

# MOTHERHOOD AND MATERNAL PRACTICES OF PROSTITUTED WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES: A NARRATIVE CASE ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lives of three trafficking survivors, particularly on how they view and portray their role as a mother, and on how their stories reflect the existing societal, and institutional problems in the Philippines. Through a series of interviews, and an institutional key informant interview with the executive director of Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP), and a narrative analysis of the constructed data, it was found that how the three former prostituted mothers view themselves as mothers are different from how they portray it. Furthermore, how they portray their roles diverge as they mature. Standpoint, Maternal thinking, Narrative, Life course, and Convoy theories were integrated into a framework used in analyzing and deconstructing the narrated experiences of the subjects. Poverty, lack of proper education and of good family structure, and the presence of trafficking led these three women to prostitution but their motive for staying is to help their family. They view motherhood and mothering as a hard, yet rewarding role and they may not be very capable to rear children but their love for them outweighs their shortcomings, thus, it became their reason for exiting prostitution and strive to become good mothers.

Keywords: motherhood, prostitution, poverty, maternal practices

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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is a dynamic and adaptive process that involves a transaction between a seller and a buyer of a sexual service (World Health Organization, 1988). Women become involved in prostitution for a variety of economic reasons but these should not be mistaken for the cause of prostitution itself, which is the **demand** from men to buy sex. If men were not prepared to buy sex, then prostitution would not work as a survival behavior.

Women's rights advocates opt to refer to them as 'prostituted women'. 'Prostitute' implies that a woman with a strong sense of self and has a complete access to resources would offer herself for sexual hire (Baldo, 2012). The term prostituted implies that the women are victims, driven by economic circumstances. Prostitution of women, men, and children is made possible through trafficking (Enriquez, 2012).

As of the year 1997, Southeast Asia is the top destination for tourists looking for sex (Cordingley, et al. 1997). In the Philippines, 300,000 women are prostituted; 75,000 of which are children, and about 60,000 sell their bodies ([www.catwap.org](http://www.catwap.org), 2012). Additionally, the export of entertainers and domestic helpers put women at risk of sexual exploitation. As a whole, sex trade in the Philippines is profitable. In 1985, it became the third largest source of foreign exchange (Dela Cruz, 1985) and in 2005, it emerged as the country's fourth largest source of Gross National Product or GNP (Preese, 2005).

Although there has been extensive debate on whether prostitution is violence against women or a form of work (Alexander, 1987; Miller & Jayasundara, 2001; Sloan & Wahab, 2000), there is considerable evidence that prostituted women are frequently victims of violent crime, including battering, rape,

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and murder (Davis, 1993; Silbert & Pines, 1982).

Despite the fact that Women's Rights is on the third spot of the Millennium Development Goals, prostitution in the Philippines is still increasing (Enriquez, 2012), and there have been no qualitative or quantitative data showing the state of prostituted mothers. This study would analyze the narratives and life story of three former prostituted mothers in the Philippines, particularly on how they are as mothers, how they view themselves as such, how they themselves were raised, and how their stories reflect various societal problems.

Their stories would be a reference on the usual issues that women like them face while being on the motherhood stage. This study would help both the Government and Non-Government Organizations to implement programs that could improve not just the women's lives, but their children as well. This study will be an avenue for these women's voices to be heard. It could also benefit the academe for the findings can succinctly define the culture of prostitution and trafficking in a third world country.

## RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES

### *Research Question:*

How does a prostituted view and portray her role as a mother in the life of her child/ren?

### *Specific Objectives:*

1. To look at the past experiences of the prostituted mothers (Narrative)
  - a. Childhood
  - b. Family and Upbringing
  - c. Relationships
  - d. Entry to prostitution
  - e. Entry to motherhood
2. To explore and understand how the prostituted mother raises her child/ren
3. To determine the struggles that a prostituted woman and a survivor face in raising their children

4. To look at the narratives as an objective reflection of the problems in the society

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

It was concluded in the study of Brannen, et al. (1996) that to be a good parent, children must be provided with a home where they feel secured, must feel protected through parental worry, and must need to identify where they came from, thus, knowing the auto/biography of their parents, along with the family narratives are very essential in building a healthy parent-child relationship.

