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**A JOURNEY TO HEALING: LIFE STORIES OF CHILD ABUSE  
SURVIVORS IN COTABATO CITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to describe and validate the life stories of child abuse survivors in Cotabato City. Data were gathered through individual in-depth interviews which were translated and analyzed using the qualitative method. The data revealed that survivors of child abuse experienced a happy childhood and harmonious family relationship before the abuse took place. Their needs were provided not until they faced economic constraints and were forced to remove from their immediate family. As a result, they had to endure a difficult life and experienced verbal and physical abuse from their family and relatives. Thus, this caused them to feel sad, unloved, unworthy. Despite living a hard life, they were able to manage their situation. They sought help from friends and relatives, shared their feelings to a friend and found a new hobby.

*Keywords: Child, child abuse, survivor, healing*

## **Introduction**

Children are very important component of society. They are the laughter, inspiration and are said to be one of the most precious individuals in the world. According to Republic Act No. 7610 also known as Special Protection of Children against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act of Philippine Constitution, a child “refers to a person below eighteen (18) years of age or those over but are unable to fully take care of themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition” (Sec.3 p. 1).

Children are incapable to take care of themselves. They are among the most vulnerable members of the society and are often subjected to worst forms of abuse. The existence of child abuse is undeniably a problem in the society that cannot be taken for granted. Children at a very young age have been opened to harm and are unable to protect themselves from various forms of abuses. Child abuse is a social and public health problem. It can lead to a wide range of adverse consequences for children and young people (Lamont, 2010).

According to World Health Organization (2016), Child abuse occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context

of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Exposure to intimate partner violence is also sometimes included as a form of child abuse (p. 7).

Children are the most in need of protection against abuses but then, in reality, they are the most helpless group of individuals and are often failed to be protected. Every year, there are 41,000 estimated homicide deaths in children under 15 years of age. This number underestimates the true extent of the problem, as a significant proportion of deaths due to child abuse are incorrectly attributed to burns, drowning and other causes. International studies reveal that a quarter of all adults report having been physically abused as children (WHO, 2016).

Child abuse is one of the main problems in the country. As many as 2,147 cases of child abuse were reported to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in the first quarter of this year, more than one-fourth of which was of a sexual nature (Yap, 2016).

In Region XII-SOCCSKSARGEN, as reported in the Journal of the Philippines-National Statistics Office in the month of October 2010, the said Region has 162 cases of child abuse in a month.

Hence, this study was conducted to obtain information about the experiences and insights of individuals that have been survivors of

child abuse. It is in this aspect that the researchers find the urgency to conduct this study.

### **Research Questions**

The general purpose of this study was to determine the experiences and insights of individuals that have been survivors of child abuse.

More specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What was the profile of the participants?
2. What were the experiences of the participants before the abuse?
3. How did the participants experience child abuse?
4. How did they cope with their situation?

### **Research Methodology**

This study used a qualitative method using in- depth interview. The interview was focused on the participant's personal encounters, feelings, and views as it would answer the research problem. There were three (3) participants for this study. These participants were male and female ages ranging from 19-25 years old who were survivors of child abuse and residing in Cotabato City.

This study was conducted in Cotabato City. Specifically, it was conducted in Buliao 2, Mother Barangay Poblacion, Buliao 1, Mother Barangay Poblacion,

and Barangay Pedro Colina Hill, Rosary Heights 1. This study was intended for individuals who were survivors of child abuse.

This used the purposive sampling technique because the participants were individuals who were survivors of child abuse and were identified based on the criteria: male or female who have been survivors of child abuse and the abuse must happen at least 5 years ago from the conduct of this study.

Interview guide questions were the research instrument used to gather the information needed for this study. The interview guide was composed of self-made and validated open-ended questions that were asked to the participants. It was composed of five parts. In part one, the participants were asked about their profile; part two was focused on the life of the participants before the abuse; part three was about the Abuses Encountered by the participants; part four was where the participants were asked what did they do to overcome the abuse; and in the fifth part pertained to the participants' insights. Each conducted interview was tape recorded as a form of documentation for transcriptions of data.

The researchers used in-depth interview as the method for gathering the needed information. The following steps were followed by the researchers during the data gathering, firstly, the researchers looked for prospective participants in Cotabato City, then once the participants were identified, they coordinated to the Barangay Officials in the places where the identified participants were residing. A courtesy call was made

through paper coordination with the Barangay officials and identified participants. The researchers presented an informed consent to the participants of the said study and they were asked for their permission to participate in the study and answer the interview guide questions. The identified participants were assured that all gathered information will be treated with confidentiality.

The use of tape recorder during the interview was informed to the participants. In this study, the participants gave their feedback, experiences and insights as child abuse survivor. The researchers have formulated open-ended questions that provided direction for the in-depth interview.

