

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE PHILIPPINES AND COLOMBIA.

Un estudio de caso comparativo sobre la violencia contra las mujeres y el acceso a servicios de apoyo en medio de la pandemia de covid-19 en Filipinas y Colombia.

Royce Lyssah Malabonga.

Abstract

This paper utilized the comparative case study method to analyse the pressing issue regarding violence against women and their access to support services from the governments amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines and Colombia through the utilization of the liberal feminism theory and the block method of compare and contrast. The purpose of the paper is to provide a more in-depth understanding of both the exacerbated violence faced by women and girls during the pandemic and how the pandemic response of the Philippine and Colombian governments impacted their access to proper support services. In reference to the Liberal Feminist Theory, it can be observed that persisting gender roles and unequal power dynamics that are deeply embedded in society reflect the patriarchal nature of both countries, which resulted in the increased vulnerability of women and girls. Moreover, the Philippine and Colombian governments have been inadequate in providing women and girls who are victims of violence with the necessary resources and services due to a lack of prioritization and a sense of urgency on the issue. Therefore, the researchers suggest that both the national governments of the Philippines and Colombia should give more focus and importance to providing accessibility and consideration to the needs of women and girls, especially in the process of planning, formulating, and implementing policies.

Keywords: Violence Against Women and Girls; Support Services; COVID-19; Liberal Feminism

Resumen

Este documento utiliza un caso de estudio comparativo con el fin de analizar la problemática constante respecto a la violencia en contra de las mujeres y el acceso que tienen a servicios

de asistencia por parte de los gobiernos en medio de la pandemia del COVID-19 en las Filipinas y en Colombia, a través del uso de la teoría del feminismo liberal junto a la aplicación del método de bloqueo de comparar y contrastar. El propósito de este documento es comprender más a fondo la violencia exacerbada enfrentada por mujeres y niñas durante la pandemia, dando a entender como la respuesta del gobierno a la pandemia impactó el acceso a los debidos servicios de asistencia. En referencia a la teoría del Feminismo Liberal, se puede observar que los modelos tradicionales de género y las dinámicas de poder desiguales que están profundamente incrustados en la sociedad reflejan la naturaleza patriarcal de ambas naciones que resultaron en el aumento de la vulnerabilidad en las mujeres y niñas. Junto a esto, los gobiernos de las Filipinas y Colombia han sido incapaces en proporcionar a las mujeres y niñas víctimas de la violencia con los recursos y servicios necesarios debido a una falta de priorización y noción de urgencia con la problemática. Considerando esto, los investigadores sugieren que tanto los gobiernos de las Filipinas y de Colombia deberían dar un mayor enfoque e importancia al proporcionar el acceso considerando las necesidades de mujeres y niñas, especialmente en los procesos de planeación, formulación y la implementación de las políticas.

Palabras claves: Violencia contra las mujeres y las niñas; Servicios de asistencia; COVID-19; Feminismo liberal.

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importance to providing accessibility and consideration to the needs of women and girls, especially in the process of planning, formulating, and implementing policies.

Keywords: Violence Against Women and Girls; Support Services; COVID-19; Liberal Feminism

Resumen

Este documento utiliza un caso de estudio comparativo con el fin de analizar la problemática constante respecto a la violencia en contra de las mujeres y el acceso que tienen a servicios de asistencia por parte de los gobiernos en medio de la pandemia del COVID-19 en las Filipinas y en Colombia, a través del uso de la teoría del feminismo liberal junto a la aplicación del método de bloqueo de comparar y contrastar. El propósito de este documento es comprender más a fondo la violencia exacerbada enfrentada por mujeres y niñas durante la pandemia, dando a entender como la respuesta del gobierno a la pandemia impactó el acceso a los debidos servicios de asistencia. En referencia a la teoría del Feminismo Liberal, se puede observar que los modelos tradicionales de género y las dinámicas de poder desiguales que están profundamente incrustados en la sociedad

reflejan la naturaleza patriarcal de ambas naciones que resultaron en el aumento de la vulnerabilidad en las mujeres y niñas. Junto a esto, los gobiernos de las Filipinas y Colombia han sido incapaces en proporcionar a las mujeres y niñas víctimas de la violencia con los recursos y servicios necesarios debido a una falta de priorización y noción de urgencia con la problemática. Considerando esto, los investigadores sugieren que tanto los gobiernos de las Filipinas y de Colombia deberían dar un mayor enfoque e importancia al proporcionar el acceso considerando las necesidades de mujeres y niñas, especialmente en los procesos de planeación, formulación y la implementación de las políticas.

Palabras claves: Violencia contra las mujeres y las niñas; Servicios de asistencia; COVID-19; Feminismo liberal.

Resumo

Este artigo utilizou o método de estudo de caso comparativo para analisar a questão premente da violência contra as mulheres e seu acesso aos serviços de apoio dos governos em meio à pandemia de COVID-19 nas Filipinas e na Colômbia, através da utilização da teoria do feminismo liberal e do método

de bloco de comparar e contrastar. O objetivo do documento é fornecer uma compreensão mais aprofundada da violência exacerbada enfrentada pelas mulheres e meninas durante a pandemia e como a resposta à pandemia dos governos filipino e colombiano impactou o seu acesso a serviços de apoio adequados. Em referência à Teoria Liberal Feminista, pode-se observar que os papéis de gênero persistentes e as dinâmicas de poder desiguais que estão profundamente enraizadas na sociedade refletem a natureza patriarcal de ambos os países, o que resultou no aumento da vulnerabilidade das mulheres e das raparigas. Além disso, os governos filipino e colombiano têm sido inadequados no fornecimento às mulheres e raparigas vítimas de violência dos recursos e serviços necessários devido à falta de priorização e de um sentido de urgência nesta questão. Portanto, os investigadores sugerem que tanto os governos nacionais das Filipinas como da Colômbia deveriam dar mais atenção e importância à disponibilização de acessibilidade e consideração às necessidades das mulheres e raparigas, especialmente no processo de planeamento, formulação e implementação de políticas.

Palavras-chave: Violência contra Mulheres e Meninas; Serviços de Apoio; COVID 19; Feminismo Liberal

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women has intensified in many countries, including the Philippines and Colombia as government measures like community lockdowns, curfews, and limited public transportation have restricted the mobility and ability of victims to escape from their abusers and seek help. In Colombia, a survey conducted among more than 1,200 women from August to September 2021 revealed the increased occurrence of violence against women (VAW) in the country, with around 63% of the women responding that they or someone they know have experienced some form of VAW (UN Women, 2022). While the prevalence of VAW in Colombia during the pandemic is obvious, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has reported a decline in the Philippine National Police's (PNP) recorded VAW cases in 2020, with the PNP recording 15,553 cases compared to the 21,366 cases of VAW in 2019 (Gomez & Robredillo, 2021). However, the decline in reported VAW cases does not directly mean fewer incidences of violence in the country but could indicate the inability of women to report violence and seek help due to the restrictions brought by the pandemic measures of the government accompanied by the limited access to support services.