Some literature validates that childless couples are happier than those who have children (Callan, 1987; Campbell et al., 1976), while for families with only one parent present, Arevalo, Toloza & Nicolas (1997), and Suemith (2000) found that children are more attached to the custodian parent, regardless of the gender.

For a married woman, her world is her children and husband (Lewis, 1984). However, the experience of being a mother and a wife differed according to the realities of class and bodily experience (Giles, 1995). Having time to read books and paying a nurse to look after her children was quite different from having to do the dishes while her children tugged at her skirt. While mothers became more stressed as the baby matures, the fathers were not similarly affected (Ambert, 1992). Studies of employed mothers indicate that they are responsible for most of the housework and childcare (Ambert, 1992).

Interests in preservation, growth, and acceptability of the child govern maternal practices in general. Mothers will typically know that they cannot secure each interest, and that unqualified success in realizing interests is an illusion (Ruddick, 1989). This unavoidable conflict of basic interests is one objective basis for the maternal humility. Although economic and social conditions may make being a mother hard, a woman still has its maternal instinct.

Children who have mental illnesses, or are physically handicapped, have higher emotional attachment to the mother than the father (Dupont, 1980; Wilkin, 1981). Orsmond, G., et al, 2006, examined the mother-child relationships of 202 children having autism spectrum disorder living at home. Despite the communication

and social challenges associated with autism, the children still show positive interactions with their mothers. Although historically, mothers of children with autism were characterized as lacking in warmth, the study proved otherwise, with the very large proportion of mothers in the sample feeling extreme affection (90%) and respect (over 75%) for their child.

The relation between aspects of the mother-child relationship and the child's social competence in the school environment was explored by Christopoulos, et al., 1989. Results indicated that the most powerful qualities that a mother must have for their child's social competence are warmth and control. Thus, loving and involved parents who are consistent with enforcing rules tend to have children who are more affiliative with peers than do parents who are rejecting and uninvolved (Hinde & Tamplin, 1983; MacDonald & Parke, 1984).

Since prostituted women rarely participate in this public discourse, the ideologies behind their movement for rights and respect cannot be communicated (p.3).

Most of the time, prostituted women come from broken and/or violent families with abusive or alcoholic parents (Klain, 1999; Vanswesenbeeck 1994). Other researches have also shown that females of minority age end up in prostitution if they become socially isolated, do not get good grades or have problems getting along with fellow students at school (Klain, 1999).

Klein, 2006, was able to construct four categories on the reasons why women become prostituted: (a) when a young girl runs away from school or ends up living on the street; (b) financial difficulties; (c) drug addiction and (d) family. The women shared that the only good thing about prostitution is the money they earn from it while what they fear most would be their children finding out about what they do. Another study by Breaking Free, Valandra, a women's rights NGO in Minnesota, show that some former prostituted women were sexually abused when they were little by a family member and that economic survival issues are the key motivators for entering the industry. The very reason why they entered the

industry is also the reason why they want to get out of it.

The ethnographic research of Tremayne, 2001, focused on the lives of young prostitutes in Baan Nua, Thailand. Despite widespread availability of contraception, and their high level of knowledge on causes of pregnancy, birth control was almost never used, causing most of them to acquire sexually transmitted diseases. Nevertheless, not all of them saw motherhood as something to avoid (Tremayne, 2001). Issues of filial duty were central to the dynamics of life in the Baan Nua community as children felt responsible to support their parents, and prostitution was their only choice to fulfill their perceived obligations. There is always a tendency to assume that parents who allow their children to become prostituted must be abusive, but in Baan Nua, the children were much loved (Tremayne, 2001).

## **FRAMEWORK**

Standpoint, Maternal Thinking, Life Course, Convoy, and Narrative Theories were used and integrated as a framework for the study.

According to the Standpoint Theory (Wood, 1993), the perspective from the lives of the less powerful can provide a more objective view since people who are on top have the power to define how things are supposed to be, thus, leaving point of views of subordinate people. Standpoint theory applies more to minority groups such as women who are deemed less influential than males. The subjects of the study have experienced oppression and the researcher would get their standpoint as a mother and a former prostituted.