The researchers analyzed the data gathered through reading the transcribed recorded interview. The analyzed data was presented based on the flow of the statement of the problem. The researchers listened to the recordings and made notes then the recorded data were transcribed. The data transcribed were coded, combined and all similar themes were identified for data analysis.

All information and data gathered were analyzed thematically to gain the most appropriate information about the experiences and insights of the survivors of child abuse. Thematic analysis is a widely use qualitative data analysis method. This method emphasizes the participant's experiences and insights as the paramount objective of the study.

This study observed research ethics to prevent, reduce, or undo harm to research participants (Davis, 2010). Participants were informed on the purpose and objectives of the study and only those with confirmation were scheduled for the interview. Participants were reassured of confidentiality with regards to this activity and personality. In this study the names of the participants were cancelled but pseudo names were used instead, in other words all the names mentioned in the narration were not real but code names only. The researchers cautiously observed permission to ruminant participation as Davis (2010) stated that penalty, coercion, or shame must be avoided in case the participant decided not to join the interview.

## **Results and Discussion**

The following are the life stories of three in-depth participants. These exposed the participant's personal background, life-circumstances before the abuse, abuses encountered, ways in dealing the abuse and insights from their experiences.

### **LIFE STORY 1**

Faisal is 25 years of age and a resident of Buliao 1, Mother Barangay Poblacion, Cotabato City. He is an Islam believer, married and has 4 children. Faisal is the one looking after his family because his wife is an Overseas Filipino Worker in Saudi Arabia. He is a third year high school graduate, working as a sikad driver and has been doing sidelines as glass ware vendor and a paid singer.

At the age of two, he was adopted by his biological father's friend living in Taviran who could not bear a child. He was with his adoptive family for years but after living with the couple, he was given to his adoptive father's mother because his adoptive father decided that they wanted a girl as their child. Faisal lived in the house of his adoptive grandmother where he made lots of adjustments as he was afraid that his new family might not accept him.

As can be gleaned from the data, he revealed that he had not met his biological mother as a child and he could not remember his parents' faces because he was adopted as early as two years old by his biological father's friend who treated him as his own child and had provided him clothes and shelter. His adoptive father has given him a family that he never had.

He was treated like a family by his adoptive father. Since he was the first and only adopted child of the couple, he felt the love of parents with his adoptive family. Faisal narrated about how his adoptive father would buy him toys from work when he would come home. He still could remember his favorite adobo cooked by his adoptive mother and how they ate meals together.

*“Mana kagay bun e kabkatadem ko sa mapya a nanggula laki kanu lu ako pan baguli kanu ama ku antu,”* (I remembered all the good moments I had when I was still with my adoptive father like it was just yesterday.)



He was raised by his adoptive parents until he was given to his grandmother at the age of five when the couple realized and decided that they wanted a girl as their child so his guardianship was given to his adoptive father's mother. It was hard for Faisal to leave his life with his family and start a new with his grandmother. He made lots of adjustments when he moved to his grandmother. At an early age, he did everything to go with what his grandmother wanted because of fear that his new family might dislike him.

Faisal was entirely raised by his grandmother together with the grandsons of his adoptive grandmother because his grandfather died before he was adopted. When asked about his life with his grandmother, he said, "*Mapya bun kasi kanu paganay, paganay a kanot ku, kinang Grade 1 ko sa Central na mapya bun e trato nilan sa laki. Mapya bun e kabpanguyag nilan sa laki, papegkanen ako nilan bun,*" (It was good because when I was little and I entered grade school they treated me well. They raised me and provided me food.)

He confirmed that his life before the abuse was good for he was treated by his adopted family well and had supported his studies. He said that his family treated him well for they did not neglect his basic needs for food. He was given a chance to go to school and was provided with the basic material needs as a child.

But despite all the good times he had with his adoptive family, Faisal was still haunted by his need to find his biological parents

because ever since he was adopted, he did not meet his parents and he was just told that the father who raised him was a friend of his biological father. He often thought about his real parents and kept on asking about them to his grandmother but his grandmother did not disclose any information.

When he was grown up and he was already in Grade 6, he finally had the courage to ask his adoptive father about his biological parents. The truths about his parents' identity were disclosed by his adoptive father and he told him where he could find his real father. Faisal had the chance to meet his father and talked to him. Before the death of the latter, Faisal was able to meet him. But he never met his biological mother.

With this, Faisal was again left on the hand of his grandmother who raised him and provided him a shelter. He was in the guardianship of his grandmother until he was in high school.

Based on the study conducted by the Child Welfare League of America (2014), the family is the main link of the child in the society. It is the one that is expected to provide protection and genuine love to the child. Thus, they have the power to prevent various forms of abuse to the child, to shield them from the cruelty of the world and guide them way back to their safe haven.

Faisal's life in his grandmother's hands was changed when he started schooling. He was 9 years old when he entered grade school. He

started his schooling late because he had a weak body when he was a child. Faisal narrated that the abuse started during his schooling days. When he would verbalize that he wanted to rest from school, he was hit by his grandmother.