Correspondingly, with the focus of governments shifting towards the pandemic response, access to proper resources and support services such as legal (access to justice), medical (physical and mental health services), and social services have been lacking for women experiencing violence which has placed them in greater susceptibility to gender-based exploitation and abuse. The pandemic has highlighted gender equality perpetuated by existing stereotyped gender roles and unequal power relations in households within these two countries. Moreover, this gender inequality is exacerbated by the minimal inclusion of women and girls' needs in the COVID-19 response of the Philippine and Colombian governments. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the circumstances faced by women and girls during the pandemic, this paper aims to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis through the utilization of the liberal feminism theory and the block method of comparing and contrasting the situation and response of the Philippines and Colombia regarding the violence against women amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the paper seeks to identify recommended areas of improvement on existing policies and programs for gender-based violence and access to support services in the Philippines and Colombia.

2. Theoretical framework

Liberal Feminism Theory shall be utilized in the case study by giving insight into the cause behind the increase of violence against women and girls as well as their evident lack of access to support services. It will also be used in examining the gaps in the Philippines and Colombia's national governments' existing policies and programs for these issues and suggesting areas of improvement that will help in creating a more effective approach in the present. The liberal-feminist analysis makes distinct the public-private dichotomy at the heart of modernization theorizing and policy development. Because it is considered that women work and ought to function within households, it is easy to overlook women's contributions in the public sphere. In consonance with Wolff (2007), one of the earliest varieties of feminism is liberal feminism. It asserts that women's secondary standing in society is founded on disproportionate resources and segregation from men. This form of feminism arose from the American abolitionist and women's movements., and it concentrates on reducing gender inequity. The fundamental principles are based on liberal intellectual traditions, as well as French and British feminist thinking. Since society is made up of equal individuals, all

individuals are eventually entitled to equal rights. There is an obvious difference between the function of the state (public) and the role of individual liberty (private) (Wolff, 2007, pg. 1). Liberal feminists promote progress by influencing people's attitudes and working within prevailing social systems. This approach gives a deeper understanding of violence by examining how it is linked to and ingrained in patriarchal power systems (Cockburn, 2004, pp. 29). This feminism stresses that violence against women stems from unequal power dynamics between men and women. Its ideology indicates women's equal individual rights and liberty while minimizing sexual distinctions. Liberal feminists suggest several tactics for eradicating gender inequality, including encouraging individuals to confront sexism in daily life without detesting the marital institution (Kartika, 2014, pg.3). As women face disparities, the way forward lies with the women themselves. In the context of violence against women perpetrated by women, the liberal feminism theory believes that gender roles play a central role in this discussion. Violence and pain are ought to be understood in a comprehensible manner that involves a macro (societal) and micro (personal) level. As stated by Nedelsky (1996), looming on Woodman's perception of violence against women, liberal feminism gives an overview of the significance of

power dynamics between men and women and how it leads to violence and destruction. And with this reality, the theory suggests the need in reforming the current unequal relations of power between men and women as over the years, it has built a nexus of destructive patterns in our society. Cockburn contends that the concept of gender power shapes the dynamic nature of every interaction (2004, p.30). Henceforth, gender norms form and are moulded by power structures. Also, the placement of individuals within these structures is essential to all feminist theories. Violence is fundamentally tied to power, and no act of violence is without a gender component. The nature of power gives an individual a foothold for violence, and it is vital for communities to create a relational approach to rights in which women are given more power to protect and sustain themselves. The liberal feminist perspective argues that citizenship hinges on participation in public institutions, particularly the labour market, (Bittman, 2001). Likewise, liberal feminists acknowledge that everything that transpires at home is a private affair that must be discussed between the husband and the wife. As a result, liberal feminists claim that confining women to the private sphere or a domestic realm is already a form of subjugation. The legal rights of women to property, especially ownership of their person, are the first step toward women's

liberation. Liberal feminism, in essence, embraces the concept that contemporary workplaces are meritocratic and that women aren't intrinsically less capable or hardworking than men, but receive fewer opportunities merely because of their sexual orientation (Bittman, 2001). Discrimination in wages and sex segregation in the labour market, as seen by liberal feminism, are mechanisms meant to drive out women from the labour market. In line with liberal feminism, gender discrimination generally stems from preconceived notions based on stereotypes. These prejudices and biases are commonly passed down through families. Similar to structural functionalist theory in sociology, liberal feminism regards the family as a social institution. In this view, this approach holds that the negative impact of gender roles may be rectified simply by providing females with better role models, and evenly distributing educational opportunities.

At this juncture, the researchers shall answer the question:

- *How did the national governments of the Philippines and Colombia address the issues of violence against women and girls, as well as the insufficient access to support services during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

And in answering this research question:

- A close examination of the existing policies and programs in the Philippines and Colombia that aim to address violence against women or gender-based violence (GBV) shall be done.
- The accessibility of support services for women experiencing violence in the Philippines and Colombia amidst the pandemic shall also be scrutinized.

3. Conceptual framework

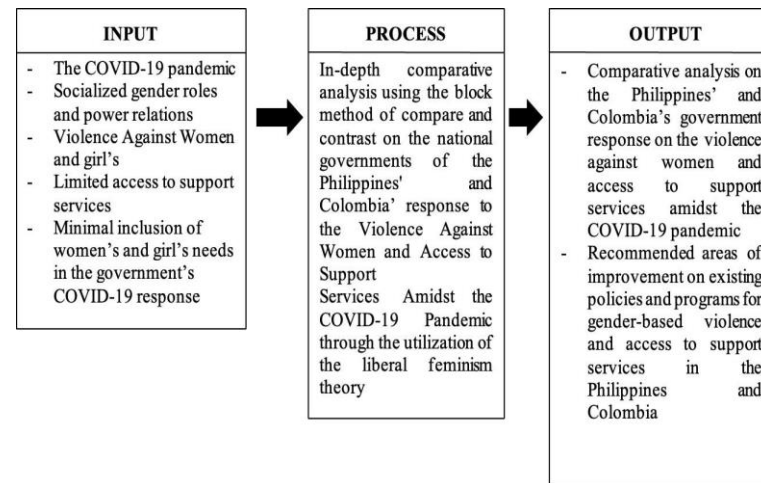


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

4. Methodology

This paper will use a comparative case study as its research method due to time constraints and limitations in gathering participants, data, and information from fieldwork. As stated by Goodrick (2014), comparative case studies include both analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences, and patterns among two or more cases that share the same goals or focus in a way that generates new knowledge that simplifies how and why particular programs or policies succeed or fail. This method usually utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods and is distinctly useful for understanding how a certain context influences the success of an intervention and how to better fit the intervention to the specific context to achieve the intended results. Using a comparative case study, the paper will determine and analyse both cases of the Philippines and Colombia in terms of violence against women and their access to support services from the governments given that there is a shift of focus toward the priorities of services and facilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For data gathering, the paper will utilize document-based research wherein information from secondary sources such as scholarly papers and journal

articles will be used to gather data.