Narrative theory will be used in decoding their life stories and relationships. Khan and Antonucci (1980) proposed Convoy Theory as an interdisciplinary framework that seeks to explain how social networks and support operate across the life course.

Their standpoint as former prostituted mothers will be viewed as a powerful voice for they rose above the situation and decided to be responsible for their children, as opposed to the traditional notion of Prostituted and Motherhood as powerless groups.

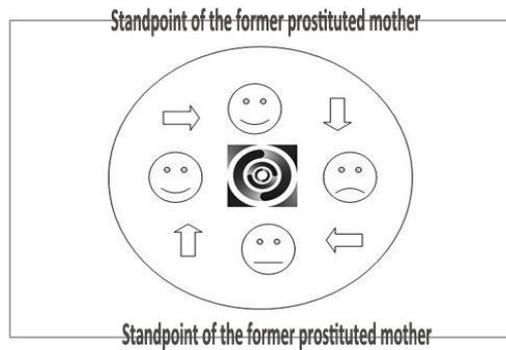


Figure 1. Integrated Operational Model

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study is qualitative in nature and used methods and analytical tools from the narrative paradigm. Focus Interviews using the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method was the primary data construction technique for the study. Discursive and narrative strategies were utilized in coding the different concepts that emerged from the data.

All in all, the research has three subjects: two of which have been receiving care and support from CATW-AP (Coalition against Trafficking of Women-Asia Pacific) and another survivor which have not received any formal training to overcome prostitution. An institutional focus interview of Ms. Jean Enriquez, the executive director of Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP), was also conducted to gather industrial insights.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Past experiences of the prostituted mothers.

#### 1. Childhood

##### Alison

She grew up in the province with her grandparents while the rest of her siblings and her Mom were in the big city. As early as nine years old, she experienced being sexually harassed by her cousin who lives in the same house, while her grandparents don't seem to care.

##### Josephine

Life was definitely happier when Josephine was young. However, life became harder when she had more siblings. Her parents fought constantly and being the eldest in the siblinghood, much responsibility was expected of her.

##### Elisa

Elisa is deeply involved with bad cliques in her youth. Having spent more time outside with her friends than with her family, she tried smoking, drinking, shoplifting, running away from home, and cutting classes. A serious incident at school led her to leave home and never go back. She was also raped by her cousin when she was seven but unlike Alison who knew that it was harassment, Elisa had no idea of what it meant.

### 2. Family and Upbringing

##### Alison

Alison grew up with her grandparents who have never given her love, warmth, and control, and would only notice her when she acts notoriously, thus prompted her to always do so; her cousin would only act with malice towards her. Her mother and siblings took her when her grandparents passed away. Although more warm and loving, they still never protected her from her cousin.

##### Josephine

The lenient and affectionate parenting styles of Josephine's parents somehow influenced her decision to marry at a young age. How Josephine was raised could support the notion that a non-functioning family life in which a girl lacks regular and supervisory care could easily lead to prostitution (Klain, 1999).

##### Elisa

The parenting style of Elisa's mother is permissive, having few rules and standards, causing her lack of self-discipline (Baumrind, 1991), and eventually leading her to run away and live with her friends. The parents had no knowledge of the rape incident between Elisa and her cousin. Elisa's relationship

with her Mom waned when she felt rejected, thus, started seeking approval and attention from other outside their home.

### 3. Relationships

Alison

As a kid, she wanted to release her anger to someone else that's why she would torture younger kids in her neighborhood. She only had one childhood friend who also experienced sexual harrasment. Alison was raped by her high school friend, and became pregnant. When she moved to Metro Manila, she met the lady who introduced her to prostitution, and friends in the same field. Those friends introduced her to different vices. She also met the man who would be willing to be the father of her child. The man became one of the reasons for her to strive and get more customers. What finally got her away from being prostituted through CATW-AP. The people inside the Coalition served as her surrogate family and support group.

