.3	20.5	45.3	1,011
1-2	40.1	23.0	36.9	6,207
3-4	42.5	26.0	31.5	3,787
5-6	53.1	21.9	25.0	1,071
More than 6	59.7	23.2	17.1	444
Total	**42.2**	**23.6**	**34.2**	**12,520**

women at the moderate or low empowerment levels. These findings indicate a possible association between women empowerment and the experience of spousal violence. The chi-square test carried out to examine the association between women empowerment and women's experience of spousal violence confirmed the association.

The experience of spousal violence – whether physical, sexual, both physical and sexual, and either physical or sexual violence - does not differ between women's age (Table 4). As household wealth increases, women are less likely to report that they experienced physical or sexual violence by their husband. In contrast, as the number of living children increase, the more likely the woman will report experience of spousal violence.

Table 3. Prevalence of Spousal Violence by Women Empowerment Index

Percentage distribution of currently married women age 15-49 who ever experienced spousal violence, according to their level of empowerment: Philippines 2017

Levels of empowerment	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical and sexual violence	Physical or sexual violence	Number of women
Low	15.7	5.5	3.9	17.3	4,598
Moderate	11.5	4.5	3.2	12.8	2,533
High	8.6	3.5	2.3	9.8	3,648
Total	**12.3 ****	**4.6 ****	**3.2 ****	**13.7 ****	**10,778**

Note: ** p<0.01

A multivariate logistic regression model was carried out to examine the relationship between women empowerment level and the women's experience of physical and sexual violence. Table 5 shows that when we compute the unadjusted regression model, the odds of having experienced physical or sexual violence is lower for women in the moderate and high levels of empowerment. But if we take into account the effects of socio-demographic characteristics such as the age of the women, her household wealth status and the number of living children she has, the women empowerment index remains significant. Aside from age of the woman, each of the other factors in the model, household wealth, and the number of living children, were significantly associated with women's experience of physical and sexual abuse.

IV. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations:

The Philippines has made improvements in elevating awareness of gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women. Since 2008, the NDHS had examined at the national level gender-based violence experienced by women. This section summarizes the major findings of the study, and the association of women's empowerment and spousal violence with selected health outcomes.

A. On Women Empowerment

In developing a composite Women Empowerment Index (WEI), nine variables were used for the study. Using these variables resulted in a different distribution of empowerment levels compared to that in the 2017 NDHS. The analysis revealed that four out of ten women are empowered at a low level. Filipino women who are highly empowered belong to women age 35-39, are at the highest wealth index and are women who have few or no living children. On the other hand, women who are under age 20, belonging to households in the lowest wealth quintile and who have more than 6 living children, have the lowest levels of empowerment.

Women under age 20 belonging to the low level of empowerment are likely due to their dependence on their husband/partner, with less engagement in earning cash due to lower access to education, and less participation in decision-making. The fact that women with no children are more likely to be highly empowered than women with 6 or more children suggests that they may be better educated, have better employment, and involved in all household decisions. The proportion of women earning cash is decreasing as women get older and the number of children increases, probably reflecting the economic viability of women in our society that are imposed on women. Ownership of house or land is low among all characteristics, but lowest among the younger women and women with 6 or more children.

B. On Women Empowerment and Spousal Violence

This study shows that women's lifetime experience of physical and/or sexual spousal violence is 14 percent among currently married women; 12 percent experienced physical violence, 5 percent sexual violence, and 3 percent experienced both forms of spousal violence. The study revealed that the greater the number of living children, the lower the empowerment level and the higher the prevalence of spousal violence. We take note also that women belonging to households in the lowest quintile are also have a

Table 4. Spousal Violence by Selected Background Characteristics

Percentage distribution of currently married women age 15-49 who ever experienced spousal violence, according to selected background characteristics: Philippines 2017

Background characteristics	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical and sexual violence	Physical or sexual violence	Number of women
Age group					
15-19	11.5	2.9	0.9	13.5	317
20-24	15.7	4.9	3.3	17.4	1,209
25-29	11.7	4.3	2.8	13.1	1,904
30-34	12.2	4.0	3.0	13.3	1,939
35-39	11.5	5.1	3.5	13.1	2,017
40-44	12.9	5.1	4.0	14.0	1,685
45-49	11.3	4.6	3.3	12.6	1,707
Wealth quintile					
Lowest	17.5	6.4	4.8	19.0	2,176
Second	14.6	6.2	4.3	16.5	2,186
Middle	12.3	5.8	4.2	13.9	2,194
Fourth	11.3	2.2	1.3	12.2	2,252
Highest	5.4	2.1	1.4	6.1	1,970
Number of living children					
0	7.6	2.3	1.1	8.9	917
1-2	10.9	3.8	2.7	12.1	5,108
3-4	13.6	5.0	3.5	15.1	3,251
5-6	17.1	7.5	5.7	19.0	1,047
6 or more	17.4	8.2	6.3	19.3	455
Total	**12.3**	**4.6**	**3.2**	**13.7**	**10,778**

Table 5. Association of Women Empowerment Index and Physical or Sexual Violence

Odds ratio and 95% confidence interval of the association of women empowerment index and spousal physical or sexual violence: Philippines 2017

Background characteristics	Unadjusted Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval Lower Limit	95% Confidence Interval Upper Limit	Adjusted Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval Lower Limit	95% Confidence Interval Upper Limit
Women Empowerment Index						
Low	1.000	-	-	1.000	-	-
Moderate	-0.358 **	-0.547	-0.168	0.763 **	0.629	0.927
High	-0.662 **	-0.851	-0.473	0.716 **	0.577	0.887
Age group						
15-19				1.000	-	-
20-24				1.325	0.724	2.423
25-29				0.933	0.538	1.617
30-34				0.941	0.533	1.661
35-39				0.909	0.514	1.606
40-44				0.931	0.526	1.649
45-49				0.823	0.465	1.459
Wealth quintile						
Lowest				1.000	-	-
Second				0.887	0.730	1.079
Middle				0.749 *	0.590	0.949
Fourth				0.666 **	0.510	0.870
Highest				0.352 **	0.248	0.500
Number of living children						
0				1.000	-	-
1-2				1.393	0.878	2.210
3-4				1.861 **	1.206	2.871
5-6				2.273 **	1.439	3.591
More than 6				2.099 **	1.279	3.443

*Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01*

higher prevalence of spousal abuse. In designing and implementing programs, we can further investigate the relationship between spousal violence and the economic situation of the household, including the woman's husband/partner and his educational level.

Looking at the multivariate analysis, the result shows that as the empowerment level increases, the experience of spousal violence decreases. The effects of age, household wealth and the number of living children are controlled in the multivariate regression model, women empowerment is significantly associated with the experience of spousal violence. Therefore, programs aiming to empower women and reduce spousal violence need to design interventions that targets women in rural areas, socioeconomic status and fertility behavior.

This study succeeded in examining the relationship of women empowerment and spousal violence to selected health outcomes and service utilization. Positive health outcomes are associated with high levels of empowerment and the absence of spousal violence. The age, household wealth and number of living children, as well as education, all had an effect on the empowerment level and spousal violence. Despite the limitations, the study had successfully showed that women empowerment has implications on spousal violence. Hence, policies and programs that promote women empowerment and interventions on reduction of spousal violence incorporated to education, economy and health will have a substantial effect to Filipino women and children.

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