Specifically, the paper will look into secondary sources that give focus on violence against women before COVID-19 happened, during the pandemic, and post-pandemic. Additionally, the paper will also look into articles that focus on the governments' services and policies that address violence against women, as well as the policies and services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. For the data analysis, a block method of compare and contrast will be used. For this type of analysis, all data, and information of the first subject will be presented first before the other. As such, both subjects will be given equal attention, however, the focus of each discussion shall be on the first subject before moving on to the other. To give a concrete idea, the case of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines will be presented first, then Colombia's. From this type of data analysis, the information for each major area can be thoroughly analyzed and can also provide a clearer and more organized discussion about the data gathered for both the Philippines and Colombia.

5. Discussion

5.1 The COVID-19 Pandemic's Exacerbation of Instances of Violence Against Women and Girls

5.1.1 Philippines' Perspective The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated violence against women and girls. The COVID-19 pandemic response, not only in the Philippines but around the world, has become both a cause of violence against women and girls and a continuing challenge in addressing the issue. From examining the situation in the Philippines, it can be observed that two forms of violence against women and girls have become prevalent during the pandemic: domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) and digital violence. This is particularly attributed to the imposition of tight community lockdowns, stringent curfews, and public transport and workforce restrictions which have confined vulnerable individuals such as women and children in their houses with their abusers and have severely limited their ability and mobility to seek help. In accordance with lockdown measures in the Philippines, families were advised to remain at home and were allowed only a single quarantine pass to perform essential errands like grocery shopping, which contributed to the aggravation of domestic

violence or IPV. According to the World Bank (2021), this is especially more prevalent in households that are experiencing economic insecurity due to business shutdowns and work suspensions during the lockdowns as there are heightened family tensions which could trigger violent episodes. This is consistent with the argument of Yang (2022) which highlighted Oxfam Filipinas' statement regarding the exacerbation of domestic violence in the country during the pandemic: "The pandemic has "created a perfect storm" of social and personal anxiety, stress, economic pressure, social isolation, and rising alcohol and substance use, which has led to an increased number of incidents of domestic abuse". On a global scale, it is estimated that at the end of 2020, 243 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced some form of sexual and/or physical violence, often from an intimate partner (UN Women, 2020, as cited in Viajar, 2020). Furthermore, a report by the UN Women (2020), as cited in Viajar (2020), revealed that during the quarantine period from March to June 2020 in the Philippines, the Philippine National Police logged 3,700 cases of violence against women and children wherein 1,945 of those cases constituted reports of violence against women and 1,754 were those against children. Other GBV issues that arose during the community lockdowns in the Philippines

are the sexual exploitation and harassment instigated by law enforcement or officials. For instance, there are reports of women in prostitution being subjected to sexual exploitation by COVID-19 checkpoint officers who pressure them to provide sexual favours in exchange for money, access to safe transportation, and essential goods. Another example is the sexual harassment and violence committed by officials against indigenous women during their protests and attempts to access their farmlands for planting and crop harvesting (UN Women, 2020, as cited in Viajar, 2020). Harvey (2021) posits, however, that violence against women and children during the pandemic did not only occur in physical spaces, but also extended into the online world with the increased reports of cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and online sexual harassment. The sudden shift in people's daily routines or activities to online spaces, such as in terms of education, employment, entertainment, and socialization, has made them more susceptible to online forms of violence. A digital report on the Philippines in 2022 revealed that there were around 92 million social media users in the country at the beginning of that year and amidst the pandemic (Abasola, 2023). Increased social media usage during the pandemic has allowed cybercriminals to take advantage of individuals and families experiencing mental, social, and

economic hardships. Correspondingly, in his article in 2020, Gustavo Gonzalez, a UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines, stated that the internet, especially social media, can be used by cybercriminals as platforms to prey on vulnerable women and girls by sexually exploiting and harassing them through the spread of "rape jokes, rape threats, and other sexist remarks". The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the immense digital divide in the Philippines. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank Philippines in 2020 entitled, "COVID-19 Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey", 60 percent of the 25 percent of poorest households do not have access to the internet (Abasola, 2023). Although the lack of access to digital resources has shielded some women from violence in the digital space, those who first experienced using online platforms driven by necessity during the pandemic have become more vulnerable to digital violence due to the lack of digital knowledge and skills. Furthermore, as pandemic measures have restricted access to physical support services, victims of violence may resort to online resources for help, which can render them more susceptible to digital violence. Further analysis of the situation in the Philippines reveals that two primary, interrelated factors contribute to the exacerbated violence against women and girls

during the COVID-19 pandemic. First is the increased exposure to perpetrators. Although homes are supposed to be one of the safest spaces during the pandemic, it has become a dangerous place for women and girls who have been left extremely vulnerable to perpetrators. As aforementioned, orders to stay at home aligned with lockdown protocols have trapped women and girls with their abusers and restricted their access to proper support services. The second factor is intensified financial stress, which potentially triggers acts of violence. Based on a report by the Philippine Statistics Authority in April 2020, more than 7.3 million Filipinos lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, marking the highest rate of unemployment in years at 17.7% (Teo, 2020). The loss or reduction of income among many individuals and households has created financial and psychological stress that could erupt into violent episodes. Moreover, it could lead to increased alcohol consumption as drinking alcohol can often be used as a coping mechanism for stressful situations like a pandemic. Based on the results of a survey conducted by the Department of Health (DOH), the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased alcohol consumption in Filipino adults with men having a higher percentage of alcohol consumption in contrast to women, 51.4% and 28.9% respectively (Gonzales, 2021). This can spark abusive behaviour

such as domestic violence or IPV against women, especially since the closure of bars and restaurants during the lockdowns have pushed many people to drink at home, increasing the danger faced by women living with abusers. Furthermore, the strain brought by unemployment has also led to power imbalances within households, wherein feelings of fear and uncertainty can provoke power assertions through acts of violence. Additionally, the UN Women conducted a survey which showed that about 33 percent of Filipino women in the informal sector had lost their jobs in April 2020 (Khullar, 2021). More women losing their jobs could result in increased financial dependence on their male partners or family members. This could lessen their bargaining power within those relationships and consequently, their ability to leave their abusers (Social Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020)