Josephine

She was not very close to her siblings but she still provides them with every form of help that she can. The bar owner who recruited Josephine played a significant role in her life. When she became a full-time homemaker, she considered her neighbors as a family. Their community is very small and her neighbors are very loving and accepting of her children.

Elisa

Elisa had been involved in a bad clique as a teenager and she now regrets meeting them. There is only one girl whom she considers as a true friend and they used to work together at a bar. Now, her support group and surrogate family are her co-survivors in CATW-AP.

### 4. Entry to prostitution

Alison

Sexually harassed by her close friend and forced by her family to marry the rapist, Alison ran away and moved to Manila, with the help of her best friend and

boyfriend at that time. Being in the most complex city in the country, with a baby in her womb, little money and education with her, she had no other choice but to accept what was offered to her- be prostituted. She got out of it as soon as she can.

Josephine

Having been married at a young age, she followed her husband when he went back to his own province. Having not enough money and resources, a pimp approached her and gradually introduced her to prostitution. She was very young then and although she did not really want what was happening, she thought she had no other choice.

Elisa

Having ran away from her family at sixteen to explore better opportunities in the big city, despite not having any relative there, Elisa easily ventured into prostitution with her friend. Pregnant during that time, she was even more motivated to continue for the offspring, but she had a miscarriage. She had transferred in various bars and she stayed in that situation for a long time, even after having other children.

### 5. How they became a mother

Alison

Alison got pregnant at the age of 16 and while she is biologically entitled as a mother, she still is not at that time. According to the Maternal Thinking theory, being a mother is so much more than being pregnant. She attempted to get rid of the baby while it is still in her womb but failed to do so. She started to act as a mother when she met the man who accepted her and the child in their family. Alison was pregnant and prostituted at the same time.

Josephine

After spending years being prostituted, she decided to settle with an ordinary man, and that was when she finally convinced herself that she can do better than being prostituted. They had two children and she was left home to be a homemaker and mother while the husband work overseas.

Elisa

She got pregnant as a teenager but experienced miscarriage. Though her friends are advising her to give up the baby in the womb (first born), she would strive even harder for the sake of the child. As a matter of fact, she had always been excited to see her babies come out of the womb and flourish. Her concern and love for the babies in the womb exemplifies her being a mother. Hence, even when she was being prostituted and pregnant for the first time, she already was and ready to be a mother. She has five children now from four different fathers.

#### B. Motherhood and Maternal Practices

Alison

She became pregnant and prostituted at 16. Inside the bar where she worked, she would drink and smoke with her customers. She never consulted an OB Gyne, nor was she conscious of her food intake. She stopped working only two days before her child was born. She tried breastfeeding but her body could not handle it. Most of the maternal work would come from the mother of Alison's partner. Alison was not the one who taught the child how to walk, talk, play, and study. What Alison taught him were various narratives and virtues such as honesty and obedience.

Josephine

For families with only one parent present, Arevalo, Toloza & Nicolas (1997) found that children are more attached to the parent who is left behind. Josephine's husband was away while their children are growing and so, they were closer to her.

The first child has some developmental problems and Josephine alone cannot help him. The child used to have a therapist but when his father died, Josephine decided to stop the medication due to financial reasons. Josephine also breastfed, and equipped them with values. Since she cannot provide her children with all of their wants, she became lenient and permissive. That could possibly be one of the reasons why her second born became pregnant at 19.

Elisa

Elisa still worked at the bar and in the streets even while pregnant. She had five children, all from different men. The second child was the only one who received prenatal care, and the only one whom was brought to the hospital for check-ups. She was not physically able to attend to her children's growing needs as her firstborn was taken by her Mom while the rest were tended by a nanny while she was being prostituted.

She also has a tendency of hitting her kids as a form of punishment every time they were naughty. One of the lessons that CATW-AP taught is that having been oppressed by people numerous times, they would want to hurt someone smaller than them, often their children (Enriquez, 2012).

Elisa only learned about the rights of children when she entered CATW-AP, and she stopped hurting her children thereafter. Elisa showed the greatest extent of parental worry among the three survivors in this sample. She would advise her children to not easily believe anyone, and to trust women who wear uniform more than men, and police.

