

SAMA-SAMANG PAGLALAKBAY SA
PAGBUBUO NG SARILI
An Exploratory Study on Incest Using Feminist
Participatory Approach: A Contribution to the
Study of Violence Against Women*

Prescilla Dela Peña Tulipat**

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This is the first ever attempt in the Philippines to systematically study the nature, dynamics, and impact of incest using groupwork as a feminist participatory method. It is definitely a contribution to the study of violence against women—both directly and indirectly. In the absence of earlier Philippine studies on incest, this study presents its initial findings and primarily seeks to make incest a public issue. We are in the process of completing the group sessions, two big group sessions and three small group sessions, which are contained in this study.

The scope of this inquiry is limited to the notion of incest and its impact on women as perceived by victims-survivors who participated in this study. At best, this report will try to describe them — the women victims-survivors of incest. And it will also present who our perpetrators/abusers are, the consequences of incestuous abuses which affected our lives, our dilemma with our relationship with our mothers, some of our experiences of repeated sexual abuses, and our struggle with the process of recovery and empowerment.

*Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Women and Development to the Department of Women and Development, College of Social Work and Community Development, UP-Diliman in April 1994.

**Research Associate WomenHealth.

In looking at the impact of incest abuse, the interpretations of this study are taken from analysis of our experiences or “experiential analysis.” Consequences of the abuse listed here are those which we articulated and those that came out during our intimate conversations.

Hence, claims on the “conclusiveness” of the findings cannot be made here because the accounts are largely based on our groupwork pending six big sessions to be completed. Second, our group has its biases or subjective perceptions and interpretations. For the same reason, gaps in individual stories cannot be ruled out. There is no significant difference in number between those women who have narrated their stories after long years of silence and those women who have narrated it just after the incest abuse ceased. However, premium is given to our own accounts and our analysis of our experiences because we believe that there will be no one to tell and believe our stories if not we ourselves. We have agreed that our pseudonyms will be used in writing our herstories.

In addition, we also make use of existing psychological concepts like trauma, flashbacks, phobias, and the like written by feminist authors to explain or pursue deeper analysis of our experiences.

Objectives/Research Questions

From the foregoing, this masteral thesis is committed to meet the following objectives:

1. to document the socio-cultural and personal factors which facilitate and impede recovery of women victims-survivors of incest abuse;
2. to study and arrive at a collective analysis of what can be called the “Survivors Cycle” or the process which we underwent since the time of the abuse up to these times;

3. to identify indigenous meanings and manifestations of incest;
4. to agree on what action to take at the level of the personal and organizational;
5. to review existing literature on incest, particularly studies in Asian countries.

Given the above objectives, the core questions tackled in this study are as follows:

1. What is the impact of incest abuse on the women/girls' conditions in the (a) home (b) school (c) workplace, and (d) community?
2. How did they cope with the consequences of incest abuse?
3. How does the socialization of females and males influence the probable occurrence and disclosure of incest in a family?

Areas of Inquiry

1. *Quest for Indigenous Meanings, Terms, and Manifestations of Incest*

This exploratory study on incest calls for a search of its different meanings, terms used for it, and its manifestations in the local context. In fact, there is no Filipino term for it. Thus, it would be a great opportunity for this study to come up with concrete words used by the incest victims-survivors themselves in defining the trauma of incestuous abuse.

Though there is no study yet in the Philippines establishing the incidence rate of incest, this study will delve into the process of secrecy manifested in the use or non-use of words identifying the incest experience. In this quest for words or meanings, the following will be considered:

1. age of the incest victim-survivor,
2. number of years from the onset of incest abuse till the time it was disclosed,

3. relationship between girls/women victim-survivors of incest and the male abusers,
4. details or narration of the incest experience.

2. *Sociocultural and Personal Factors
which Facilitate and Hinder Recovery*

Women who have been victims of child sexual abuse adopt coping strategies in order to survive emotionally and physically. They are able to build up defenses or lose them for survival purposes. These defenses form as walls, which in turn make it hard for a common observer to identify women victims-survivors of incest.

It would be helpful and meaningful, in the interest or need of facilitating recovery, to identify the consequences of incestuous abuse and the concomitant coping strategies we used. Moreover, the Filipino culture in socializing or raising girl and boy children is a critical dimension to look into. The family is considered a very important structure which should be analysed to shed light on the occurrence of incest. But this analysis is done using the feminist perspective which sees incest as a question of power relations.