5.1.2 Colombia's perspective

One of the most important turning points for daily life throughout the world occurred in March 2020, when the increase in the number of cases infected by COVID-19 caused the borders of countries to close, economic activity to

stop, and people to lock themselves in their homes. When analysing the different ways in which this pandemic affects the world's citizens, the first premises that come to the discussion are: the large peaks in mortality rates across continents; the decline of the economy due to the closing of borders, evidenced in the performance of international trade and the development of different industries, such as tourism; the increase in poverty and inequality. And while all these notions are correct, there are some collateral damages of the pandemic that most of the time are not part of the debate, such as the increase in cases of violence against women. While Bogotá's data highlights alarming rates of violence, gender-based violence during the lockdowns was a national issue. Reports from other regions such as Antioquia and Valle del Cauca also show significant increases in gender violence complaints, indicating that this was a widespread problem, not limited to the capital. For a more representative analysis, this study must consider national data, especially the challenges women in rural areas face, where access to support services is even more limited. Londoño et al. (2021) affirm that in Colombia, violence against women in the pandemic era was illustrated through horizontal inequality rates, which represented the cases

focused on the vulnerability of a population group with specific characteristics, one of them, gender. This indicator, in addition to representing the violence faced by women at the time of the pandemic due to the decrease in political representation and economic or patrimonial violence derived from economic dependence and precarious working conditions, simultaneously focuses on violence against women manifested in physical, sexual and psychological harm or death in the private and public spheres. Concerning this type of statistics, the author states that violence against women cannot be defined under the manifestations resulting from patriarchal structures, it should also be taken into account that it is characterized by the deprivation of freedoms and the hindering of access to human rights. Similarly, it states that violence against women is not only exercised by the active individualized subject, the protagonist of the violent manifestation, mostly a partner or ex-partner; the responsibility also falls on society and the Colombian State, for not acting in a timely manner to provide channels of protection and to break the cycles of violence that have been naturalized. As mentioned above, violence against women has also been evidenced in the public sphere, according to the survey called "Pulso País", women

expressed the fear they felt of facing the public sphere since 43.9% of women stated that they never go out alone at night, 24.9% stated that this practice seems unsafe to them and 8.3% considered it very unsafe. On the other hand, Moreno and Alfonso (2020) developed a study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women, in which they took the Colombian capital, Bogotá, as the study territory. The increase in violence against women as a result of this situation was notably evidenced, the authors postulate that:

In Bogotá, where the confinement began on March 20, 2,627 calls were received up to June 15, mostly for psychological violence; this figure shows an increase of 187% in telephone hotlines and 774% in virtual hotlines, respectively. With respect to the previous year, femicides in Bogotá increased by 8.6%. (Moreno & Alfonso, 2020, p. 116).

According to Moreno and Alfonso (2020), the impacts of the pandemic deepened the cases of violence against women, because the mandatory confinement that was established as a first measure to reduce the virus infections, had collateral

damage, which exposed women to a longer contact time with their aggressors (abusive partners), as well as the social isolation, decreased the opportunities for intervention and the possible response time of external agents to help the victims. On the other hand, both Moreno and Alfonso (2020) and Londoño et al. (2021) affirm that the pandemic increased the cases of violence against women, both inside and outside their homes, since, being alone in the streets, they were exposed to a greater number of dangers represented in citizen crime and femicides. Finally, concerning the response tools to violence against women, Moreno and Alfonso (2020) postulate that, although in the case of Bogotá, responses were recognized that were established before the pandemic, such as Law 1257 of 2008, during the pandemic, such as Decree 460 of 2020 and some district regulations such as the exception to confinement due to force majeure, within these exceptions were included violence against women. From the perspective of the authors, all these laws and decrees were timely, but they fell short of solving the problem, or at least confronting the phenomenon. Their descriptions did not take into account aspects relevant to the population of women present throughout the Colombian territory, for example: not all parts of the country have family police stations, they are only located in urban areas, and not all

violence against women occurs within the family. Therefore, they conclude that although the work of the Colombian government in conjunction with the institutions in favour of the eradication of violence against women was present, it needed to be modified and adapted to the new realities faced by women daily, mainly due to confinement.

5.1.3 Using the Lens of Liberal Feminism

One of the main arguments of Liberal feminism is that gender equality should exist both in the private sphere, particularly at home, and in public life. From the perspective of liberal feminists, the family is a social institution that should have an equal structure. Correspondingly, liberal feminists' view of an ideal marriage is that built upon equal partnership, which suggests that domestic violence and other forms of sexual harassment and abuse are extreme barriers to gender equality in the public sphere. In relation to this, the increased occurrence of violence against women and girls both in the Philippines and Colombia during the pandemic highlighted the prevalence of unequal power relations and dynamics between men and women within families which negatively impact their health and well-being, welfare, and overall quality of life. Moreover, liberal

feminism posits that these existing unequal power relations between men and women lead to violence and eventually perpetuate a vicious cycle of destructive patterns in societies. During the pandemic in the Philippines, the financial stress due to the loss or reduction of income among many individuals and households has led to increased alcohol consumption that, in some cases, has triggered acts of violence. Additionally, the financial and psychological strain brought by the pandemic has resulted in power imbalances within households. As many Filipino women lost their jobs during the pandemic, their financial dependence on their male partners or family members increased, which in turn decreased their bargaining power within households and subsequently, their ability to escape from their abusers. The situation of women in the Philippines during the pandemic, therefore, aligns with the liberal feminists' idea that acts of violence have a gender component and are fundamentally linked to power structures. The intensified unequal power dynamics during the pandemic could explain the exacerbation of violence against women and girls in the country. Liberal feminists do not focus on criticizing societal institutions and systems but rather believe in their capacity to reform. Moreover, they believe that achieving gender equality requires a modification of existing social and political systems. The state is