#### C. Struggles as a Mother

Alison

According to Alison, the hardest part of her being a mother is not always being present in her child's activities. The only thing that she knows about being a mother is the financial aspect. She thought that providing money and other material things would be enough but it really tears her that she doesn't get to be with her son while another woman is there. Furthermore, her own son developed a romantic relationship with her adopted daughter. It's hard for her to see history repeating itself, given her former situation with her cousin.

Josephine

Josephine's first born child is born developmentally-challenged. There is no way that the special child would live a normal life and be accepted in this cruel world. Her other struggles include financial difficulties.

Elisa

According to Elisa, she still has to work in the bar and in the streets even when she was pregnant. That was admittedly one of her struggles. Instead of just resting, she had to attend to the needs of the customers. Her first born child was taken away from her by her mother and it hurts Elisa that she can't watch him grow. She only visits him very occasionally and according to Ruddick, 1989, and Rich, 1995, mothering is related to care-giving and not being capable of giving care to its children is a mother's greatest frustration. Also, Elisa reported to have physically hurt her children. Seeing her children cry because of her is one of the painful things that a mother would feel (Ruddick, 1989).

#### D. How they view themselves as mothers

Alison

Despite her shortcomings, Alison is very much satisfied in how she raised her boy. He was not breastfed, nor did he experience nourishment when he was in the womb, but he still grew up to be a very successful individual, excelling in his academics and other fields he engages himself into. Seeing her child flourish is a mother's greatest joy.

Josephine

Though Josephine mentioned that she is not satisfied with how she is as a mother, it is very evident from the interview that Josephine seems happy for how she portrayed her role as one. Though she has some various struggles, the positive experiences still tend to outweigh it. The second born may have married and had a child at nineteen but at least unlike Josephine, she isn't prostituted. She is still happy that the child of her daughter can have the chance to be better than them.

Elisa

Elisa hurt her children and it even went to the point where she was reported for child abuse, and she was not able to watch her first born grow but after undergoing various empowerments and counseling programs in CATW-AP, she rose above the situation. She became more caring and loving to her children.

She is now satisfied and happy with her being a mother.

#### E. Reflection of Society through the women's narratives

Alison

She experienced being sexually harassed by her elder cousin when they were kids. His grandparents were not imbuing values and his cousin's sources of information were school, media, and peers. It is important to note how parental supervision is lacking and the child probably got the gesture from any of the mentioned institutions above.

Alison's family forced her to marry him, a situation called victim-blaming, holding her responsible for the abuse. At the same time, it releases the man who commits violence from the supposed punishment. If her family approved of her verdict to punish the rapist and save her, she wouldn't have run away and be introduced to prostitution.

Josephine

Josephine is a victim of human trafficking. According to Jean Enriquez, the executive director of CATW-AP, trafficking is the way to allow prostitution to happen. Josephine was forced to work in the bar and was not even allowed to go home during the weekends. Besides, according to her, the salary is only partially given to her because the amount that the customers pay are equally divided to the bar owner and the prostituted. Such was also validated by Jean Enriquez, executive director of CATW-AP who said that in such trade, only a quarter will be given to the prostituted woman.

Elisa

Elisa was also sexually harassed by her elder cousin but unlike Josephine who knew what was happening, Elisa didn't know that she was being harassed. She was helpless and according to her, her cousin is a very huge guy while she is very small then so she had no means of protection.

According to Elisa, her cousin got the idea of incest on the local television. There is an evident media planning problem for the TV did not take into

consideration that children would possibly be viewing those and that single mistake destroyed the innocence and/or moral of the boy and negatively affected the Elisa's future.

Just like Josephine, Elisa's experience was an evident case of trafficking. She didn't know where she was about to go and little ladies like her are usually the targets of human trafficking agencies. She was young and she had no other means of living. They used her motivation to go home in their province for her to trade sexual acts for money.