*“Sabap sa kabangagi ko paganay. Anantu a diyaku bu anan pakapangagi a bamiten ako nilan,”* (It was because of my schooling. Sometimes, if I would be absent from school they beat me up.)

He was often physically abused by his grandmother and cousins for being in school. He was punished using the head of a leather belt, broom stick but often physically abused by making his both hands intertwined, then it was forcedly pressed together to illuminate great pain for Faisal.

With this, Faisal felt like he was carrying all the sufferings in the world. He often stayed in his room after he was beaten up and waited for his grandmother to leave or do something. When he would have heard that his grandmother was not around, he still would not feel fully relax and comfortable because if his grandmother was not around, he was physically hit and beaten up by his adoptive grandmothers' grandsons whom he considered as his cousins. They bullied him and sometimes, hit him without reasons.

He was also called names and had been cursed by his grandmother. When asked how often he was abused, he said,

*“Halimabawa, mayaba uman isa a gay, anantu mapya e kwana nin sa laki pagkapilagay antu pameten ako nin, anantu pameten ako nin sa da sabap nin anan. Anantu aden gakineg ku sa lekanilan, intuba ka baninta ta nilan mayay gasugat ka tigin na mulka,”* (For example, one day my grandmother was treating me well then after days she would beat me up again. Sometimes, she was beating me without reasons and I would hear them talk about me. They were talking bad about me and cursing me.)

Faisal’s life in his grandmother was not easy. He had difficulty with his situation and the abuse he experienced in the hands of his new adoptive family. Feeling lonely and devastated with his situation, Faisal thought about killing himself. *“Nan namana imatayan ko den i-ginawa ko sabap sa tuba,”* (I wanted to kill myself because of all those things.) He was hurt and he questioned himself on why did the people whom he considered as family had done terrible things to him.

With all the emotions he had inside, Faisal had spoken to someone about the abuse to free his emotions. He told someone about the abuse but no one had step up to help him or to stop his abusers. Their neighborhood knew about the abuse he experienced because they were also witnesses of it but then no one had done anything to help him from the abuse. He confirmed, *“Aden bun banudtulan ta a uged na di nin bun bedtalun sa tuba bametay sa laki,”* (There were people whom I told about the abuse but then they did not tell it to the persons who abused me.)

The abuse continued from grade school until he entered high school. He was still physically maltreated by his grandmother during his high school days. His grandmother would still punish him severely even if he had not done anything wrong. There were times when his grandmother together with his cousins would put him in a sack and let him stay inside for hours.

With all the abuse Faisal had experienced, he thought about running away from home. Away from his grandmother and his cousins but his gratitude to the family who brought him up was more compelling and it was the only thing that kept him from running away. He stayed in his grandmother's side and every time he was physically beaten; Faisal would cry out his emotions. *"Ibelyu ku bu anan sa emosyon matag masakit salaki na ibegliyu ku bu sekanin. Ibagulyang ku bu sekanin"* (I would just release all my emotions even if it hurt me. I used to just cry it out.)

Faisal's another way of releasing all his emotions and one thing that had helped him with all his past experiences was singing. Singing is his passion and his favorite leisure time. He spared time in going to Videoke houses to sing his favorite songs. Through this, he released his feelings and it somehow helped him lessen the pain. *"Sa kapedsingal kubu ananto ibelyu i langun na sakit na ginawa ko, mapya bun I kangginawa ko meka pakadsingal ako"* (Sometimes, I released all my emotions through music. I feel good every time I sing).

Faisal diverted the abuses he encountered in music. He made music as one of his ways to deal with the abuse. He joined different singing contests. He showed his talent not just locally but also national. With his singing skills, he was once featured in a television show in the country. As he was walking his journey in singing, he found his partner and got married at the age of 18. This had become a way for Faisal to be away from his abusers. At the age of eighteen, Faisal entered into marriage life and he moved out from his grandmother's place, away from the place where he had painful experiences. Faisal started a new life with his family and lived with his in-laws house that treated him like a family. *"Tu den ba talaga e kinatelen nin na niya den ba kinapangaluma ku banya. Eka isa na niya den ba kina asenso ko anya sa kadsengal sengal."* (The abuse really stopped when I got married and also when I became successful in music.)

Faisal did not have any professional intervention from anyone. The abuse just stopped as he moved out in his grandmother's house. He said he used to talk to himself in front of the mirror to motivate him every day. He disclosed that it was one of the things he did that kept him to survive all the pain he experienced. He mentioned, *"Tinigkeran ku den ka tig ku aden bun gay a makasurvive ako bun,"* (I endured everything and I said to myself there will come a time that I could survive this.)

According to Faisal, patience was something he had all the time. He coped with all his painful experiences through different ways but patience was what he had to survive all the struggles he faced.