especially viewed as a powerful institution in providing women with equal rights and opportunities as men through legal measures, especially in a global health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Liberal feminism embraces the role of the state as the guarantor and protector of rights, especially that of women in this case. In Colombia, violence against women is understood as not solely caused by patriarchal structures, but by the ineffectiveness of the state to guarantee equal freedom and access to human rights for women and girls. During the pandemic, the Colombian State failed to provide channels of protection that could bridge access to support services for victims of violence. This hindered individuals and communities from breaking the cycles of violence and to some extent normalized acts of violence, which explain the increased cases of VAW. Furthermore, although Colombia has laws and policies in response to VAW, it needs to be tailored to the new realities such as the lockdowns, curfews, and social isolation encountered by women amidst the pandemic. This aligns with the argument of liberal feminists that societal institutions and systems have the capacity to reform. Liberal feminist theory argues that gender-based violence is deeply rooted in patriarchal power dynamics that confine women to the private sphere and deny them equal opportunities. In Colombia, these

dynamics are exacerbated by poverty and armed conflict, while in the Philippines, women's economic dependence and confinement to domestic roles make them especially vulnerable. Liberal feminism offers a critical lens through which to analyze whether government policies are perpetuating these inequalities or working to reform them. It is not enough to merely expose the existence of gender-based violence; we must also critique policies that reinforce or perpetuate these unequal structures, advocating for systemic reform to achieve real gender equality.

5.2 Women's and Girls' Vulnerabilities as Members of Society During the Global Pandemic Were Intensified as Access to Support Services Were Limited

5.2.1 Philippines' Perspective

The COVID-19 Pandemic affected the physical and mental health of each individual in the whole world. Because of the virus, a lot of people were forced to stay in their homes, some adults lost their jobs while the younger generation was forced to attend online classes rather than face-to-face classes. This then became the cause of depression and anxiety for a lot of

individuals. According to Oxfam Pilipinas (2021), the pandemic is the very reason why people suffer from personal anxiety, stress, economic pressure, and social isolation. More than this, people are stuck in their homes with their abusive family members or partners who are heavily drinking alcohol and using substances/drugs (Oxfam Pilipinas, 2021). Because of this, the cases of domestic abuse have also increased. However, most of the reports that were discovered showed that most of the victims were women. Linde and Gonzales (2020) found three areas where women are at risk and vulnerable: in their homes, frontlines of healthcare, and in the Labour market. On one hand, women are at risk inside their homes during crises because of the possibility of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence (Linde and Gonzales, 2020; Dumpit, 2021). On another hand, most women are working as front liners in healthcare. It was estimated that 70% of women are all part of health and social services staff globally, yet they still have less access to health services than men (Linde and Gonzales, 2020; Dumpit, 2021). Lastly, there was a huge gender wage gap between women and men. Women earn only a little compared to men, which makes women vulnerable economically and negatively affects their position in the labour market (Linde and Gonzales, 2020; Dumpit, 2021). Even before the pandemic, Filipino women were

already suffering from a patriarchal society. In the Philippines, the male population continues to dominate in family structures and larger social institutions (Valdez et al, 2022). The Filipino tradition consists of the male being the head of the family and breadwinner, and women are expected to stay in their homes and do household chores (Valdez et al, 2022). Women were vulnerable because they continued to be abused, objectified, and victim-blamed by men (Valdez et al, 2022). Because of this, When the pandemic hit the Philippines, the vulnerability of women intensified. Lockdowns and quarantine restrictions were implemented and the Filipino Women had no choice but to stay trapped inside their homes with their abusers. Because of such implementations and restrictions, there was an increase in cases regarding gender-based violence and abuse while access to legal, medical, and social services was limited. The country already faced gender inequality issues such as access to healthcare services, gender-based violence, and economic insecurities even before the pandemic (Dumpit, 2021). The pandemic only worsened the situation of the victims and according to a report that was released by the United Nations Women in June 2020, the women in the Philippines faced a heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Dumpit, 2021). The economic and social

pressures such as loss of livelihood and food insecurity caused and triggered violence against women and girls (UN Women, 2020). In addition, the restrictions of the quarantine reduced the options of women for accessing support services and seeking help (UN Women, 2020). Because of this, there was an increase in cases of violence against women and rape during the long period of quarantine. The Philippine National Police reported that they handled a total of 391 cases of violence against women and 42 cases of rape amid the lockdowns in the country (Dumpit, 2021). More than this, the COVID-19 pandemic also exposed women to harassment and discrimination. There was an increase in reports regarding women healthcare workers facing discrimination such as refusal of basic services and transport (UN Women, 2020). 96% of health workers in the Philippines are women and are underpaid, overworked, and lack job security (House Bill 5184, 2019; Castillo, 2021). Furthermore, they suffer from stigmatization which negatively affects their mental health (Castillo, 2021). Various reports were found regarding the women health workers who were harassed and evicted from their boarding houses, refused rides, and were being disrespected at home and their workplace (Corpuz, 2022; VOA News, 2020; Castillo, 2021). Despite suffering from discrimination, harassment, and stigmatization, women health

workers during the pandemic also faced a higher risk of being infected by the COVID-19 virus. Barangays in the Philippines have their own Barangay Health Worker (BHW) and Barangay Nutrition Scholar (BNS), and most of them were women (Castillo, 2021). The BHWs and BNS were women health workers who volunteered and completed critical tasks such as COVID-19 response, house-to-house visits, and contact tracing (Castillo, 2021). These women had a higher risk of infection to themselves and their families because their work consists of being exposed in a public space. Lastly, women also faced an increased risk of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and exploitation by law enforcement such as the police and the military during the COVID-19 checkpoint (UN Women, 2020). Only 12% of women are part of law enforcement in the Philippines and the COVID-19 mandatory health screenings such as temperature checks were often being conducted by male police and military officers which gave them opportunities for gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment of women (Mohideen, 2020). This then showed that the safety of women during the pandemic was negatively affected, despite being stuck in their homes and being outside. There are always cases of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination.

