

Problematizing ‘financial support’ of women within social welfare policies and practices in Makati City, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The problem of spousal financial support for women in post-separation relationships has been increasingly reported at the Makati Social Welfare Department (MSWD) in Makati City, Philippines from 2013 up to the present. This problem is primarily framed as a question of financial insecurity than a question of hegemonic masculinity and changing patterns of gendered power and relations (Cook and Natalier 2015, p. 28). The purpose of this exploratory study is to understand how the social welfare practices and policies constitute ‘deprivation of financial support’ as ‘economic abuse’ experienced by women in the context of conjugal separation in Makati City, Philippines. Case management practices and their implications for women/mothers and men/fathers as social welfare clients are also considered. This paper argues that the traditional gender norm (Butler 1990) of women’s economic dependence on men is performatively reproduced through the practice of compromise agreement at the local social welfare agency.

This thesis is informed by an analysis of national policy on violence against women and their children (VAWC) and its translation into case management protocols and case files of ‘women in especially difficult circumstances’ clients at the MSWD. Guided by Carol Bacchi’s ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’, or the WPR Approach (Bacchi 1999; 2017), this study interrogates the potential *gendering*, *heteronorming*, and *classing* effects of the Anti-VAWC Act of 2004 policy and MSWD case management protocols that shape and reproduce the social experiences of ‘men’ and ‘women’ (Bacchi 2017, p. 21) as gendered, social welfare clients. Secondary data from 50 intake forms, 25 Compromise/support agreements, and MSWD case management protocols were analysed to arrive at the findings and conclusion.

Findings indicated that the current national policy on VAWC, translated into social welfare practices, constitutes ‘deprivation of financial support’ as a problem of post-relationship disagreements that may be ‘fixed’ through amicable settlement and compromise/support agreement. The ‘fixing’ of the problem reproduces gendered norms through the use of discursive texts. These texts, such as ‘caring’ but ‘dependent’ mothers, and ‘providing’ but ‘abusive’ fathers implicitly play out in agency frameworks that guide case management. Findings also suggest that the current case management practices of mediation, compromise, and referral for legal services have taken for granted women’s subjective differences and economic consequences as solo parents, which render the case management processes insensitive to gender inequality. Support for women’s economic empowerment programs and gender-sensitive case management practices are recommended in this study.