The three former prostituted women were all suffering from poverty. Josephine and Alison were able to reach high school while Elisa was not able to finish elementary. The lives of these women can exemplify as one of the effects of poverty and lack of education. They are products of learned helplessness, being born poor and falling into unfortunate circumstances which led them to their past situation of being victimized into prostitution.

Poverty, lack of education, and the presence of trafficking may be some of the main reasons why women become prostituted but the cause of prostitution itself is the demand from men to buy sex. According to CATW-AP, 2012, the urge of men to demand sex from the industry is not a natural instinct, it is socially imbibed. An evident proof would be those men who raped Elisa and Alison.

The submissive parenting styles of Elisa and Josephine's parents became one of the reasons why they were able to run away from her home without being followed. At almost all times, a mother will inherit its parenting style from its mother, too. Hence, just like Josephine's mother, she became lenient as well. In the end, Josephine's daughter got pregnant at 19. Children of permissive parents usually have no self-discipline.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

How the subjects view themselves as mothers are somehow different from how they portray it. Furthermore, the portrayals of their role as mothers in their children's lives diverge as they mature. Being in their standpoint also proves to be difficult and being a single mother placed a great deal of strain on them.

Elisa and Alison are very much satisfied with how they are as mothers. They recognize their sacrifices for their children and they are happy to know that their children are somehow successful in their own fields. This finding goes hand in hand with the Maternal Thinking theory for it also states that a mother's greatest success is to see its children flourish. The stories of the three women prove that the love of a mother for a child is like nothing else in the world; hence, it remains as one of the greatest power of women against oppression. Motherhood and mothering give women the power to rock the cradle, but they still do not rule the world (Baldo, 2010). Evidently, problems are still there and the three women admitted that they are still not strong enough to direct their children's paths and to simply provide for what they need and want. Hence, the three women still sought help to other people whom they consider as support groups (Convoy Theory). Elisa's mother took care of the first born, and almost similar to that is Alison's case where the family of her previous partner took responsibility in providing the child with a home and a large network of support group. The two women still continued to be prostituted even when they had children and similarly, both of them were not able to physically nurture their children.

Josephine, on the other hand, had already survived prostitution when she became a mother. What went wrong was her inability to handle money and giving more priority to her being a daughter and a sibling than to her being a mother. She resorted to being lenient to cover up for her shortcomings but unfortunately, it led to her daughter's being pregnant and dropping out of school. Similarly, Elisa admitted to be a lenient mother too. However, while showing up a submissive front, she would still worry too much and she has the tendency to follow her children secretly just to see if they are safe. Just like Josephine's daughter, Elisa's became pregnant too. Despite being regretful, both mothers still look at the situation positively. According to Josephine, her grand child is the one who gives her joy and that she and her daughter will strive to make the baby's future bright. Josephine is the only one among the three who isn't satisfied with how she portrayed her role as a mother.

When it comes to their maternal practices, Alison is very hands-on. Despite not being present most of the

times, her son still shows great affection and it could be observed every time he cries when his Mom would travel back to Manila. According to her, she is strict when it comes to her son's social networking activities. Alison also had an adopted child which she loves equally. Her greatest frustration is when her two children got romantically involved which could be attributed to the presence of various programs on local television which promotes sibling love (Enriquez, 2012). Elisa had admittedly hurt her children in the past but through the help of CATW-AP, she learned that children must be loved and protected. Parental worry is very evident in Elisa's and Alison's case but somehow not much observable in Josephine's.

Since they have no other standard, prostituted mothers tend to raise their children according to their parents' practices (Enriquez, 2012). Elisa's parents were submissive, which made her a stricter parent. Josephine's parents were very lenient and so she became lenient, too. Alison, on the other hand, grew up with her grandparents and cousin and almost same situation applies to her children. However, she makes sure that they won't experience harassment and neglect.

It could be concluded that the three women view motherhood and mothering as a hard, yet rewarding role. They may not be very capable and educated enough to rear children but their love for them outweighs their shortcomings, thus, it became the reason for their exit in prostitution. They may be weak to begin with, and had been weakened by various societal, structural, and filial problems but the birth of their own children prove to have been their strength and reason to fight for their right and save more women of their kind.

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