5.2.2 Colombia's Perspective

Other than in the Philippines, the vulnerability of Colombian women was also intensified because of the COVID19 pandemic. Women in Colombia, just like the Women in the Philippines, also suffer from a patriarchal society. In Colombia, most of the women are social leaders, and when the global pandemic hit the country, they were the ones who became the most vulnerable. The biggest danger posed by the pandemic is not contracting the virus itself, but it is a threat to women social leaders and their communities. The government imposed strict quarantine measures. With this, national and international humanitarian organizations were also removed (Zulver, 2020). The pandemic showed that there is also an existing unequal power dynamics between men and women in Colombia. Women social leaders were exposed to violence at the hands of armed groups and are seen as transgressing the masculinist social norms (Zulver, 2020). Because of this, cases of genderbased violence (GBV) continued to increase in Colombia ever since the global pandemic started. The GBV cases that were reported showed that GBV is not limited to any age range or socio-economic status (Averis, 2021). Moreover, women who are also part of the Indigenous and LGBTQI+ are proven to be vulnerable to

gender-based violence (Averis, 2021). With this, it is evident that genderbased violence can happen anywhere. In Colombia, cases of GBV are in the academe, politics, and even in the arts (Averis, 2021). In academia, 131 students reported that they were being sexually harassed at the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas (El Espectador, 2020; Averis, 2021). While in politics, the regional mayors of Colombia were denounced because they were accused of sexual abuse and lastly, in the arts, eight women reported that they were being sexually harassed by their filmmaker (Sepulveda et al, 2020; Rui-Navaro and Londoño 2020; Averis, 2021). It is evident that there were various cases of women being disrespected by men even before the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic only worsened the situation of women, particularly when lockdowns and quarantines were imposed by the government. According to a survey that was conducted on more than 1,200 women between August and September 2021, there was an increase in cases of violence against women (VAW) in Colombia (UN Women, 2022). 63% of 1,200 Colombian women reported that they have experienced at least one form of VAW such as physical violence, denial of basic needs, sexual harassment, forced isolation, or verbal abuse (UN Women, 2022). According to another report from the Colombian Women's Observatory, after

the first three weeks of quarantine, there was a rise of 142% in domestic violence (Salamanca, 2020; Pacheco and Rudas, 2021). After 6 months, the prosecutor's office or fiscalia in Colombia reported 60 more cases of domestic violence around the country, and in Colombia's capital Bogotá, there were also 13 reported cases of domestic abuse during the lockdown (Amat, 2020; Pacheco and Rudas, 2021). Same reason in the Philippines, such cases were caused by the lockdowns and restrictions as women were forced to stay at home with their abusers. Women had limited access to support services because they are far away from their families who could help them (Pacheco and Rudas, 2021). Colombia also suffered from inequalities due to its healthcare services. According to the iMMAP (2021), the healthcare system of Colombia mainly prioritized reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health care (RMNCH). However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, their priorities changed, particularly when the virus started to spread out. Because of this, it resulted in more social, economic, and structural inequalities with a 69% increase in maternal deaths between 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic (iMMAP, 2021). On September 1, 2021, it was reported that there were around 4.9 million COVID-19 cases in the country and 124,000 deaths (iMMAP, 2021). Factors were identified to

further analyze why there was an increase in maternal deaths in Colombia: (1) lower demand for healthcare services because women had this fear of contracting the virus (2) pregnant and lactating women were infected by the virus itself (3) women had limited access to healthcare services because of restrictions and quarantine measures and (4) medical staff were infected by the virus which resulted to a decrease of availability of healthcare services (iMMAP, 2021). With this, It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation and increased the maternal mortality rate in Colombia. Colombian Women were not just victims of violence, harassment, and discrimination, but they were also victims of a disorganized healthcare system.

5.2.3 Using the Lens of Liberal Feminism

One of the main perceptions of Liberal Feminism theory is that there is an existence of unequal power dynamics between men and women. Because of such dynamics, it always leads to cases of abuse and violence. Both the Philippines and Colombia suffer from a patriarchal society. During the Global Pandemic in the Philippines and Colombia, women became more vulnerable because they were stuck in their homes with their abusive partners. Traditionally, in the Philippines, the male population

continues to dominate family structures and social institutions. Women are always seen as the one who is only staying inside their homes doing household chores and being of service to men. While in Colombia, most women are social leaders. When the pandemic hit the country, they were declined by the government because of quarantine measures. This then allowed men, particularly those who are part of armed conflict, to take advantage of the powerlessness of women and cause genderbased violence. With this, the Liberal Feminism Theory explores how people's attitudes influence social systems and how violence is linked to and ingrained in patriarchal power systems. This theory gives a deeper understanding of how patriarchy negatively impacts the lives of women in the Philippines and Colombia.

5.3 The Minimal Inclusion of Women's and Girls' Needs in the Government's COVID-19 Response.

5.3.1 Philippines' Perspective

A dire consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic which is often subject to disregard is the prevalence of violence against women and girls. In the case of the Philippines, being one of the

countries with the longest period of implementation of lockdowns, led to a significant increase in victims. With the imposed curfews, transportation disruptions, and a surge in unemployment, women and girls became even more vulnerable. Despite these glaring issues faced by women, the Philippine government prioritized pandemic response with little to no room for women's and girls' needs in health, safety, and justice. The national government has failed to take into account the gendered impact of the pandemic, which leans towards women and girls' disadvantage. Initially, women made up the informal sector, which made them prone to economic downturns precipitated by the global lockdowns. Apart from this, the Philippine healthcare system is predominantly composed of women, which makes them at the forefront of health risks. In addition, based on the Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau report, there are multiple reports of women having to pick between food and personal hygiene necessities that have been perpetuated by the pandemic. Meanwhile, pregnant urban poor women expressed their inability to undergo prenatal check-ups due to a lack of supplies by their local government units (e.g. Barangay Health Centers) which is particularly harder for single moms. In this context, A study conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (2022), states that single

and/or young mothers and urban poor women and girls, in general, are heavily reliant on the public services and goods provided by the government's social amelioration program and local government units. As a vulnerable population, many of them are concealed in their homes largely attributed to being a housewife or dependent on the head of the house which prohibits them from getting “ayuda” (aid) regardless of their disadvantaged status. And with over 15 million solo parents in which 95% of whom comprise women, the onset of the pandemic made it harder for women to survive (WyethParenTeam, 2022).

Access to Basic Services and Healthcare:

a. Access to support centres Bearing in mind the possibility of transmission through direct contact, the national government issued that all “nonessential” businesses and services be temporarily shut down. As a result, several Filipino women’s support agencies were forced to comply with an online set-up which includes virtual counselling and helplines. As of 2022, the Women and ICT Development Index survey estimated that around 84.9 percent of the women respondents have mobile

phone ownership but with varying degrees of access to the internet (Xinhua News Agency, 2023). In this way, women and girls have a likelihood of acquiring access to support services. The real problem, however, is the possibility of limiting freedom in seeking help online due to supervision. Moreover, social distancing regulations have decreased the capacity of support centres that were permitted to continue their operations. Since they do not have enough room to accommodate women requesting shelter from domestic abuse, centres are given no choice but to refuse them. For instance, at the beginning of the lockdown from March 17 to 23, it has been reported that an estimated number of 602 women in Quezon City were subjected to maltreatment and/or rape in just a very short period of time (Calleja, 2020). More so, there had been a minimum of 12 complaints submitted in that municipality’s women and children’s desks alone compared to having around 5 complaints before the start of the lockdown. Women and girls needing a place to stay were redirected to another centre and in some cases, their grievance was interrupted because of economic dependency and stigma on women who are abused. Moving aside, there were cases wherein centres weren’t allowed to accept victims of violence if they lacked the necessary COVID-19 test results which put urban poor women at a disadvantage at

the height of the pandemic as test kits were limited (Social Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020, p. 14).