Adult survivors of child abuse may never forget what happened to them, but they can live healthy, and empowered lives. According to the National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (NAASCA) one way to cope with past child abuse is to talk about it. Whether counseling is an option or not, talking about it with support groups, close friends, and loved ones can help ease the pain.

Faisal was asked about his realizations after his experiences and he said that he learned to have patience in life. Patience for what a person is going through and patience in the situation you are in. He said that he realized how important it is for any person who is dealing with abuse to have patience in one's life.

Faisal disclosed that there were times that he could not stop himself from physically hitting his children to discipline them. When he was asked how he disciplined his children, he said, "*Lima bu. Nakaranas ta bun kanu wata ta sa bameten ta bun*" (I only use my hands. I also experience to be physically beaten as a child so I know the feeling).

The cycle of violence is the repetitive nature of perpetrator's actions that hinder a victim's ability to leave an abusive relationship. Violence usually happens in a cyclical pattern. It can be a repeated act of violence. And as time goes by, the level of violence may increase. This cycle of

violence can occur when children who either experienced maltreatment or witnessed violence between their parents and caregivers learn to use physical punishment as a means of parenting their own children (Child Information Gateway, 2009).

Faisal showed that not all survivors of a child abuse can be abusive as a parent. He learned to stop himself from physically abusing his child and giving them extreme punishments. Faisal disciplined his children with his hands but not through the extent of physically beating them like how he was used to be hit when he was a child because he knew the feeling of being physically abused and he did not want his children to have the same experience as he had. He narrated that his past experiences taught him to endure all painful situations and to always have patience.

According to the World Health Organization (2008), the majority of individuals who experienced maltreatment as a child are not violent towards their own children. But some parents may need psychotherapy and counseling to overcome their adverse childhood experiences. In order for them also not to do the things they had encountered during their childhood which were the nightmare of their past and the struggles they had passed.

The researchers asked Faisal for his last statement and advices to anyone who is facing the same situation as he was when he was a child and he said, "*Niya ku bu madtalu salkanilan na apiya ngen e kabeg api-*



*api nilan sarkanilan, syempre di bun mawa su katigkel. Endu kaisa na apya makenteng na pameten silan na rukes nilan na di nilan den ged dibdiben. Ilyu nilan makin para di silan makapagitung. Mangilay silan sa kalimpangan na ginawa nilan a mapya.”.* (All I could say to them is that no matter how people may insult you, patience should not be forgotten. And another thing is that when your parents, disciplined you by hitting you, do not keep it on your own. They should release their emotions. Find a hobby that can divert their attention and satisfy themselves).

Faisal added that anyone should not keep hatred in their hearts. Forgiveness should be given to people even to those who had wronged you. He stated that he already forgave his deceased grandmother. He was now living together with his children and mother-in-law. Sometimes, he visits his adoptive parents every time he has free time. He was now focusing in earning money through driving and singing to provide for his family’s needs. Since he was once featured in a television show, it helped him to have more requests for singing. He is enjoying his life now supporting his family and doing his passion, which is singing.

There are some factors that can affect the consequences of child abuse but not all children exposed to similar experiences of abuse are affected in the same way. For some children and young people, the effects of child abuse may be chronic and debilitating; others may experience less adverse outcomes (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007).

## **LIFE STORY 2**

Noel is 20 years old and a resident of Barangay Pedro Colina Hill, Rosary Heights 1. He has three brothers and he is the third in the four siblings. He is a graduate of Communication Arts. He also took up Bachelor of Science in Marketing Management but was not able to finish it due to lack of financial support. He is a consistent honor student from kindergarten up to his college years. He graduated in elementary and high school as Valedictorian. He was a consistent Dean's Lister and he graduated in college with flying colors. He was consistently on top of the class as he wanted to level his father's expectation.

He worked really hard and studied most of the time because he did not want to disappoint his father. He stated that his father's perception was that education will be the key to continue the success of their family that was why he was pressured to always be on top. His mother is a Catholic while his father is a Maranao. Despite the difference between his parents' religion, both had accepted each other. Noel's mother did not convert into Islam and his father respected his mother's decision. No one in the family including him followed Islam and his father respected their decision.

Noel's family was well-off. Money was not an issue in their family when he was a child. He lived comfortably with his three siblings together with his parents. They had family trips together and they enjoyed their family bonding. He was with his parents most of the time. He was second to the youngest but he did not feel inequality in terms of

his parents' treatment with his other siblings. He lived comfortably as they were given all they needed. His father was a generous man in giving them gifts. Noel's father earned his first million at the age of 24 and so raising them financially was easy for their family.

He said, "*So, everything was really good before. We were actually very wealthy.*" As they had the money, they have nothing much to worry about. Noel felt like his life was in the right places because he had a complete family, loving parents and siblings. They did not bother to think about financial problems. He enjoyed every moment he spent with his family--their talks and just the time being together.