- The issue of government health services being preoccupied with COVID-19 Hospitals were overcrowded by COVID-19-related cases, which posed a problem for women who require medical attention due to violence. With the overwhelmed government-owned facilities, emergency rooms had the tendency to provide more attention to the treatment of COVID-19-positive individuals than to victims of violence. Furthermore, with the seeming unavailability of medical services, government organizations were obliged to transfer their funds from the prevention of violence against women and girls towards the Covid-19 assistance. At this juncture, the difficulty in seeking medical treatment, along with limited access to aid, security, and legal resources, renders women facing assault more vulnerable during the outbreak. Ultimately, the lack of medical care restricts women's options in receiving treatment for domestic abuse, which can also have a direct effect on reproductive health and family planning services. Limited access to government-accounted medical treatments will lead to fewer examinations for indications of VAW. Besides, urban poor

women become even more subjected to lesser access to contraceptive and sexual health services, as well as challenges in accessing health records that may be necessary for referrals or legal action (Social Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020, p. 14). Indeed, the pandemic has irreversible and highly detrimental consequences for women and girls.

b. Reproductive Health and rights services (SRHR) The provision of reproductive health and rights services (SRHR) has been disrupted during the lockdowns as resources and services including maternal health have been put aside to give way to pandemic-related concerns. The Commission on Human Rights (2021), indicates that relief packages provided by the national government for urban-poor women do not include hygiene and menstrual kits. Moreover, women raised their concerns about the unavailability of children's food, for the relief packages being given mostly consist of food consumable only by adults. Likewise, a lack of access to information on pre and post-natal care and family planning commodities has been a major issue. Specialists claimed that more than 5 million women in the Philippines had been affected by the lockdown's hampering of reproductive health services (Santos, 2020)

5.3.2 Colombia's Perspective

In Colombia, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the isolation lasted approximately 2 years, a long time in which, although little by little the people were able to go out to the streets and return to their daily work, thousands of families were impacted by unemployment, especially women who had to stay at home taking care of their children because there were no daycare centres or schools open while men went out to look for a job opportunity. As a response, the national government devised economic support programs for women as they were severely impacted by the decrease in income, more so than men. CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA), "found that the majority of Colombians reported seeing a decline in income in the midst of the pandemic, and women fared worse than men (76% versus 72%, respectively)" (UN Women, 2021). Similarly, it "showed that more than half of respondents had lost their job or business due to the pandemic, but women were more affected than men (56% versus 48%, respectively)" (UN Women, 2021). Although this initiative took place in 2021, until the end of 2022 the start date was announced and in the first months of 2023, it began to be implemented, so being a support that was thought to help women especially heads of households the negative impact of

the pandemic of covid 19, almost 2 years later it is launched. This type of government initiative has certain requirements in order to receive government support, such as being of legal age, proving that the household is headed by a woman, and that she is in at least one of the following situations: risk of femicide or any other type of domestic violence against women; a victim of the internal armed conflict; in the process of reincorporation or reintegration; women caregivers (Infobae, 2022). However, it must be taken into account that the abovementioned is general and in Colombia in rural areas women have a higher rate of violence, being more likely than women in urban areas to suffer aggression by their partners, about 60% of them stated that this had already happened before the pandemic while the remaining percentage stated that they had started during the pandemic, even so, a quarter confirmed that during the pandemic physical violence in homes increased considerably and about 40% that it remained the same (UN Women, 2022, p. 12). This also includes other factors such as the educational level of women and girls, where those with secondary education or less suffered some kind of abuse by their partners or in the case of young people, older people with whom they lived, also take into account that most of the abused women do not report (21% approx.) what they experience to the competent authorities such as the police,

most prefer to tell relatives or acquaintances (UN Women, 2022, p. 16). This is a major problem for carrying out a judicial follow-up of the aggressors since many do not report for fear, either of being left alone or of what might happen to them, fear of being judged or being blamed, economic or emotional dependence, among others, as well as the slowness in some processes or incompetence on the part of the corresponding authorities, making girls, women, and young women unwilling to tell their situation. Given these obvious difficulties faced by women and girls, the Colombian government has failed to address women's and girls' needs in access to health, safety, and justice services.

Access to Basic Services and Healthcare:

a. Access to support centre

The ownership of mobile phones for Colombian women is at 87% based on a survey conducted by Gallup World Poll in 2018. This is 2.1 percent higher than the Philippines but still connotes that women in this region have the capacity to navigate themselves in digital platforms thereby, allowing them to have access to information, and services in health and financial

matters (Burjorjee & Bin-Humam, 2018). However, mobile ownership doesn't guarantee women's and girls' access to support services and centres, especially those who belong to the urban poor sector. Moreover, the Colombian Women's Observatory, a government agency responsible for gathering, assessing, and disseminating information regarding the situation of women residing in Colombia, has reported that a 142% increase in calls of domestic violence has occurred during the first three weeks of community lockdowns (Salamanca, 2020, as cited in Pacheco & Rudas, 2021). Similar to the case of the Philippines, the Colombian government finds it difficult to mobilize women's support centres as funding was limited to mitigating the outbreak. As such, support centres were left to fend for themselves, and for rural areas, women social leaders were pressured into giving aid, food, and supplies to those in need. Nonetheless, the government through the National Police launched a Home Patrol approach wherein officers are given the authority to conduct door-to-door surveillance on households for the possible occurrence of VAW (Gender Based Violence, SRHR, and COVID-19, 2023). But then again, this strategy was unsuccessful due to the several accusations of excessive force committed by the police officers during their patrols. The national government also enabled the Colombian Family

Commissariats to provide virtual services and create new hotlines to cater more help to the female population. This provided the women and girls to seek legal assistance in a virtual platform. Furthermore, it is notable that an organization called Corporación Con-Vivamos is funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund) and provided assistance to women and girls who experienced and were experiencing violence during the pandemic.

- The issue of government health services being preoccupied with COVID-19

The National Institute of Health (INS) recorded 3,048,719 total positive cases in the country by May 13, 2021, with 2,859,627 (93.8%) recovering and 79,261 (2.6%) dying from the coronavirus. Accordingly, the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Centre stated that Colombia ranked 12th in the world in absolute positive case reports in May 2021 (Guarnizo Peralta et al., 2021). In this context, hospitals are focused on providing aid to virus-related cases. Women and girls suffering from domestic violence sought medical care from women's support shelters instead of directly going to hospitals in fear of contracting the virus and probably getting turned away

due to the high influx of positive cases. Therefore, this situation prompted an increase in undocumented examinations for indications of VAW. b. Reproductive Health and rights services (SRHR) Akin to the reproductive health and rights services of the Philippines, Colombia also faced reprioritized and inaccessible resources for family planning and maternal health. A study conducted by Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP, 2021), indicates that access to family planning services and contraceptives has significantly decreased as supply chains were disrupted. Maternal mortality in Colombia was also amplified, which may be caused by pregnancy complications and/or COVID-19. Equally important, nonGovernmental institutions like the UNICEF and Heartland Alliance distributed hygiene kits containing menstrual supplies to vulnerable women from rural areas.

5.3.3 Using the Lens of Liberal Feminism

Looming on the theoretical framework of Liberal feminism, women and girls' minimal access to support services is a result of the continuous rampancy of women being confined in the domestic realm. As both the Philippines and Colombia still suffer from a large degree of unemployment rate for women as

well as women engaging in the informal economic sector, there is this perpetuation of a labour gap between men and women. Through the lens of this theory, sexism is portrayed based on how the national governments of the Philippines and Colombia dealt with the issue of VAW and access to support services during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, despite Philippine healthcare being predominantly composed of women, the national government failed to provide them with incentives. Second, Filipino women are still frowned upon by society when it comes to accessing contraceptives. With this reality, contraceptive supplies are normally not procured by LGUs since it is unpopular among the urban poor masses. In this manner, the denial of women's access to various support services in health, safety, and justice, is a denial of their development of full potential as an individual.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of how government responses during the pandemic impacted gender-based violence in the Philippines and Colombia. By comparing these cases through a liberal feminist lens, it highlights common structural failures that limit women's access to support services,

aggravated by patriarchal power dynamics. By arguing the need to reform these structures and policies, this paper suggests that governments must implement more inclusive and equitable measures to prevent and respond effectively to violence against women. As discussed in the paper, the pandemic has aggravated instances of violence against women and girls. Given that there is a preexisting and concerning issue regarding violence against women, the researchers have confirmed that the pandemic not only affected the physical and mental well-being of individuals but has also been an avenue for domestic abuse during the lockdown period, especially to women and girls in both countries of the Philippines and Colombia. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the three areas of risk and vulnerability for women are found in their homes, in the front line of the healthcare sector, and the labour market. Despite the increase in gender-based violence from these sectors, it was found that women and girls do not often seek help for fear of contracting the virus or from other external factors such as financial issues, severe emotional and mental distress, etc. Thus, it has resulted in women finding difficulty in leaving their perpetrators as well as a channel for violence (such as domestic and digital violence) to happen during the pandemic. In reference to the Liberal Feminist Theory, it can be observed that the gender roles that

are deeply embedded in society, even way before the COVID19 Pandemic happened, reflected how both countries are patriarchal which resulted in the increased vulnerability of women and girls during the mandatory confinement in their own homes, in the frontline health sector, and the labour market. Apart from an influx of cases of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic, women's and girls' vulnerabilities as members of society during the global crisis were intensified as access to support services was limited in both the Philippines and Colombia. With similar cases found in the Philippines and Colombia, women have limited access to support services because of distance from family members that can help them, socio-economic pressures brought by the pandemic, restrictions and preventative measures from the virus, and change in priorities of the healthcare sector during the pandemic. In connection with the lack of support services that women and girls have, there is also minimal inclusion of women's and girls' needs in the government's COVID-19 response. The researchers found that the national governments have failed to take into account the disadvantages that women and girls experienced during the pandemic. Although acknowledgment was present towards the existence of violence against women and girls, effective and strong implementation

of policies and services was not strictly met and prioritized. Moreover, access to support centres has been an issue as the priority drastically shifted and focused on COVID-19. Consequently, health services like treatments for violence and abuse were very limited, and there was a lack of necessities and hygiene kits for urban-poor women (such as menstrual kits) that were not provided in relief packages. In both the Philippines and Colombia, there's a seemingly and outright reliance on nongovernmental organizations' aid in giving hygiene kits containing women's and girls' period care packages. Meanwhile, looking at the data gathered and focusing on the perspective of Liberal Feminism Theory, the national governments of both states have a huge power to influence and provide more opportunities and access to support services for women and girls, especially during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, as found in previous studies and existing data, the role of the state as the guarantor and protector of rights, especially that of women in this case has been inadequate resulting in the continuous and increased perpetuation of violence against women during the global health crisis. In conclusion, despite the acknowledgment of the existence of violence against women in the Philippines and Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of cases regarding the issue has soared, and a lack

of response, such as through policies, from the national governments of both countries that address women's access to effective and efficient support services for the violence, were observed. From these, the researchers suggest giving more focus and importance to the issue and not solely relying on the existing support services and policies for cases of violence against women, which are provided by non-government agencies. As found in multiple studies, there are policies and support services available for women experiencing violence from their partners, families, coworkers, etc. but these interventions have not been able to lessen nor eradicate the issue regarding gender-based violence. With this, accessibility and consideration to the needs of women and girls shall be given more importance by both the national governments of the Philippines and Colombia. The extension of help provided by governments through relief packages must include menstrual kits, maternal and post-natal care, and overall reproductive health services, especially for those women and girls that belong in the rural areas and are considered to be part of the urban-poor sector. Moreover, raising awareness and educating individuals regarding this issue shall be implemented in order for women and girls experiencing these cases to gather more courage to seek help, and for other people to cease the

perpetuation of gender-based violence brought by gender and power dynamics embedded in society. Lastly, a reallocation of the national budget for long-term funding for women support agencies working under the government must be part of the country's agenda. Consequently, the government must work on ways to foster linkages between SRHR service providers, government agencies, and civil society organizations, to coordinate a strengthened delivery of support services to women and girls nationwide. Ultimately, proper implementation and monitoring of these services should be at the forefront of these agencies for an improvement of transparency and accountability. Ergo, from these recommended areas of improvement, based on existing interventions for gender based-violence and support services in both the Philippines and Colombia, the study aspires that better understanding and response of the national governments as well as the receding number of cases will be observed during post-pandem.

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