Noel was his father's apple of the eye because he believed that he inherited his intelligence and capacities as an individual. With this, his father expected him to do like him or surpass him in the field of academics. He studied hard to be always on top and not disappoint his father.

In his schooling, he was supported by his mother. He remembered that his mother was the very first person who would congratulate him in his achievements. His mother was the one who encouraged him to do well in his studies without expecting anything from him while his father, though he treated him well, in terms of his academics, he felt pressured from him.

At an early age, he learned to adjust to his father's expectations. He worked hard to maintain his grades and to make his parents proud.

He joined several extra-curricular in school and did everything he could to always be on top.

Noel's view of happy family was shattered when his father retired from work at the age of 28 after earning his first million. When his father retired, their money was used by his father to his friends and bought everything he wanted. His father had not realized that it might be their last million so he wasted their money. This became one of the reasons for the abuse. Noel's sexual preference was also one of the contributing reasons that triggered the abuse. His father could not accept his sexual preference. He is a gay but he could not show it to anyone, not in front of his father because of fear that he might beat him up.

According to Noel, *"It just so happened that what triggered the violence is the economic scarcity, the financial crisis, as well as my sexual preference. Since we don't have money anymore, he tries to redirect his focus on us, he's children. He's always angry, he's furious, he's always mad. He burst it out to us, most especially to me because I am the one who's different from four siblings"*

Noel's sexual preference was a truth his father could not accept. He had difficulty in hiding his sexual preference. He hid it for a long time and he acted like a true man in front of his father and relative. So when his father knew that he was gay, he was beaten up to death for it. And since then, even if his father knew about his sexual preference, he still could not act freely about it because he feared that he might be beaten

up for it again. He was forced to act like a man and act the way his father wanted.

He was also pressured by his father to always be on top of his class. Despite all his hard work to make his father proud, he was still not appreciated. What he wanted was to have all the awards in every graduation. He revealed *“I should have no grades below 90 in every subject. And I can remember when I had a grade of 88, I was beaten up so bad that I can’t even walk. My face got bruises and my body was so soar. And that happened even in my graduation. I graduated valedictorian when I was elementary but my father still didn’t go up on stage because he was not happy that I haven’t got all the academic subjects. Because he wants me to get everything”*

He was often the one that was physically hit and beaten by his father for several reasons such as his studies and sexual preference. He stated that the abuse was very frequent. *“I would say my body totally adjusted na every time my father beats me with sinturon. I experienced everything from bamboo na kahoy, from suntok, from walis. (I would say my body totally adjusted to it every time my father beats me with belt. I experienced everything from wooden bamboo, punches and soft broom)*

With all the beatings he received from his father, Noel got used to the abuse so when asked about his feelings every time he would be beaten up. He said, *“Parang di na ako naano. Pero nasanay na rin ako. Kasi we go home parang ok, if wala kaming dalang sigarilyo, if wala*

*kaming dalang inumin for him, ayan na, ayan na , ready na kami dyan. I don't even cry anymore" (It like I don't know what to feel anymore. I became so used to it because every time we go home without anything we could give to our father like cigarette, we ready ourselves for some beatings. I don't even cry anymore.)*

Noel was asked if someone knew about the abuse and he said that their neighbours were aware of the physical abuse that happened but they chose to remain silent since most of the people in their neighbourhood were afraid of his father due to their religion. According to him, *"You know that's the stereotype. When you are Muslim, people will be afraid of you. So, when they hear about our screams, our cries, they just try to neglect and ignore it because they are afraid of it."*

Noel's mother and grandparents were also aware about the abuse but they could not do anything about it because of fear for his father. After they were bankrupt, his father's personality had changed and even the way he treated his mother. Noel disclosed that during the time when his father was physically abusing them, his mother was his first line of defense. She was the one who defended him from his father. *"But it came to the point where my mom can't even take it anymore because when the chair was thrown and was patted into my body. My mom was the one who try to defend me."*

With this incident, Noel talked to his mother and told her to leave his father. He stated, *“I was thirteen when I gave my mommy the money that I earned from school so they can leave and separate na,”*

He gave his mother all the money he earned as a working student to let his mother have a chance to start her life as they separate from his father. He made this decision at a very young age because of his concern for his mother’s situation if they stayed with his father. With all the struggles he faced during the abuse, Noel tried to commit suicide because of the devastation he felt. He took some pills that he found on his cabinet. He was ready to die and leave the world to escape from his pain but he was so shocked when he woke up and he even felt more energetic.

*“I was so shocked when I woke up I didn’t even expect that I would wake up, but I woke up. At 7 pm I felt so relieved, I felt like I was so full of energy, only to found out that the medicines that I took was actually a vitamin C.”* This incident made Noel to be grateful to the Almighty. He cried hard after he woke up and he thanked God for another chance. Unable to carry all the burdens he had at home, Noel he left home at 16 year old. He just graduated from high school when he left and went to Davao City to be away from his father and to let his heart find peace. When he was asked if someone helped him, He said,

*“Yes, someone helped me, it was actually one of the most special people that I have right now, who really help me a lot because when I was here I really don’t have anyone”.*

In an early age, he risked going to a place where had no one to leave the city where his family was residing to find a peace of mind. He talked to his trusted friends about his experiences and he cried a lot to let out all his emotions when he first arrived in Davao City. With the help of some friends whom he met in the new City, he was able to start a new life and find job.

But then he was not able to run from his past. Noel shared that one night while facing the monitor of his computer, all the abuse he encountered flashed out on the screen and everything came back.

*“And my jaws starting to be locked. I can’t even talk. I..I started to palpitate. I can’t breathe anymore that’s when the trauma came back”.*

He was rushed into the hospital and was provided with medicines. Then his doctor said he needed to visit a psychologist so that he could be helped. He went to a psychologist to ask for help. He had sessions with a professional psychologist for his trauma. After some sessions, he was able to conquer his fears of remembering the memories of the abuse he encountered.

Survivors of child abuse are prone to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the American Academy of Child and



Adolescent Psychiatry some of the symptoms of child PTSD include frequent memories and/or talk of the traumatic event, fear of dying, bad dreams, repeated physical or emotional symptoms whatever the child is confronted with the event, loss of interest in activities, regular physical complaints such as headache or stomachache, extreme emotional reactions, trouble sleeping, irritability, anger, violence, difficulty in concentrating and increased vigilance or alertness to their environment.

Once a child has grown to be an adult, symptoms of PTSD can become more subtle as he or she learns how to cope with this in day-to-day life (Babbel, 2011). PTSD can mimic other disorders such as depression, anxiety, hyper vigilance, problems with alcohol and drugs, sleep issues, and eating disorders are just few. Noel had shared some of his ways in coping with the abuse.

*“Okay, first thing is to always acknowledge your grief, and embrace the pain, there’s no other way that you can move out from that misery than to face it and honor it. It means you have to give it time, we have to let it set for a moment and let it go out. Think about all the memories, let it flush out, don’t think of it and tomorrow is not, is not go, is not that easy to flush it out, and the next time talk to someone, cry it out, don’t ever be afraid to always share it to people that you trust, and when I say trusts, only few, because they might use it against you. So, third one is to always pray and have relationship with God, cliché as it might sound but it is really true, so*

*always communicate and always reunite with the people that you love and again, forgive, just forgive.”*

Noel had emphasized the need to forgive and reunite with the people you love so that you could move on from painful experiences and start anew. Forgiveness was one of the ways of Noel to cope with the abuse.

Noel shared his realization after he experienced the abuse. His painful experiences had greatly helped him in achieving success in his life. Despite the abuse he encountered in the hands of his father, he took it as a positive experience and an inspiration to give his best in life. He said, *"I think part of really my success now, part of, a huge part of my success is really because of the pain. I don't really take the possibility is my greatest... step to achieving this. But one of the greatest things that I did and I really took into consideration is really embracing your flaws, and always, always put in mind that when someone does bad to you, it doesn't mean that he is bad. You always have to see the light in everything. You always forgive in the end of the day, always forgive. There's no other success in life then just to be able to sleep at peace, having your own solace and being able to breath freely that whenever you go to places you're not scare that people might hurt you, you let go all of the pain and you use it as your greatest advantage that the next time this, if this happen to me again I know what to do, that's success for me".*

Forgiving was his tool for moving on in the abuse he experienced. Noel's perspective of life has good effect on his life today for he used his experience as a weapon to become stronger. When asked about how his past experiences affected his life today. He said,

*"Ahm effects, ahm yeah, good effects not bad, ahm right now I can say I'm smarter, I'm tougher and I'm bolder. I'm not afraid of anything, anything that might happen to me, I can conquer everything by myself, because I know that I've already experienced everything from the past years and I'm very happy that this happen to me when I was still young, I cannot imagine if this could happen to me if I'm now I'm not in my age and ten years from now it still happens to me I cannot imagine that. So right now, at my age when I am, when I am now building myself, my career, I'm looking forward having a smooth bright because I believe it's not just about having the bad experiences and ahm I want to experience a very smooth ride and that's experiencing, a very good journey learning from the past, so yes, that's it."*

### **LIFE STORY 3**

At the age of six, Farida was transferred from Manila to her grandmother's house in Cotabato City. She was born in Manila and lived there for years but she was transferred to Cotabato City when his father

was fired from work and could not support them financially. Farida has 3 other siblings and she is the oldest.

Farida's parents were left in Manila while she and her siblings lived in her grandmother. But then, when her grandmother could not support all the needs of her other siblings, she decided to let her sibling lived in the house of their aunts and she was left in her grandmother. She felt alone and lonely when her siblings left but then she believed that it was for their own good.

She thought that she could stay in her grandmother's but when her grandmother had some financial constraints; she was also forced to live in some of her aunt's house. Farida is now 19 years old and a resident of Buliao I, Mother Poblacion, Cotabato City. She is not married and she is currently working as a caretaker of a carenderia in a Super Market. She left her aunt's side and now she is living alone in a space her boss provided.

She is working to sustain herself and sometimes she was lending some money to her siblings that are living in their aunts because after they were given to her grandmother, Farida did not hear anything from her parents.

Farida verbalized how hard it was for her to adjust when she lived in Cotabato City. It was hard because her parents were not around to take care of them. Their family was not rich but they were happy living together. Farida's parents loved them and they provided all their needs.

She could still remember her parents and siblings living together. She remembered some moments with her parents that she could not forget. “*Su kunawna na mapya ged, uman baguli si ama, aden tapik ni ama Jolibee*”. Farida, enjoyed every moment she had with her parents.

She loved playing with her siblings and looking after them. When her father would go to work, she was left with her mother and siblings. She said her mother loved to look after them. She would comb her hair and taught her some household chores.

And when her father would come home from his work, he would bring toys and food. Farida felt delighted and excited as she was often waiting for her father. They would run to her father every time they see him in their coming home from work.

Farida at an early age could not understand when her grandmother visited in the house and took them with her to live with her. She cried a lot and asked her grandmother several times why they needed to go away from their parents. She thought she could be with her parents all the time and she wanted to always be with them. She was confused but her grandmother explained everything to her and even with her age, she tried to understand everything.

As Farida’s grandmother took them with her, she started to live in her grandmother’s house. She made lots of adjustments such as looking after her siblings alone and working inside her grandmother’s house. She did not want to be a burden to her grandmother that was why she did

everything to be of any help. Her grandmother treated them well and they provided their basic needs. She gave them food to eat but she sometimes was limiting their meals.

After months of staying with her grandmother, Farida was informed that her other siblings would live in the houses of their aunts because her grandmother could not sustain them all. She was very young then and she could not do anything. But her grandmother said that it would be the best option for her siblings so she tried to understand. Farida's infant sibling was adopted by a doctor while she was left in her grandmother's custody.

When she stayed in her grandmother for months, she helped her inside the house. She thought that she had a good relationship with her grandmother but there were times when her grandmother would hit her really hard. She was beaten by her and she said it was to discipline her. Every time she made mistake like interrupt in her grandmother's leisure time with her friends, she would be beaten really hard. She was hit with the stick of the mop and she said that the aluminum stick would break when her grandmother would beat him.

Farida did not have the chance to study because she was forced to work. And when her grandmother decided that she should live in her aunt's house in Mabini because she had no money to support her. She did not object because she thought that it would be her chance to escape from her grandmother.

But when she was in her aunt's custody, she experienced abuse much worse from her grandmother. She was forced to work by carrying woods to be paid then the money she would earn was used to buy a kilo of rice for her aunt. "*Banapwat ako sa mga kayo, meka kwana pakapamuku ako sa saka kilo.*" (I used to carry woods and with that I get money and buy a kilo of rice.)

Farida was the one who worked for her aunt's family to survive each day. When she cannot provide her aunt a grain of rice, she was beaten up. And this happened often when she was living in her aunt. She said, "*Mengka diku silan kabamukwan sa bigas bameten ako nilan*" (When I cannot buy a kilo of rice they would beat me up). She was used to be hit by the metal part of the belt, sometimes a bamboo wood or the heel of the shoes. She disclosed that the most painful experience that she had was when her aunt hit her with the heels of the shoes in the face.

She said, "*Ngin I palu na talumpa anan, pembubugel man i sya ko ba (pointing at her face)*" (I was hit with the heel of the shoes in the face and I would get bruises from it)

Their neighbors were aware about the abuse that was happening to her but they did not give attention at all. No one helped her to stop the abuse not even when she was in her grandmother or in her aunt's custody.

Farida stayed in her aunt's house for years and when she had found a place to work in the Super market. She decided to leave her aunt

and live on her own. She left home and stayed in her boss's place. She is working as caretaker of a cafeteria in the market. Farida's boss knew about the abuse because she told about it to her. And her boss was kind enough to let her live with them and she provided a room in the cafeteria for Farida.

Living was the best thing that Farida did. When she was still in her aunt and she was pent up with all the pain her aunt was inflicting to her. She would live home and went to her friends. She cried out her pain and emotions in her trusted friends. She said she was advised by her friends to tell the abuse to anyone in their neighborhood so she did spoke about it but then they did not care. No one helped her to stop his aunt from physically hitting her. She endured everything that her aunt did to her. And she was given a chance to be away from her aunt. She grabbed the opportunity and left her home.

Even with the entire bad attitude her aunt showed her, she still politely bid her goodbye to them and when they started to stop her she fought back by words and defended her that she wanted to live alone for she knew she could support herself now.

The abuse was stopped when she left home permanently and lived in her boss' house, where she was currently working. She accepted the fact that her aunt hurt her and as a way of coping and dealing with the abuse, she moved out from her aunt. Farida also said that she did not receive any professional intervention or help from any agency or people.



She coped with the abuse by helping herself and by moving out to the place that inflicted her pain.

As according to WHO (2008), harmonious relationship within the family can help the child to avoid the so-called abuse. It is important that a child can experience the comfort inside the family and can feel everything he or she needed. It is the family that prepares a child for life in the adult world. Here, the child first experiences the love, care and attention that help launch him into a bigger, more complex environment. The parents are the primary influence in molding children's values, norms, attitudes and standards of right or wrong. Children who spend most of their growing years in an intact family structure generally receive more and better guidance and attention that protect them from engaging in socially unwanted and negative behaviours such as smoking, drug use, drinking or engaging in commercial or premarital sex.

Farida shared that with all her experiences as a child, she learned to accept that life has its ups and downs. She accepted the things that happened in her life and she made it as motivation to be stronger and face anything. With all the pain, she learned to be independent. She worked hard even if she was not able to go to school. She did her best in her work and focused herself in working hard for her and her siblings.

Farida often visited her siblings in her aunts' houses to ask how they are doing and to ensure that they will not experience the experiences she had. She gives them money to help in their schooling.

She could not get all her siblings to live with her but she promised herself to look after them. Farida gave advice to everyone that is encountering any kind of abuse to make their experience as their way to be stronger. Work hard in what you do best and let the people who see that you could do something better. Farida advice every child and said, *“Di silan pedtegas. Kamengka edtegas silan a, di nilan paginugutan I lukes nilan a mapameta silan.”* (To every child, they should not be hard headed for if they don't listen to their parents they might be disciplined by hitting).

Farida is now living in her boss's cafeteria and she was the one who is looking after into it. She had no constant communication with her aunt who abused her but she was sometimes visiting her. She already forgave her aunt and had made peace with her deceased grandmother.

She is now focusing in her work to make money and help her siblings. Farida's parents had not contacted her and she was told that her parents had separated and both of them already have their own family. She has accepted that fact and decided to live to focus on her siblings.

### **Summary and Implications**

The study revealed that the participants were all able to go in school but were forced to stop because of economic constraints which have caused problems in their family. It was illuminated that the participants' normal family structure was disorganized when they were

left by their parents to their grandmothers. The participants all grew up in their grandmothers except for Noel. The child abuse survivors have shown that they have a normal, intact and happy family life before the abuse took place. The participants felt happiness with their family. They enjoyed the feeling of having both parents giving them love and care. They experienced a harmonious relationship with family not until they faced economic constraints which have triggered the abuse.

As gathered in this study, participants' abusers were all part of their family. In the data gathered, it implied that they experienced different forms of abuse. The participants experienced physical abuse shown through the excessive discipline they felt in the hands of their abusers. They were beaten up with the head of a belt, the heels of the shoes and have experienced excessive physical pain with their abusers' beatings. They revealed that sometimes, even without reasons, they were beaten up. The participants expressed that they felt lonely and unloved with the verbal abuse they received. They felt helpless and have lost self-worth with degrading words. The participants felt ashamed as they were called names, belittled and mocked. The pain was incontestable as they hear demeaning words from their family. This had a psychological impact in them. Thus, pain, frustrations and hurtful words caused the participants to feel worthless. They have suicidal thoughts and have lost self-confidence. They have shown panic attacks with people they feel resembling their abusers. Nevertheless, participants have shown ways to

cope with their situation and illuminated hopefulness to change their situation.

The participants revived their normal life and survived the abuse through various ways of coping. They stated that they talked about their problems to someone they trust to decrease the pain. They open up their emotions and let out their frustrations. Moreover, they have shown different passion and hobby where they focus their attention to forget about their pains. The participants found an outlet of letting out the pain through doing positive things they love. Through the support they got from the people they trust, with different ways of coping and doing positive things, the participants were able to survive the abuse they experienced. Additionally, the participants verbalized suggestions and recommendations in dealing with child abuse. Noel suggested that victims of child abuse should talk about their situation to people they trust. They should have someone to share their problems and frustrations. Faisal emphasized the need to find the things you love to do. Find an outlet for your pain. Do something you love which would not jeopardize anything in your life. While Farida stated to follow parents and do not be hardheaded. Furthermore, forgiveness and patience were emphasized by the participants.

Findings of this study have depicted a definite picture whereby participants have completed their journey to healing from child abuse through their struggle to live a normal and successful life. From the

findings, this study indicated worthwhile results of the long struggle of the participants being abused as a child towards their journey to healing and demonstrated positive coping ways to survive child abuse.

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