



**Understanding Domestic Violence**  
*Case Studies on Filipino Migrant Women in Japan*

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MIGRANTS  
CENTER (FMC)**  
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## Introduction

FMC's encounter with Filipina victims of domestic violence or DV in Japan began in 2000, the same year it was established primarily as a counseling center for migrant Filipinos in Nagoya. At that time, there were only 144,871 registered Filipinos in Japan<sup>1</sup> and about 20,000-30,000 "overstays" and undocumented Filipino migrant workers.<sup>2</sup>

Back then, the number of Filipina DV victims was not as many compared today but it could be mainly because many of the victims were reluctant to come out for fear of reprisals from their husbands or partners. Others who had no permanent residence status, most especially those without visa, were worried about the prospect of deportation or losing custody of their children. It is also important to note that there was no domestic violence law in Japan to speak of at that time, and not enough mechanisms in place, if there was any at all, to protect and support the victims.

In its first years, FMC's response to the issue focused on providing counseling and other forms of assistance albeit limited to Filipinas who complain about spousal abuse. Although Information campaigns and advocacy on domestic violence were integral to the work of the FMC, these hardly took off the ground for sheer lack of information since, as mentioned earlier, many of the victims were apprehensive to come out and speak up. People in the community knew that domestic violence exist and that Filipino women who were either married or in a relationship with foreigners, particularly Japanese men, are among the victims. Nevertheless, DV was treated like a "shadow" lurking around the community or just a passing issue talked about by rumormongers, but never really discussed in community affairs.

The situation now is a lot different. For one, the number of migrant Filipinos in Japan has increased over the last ten years. In spite of tighter immigration controls and the series of crackdown on "overstays" and undocumented migrants, many Filipinos managed to evade immigration controls through the aid of brokers and unscrupulous agents who obviously had connections with both

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice, Immigration Bureau (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Migrant Report, Filipino Migrant Center, 2001

Japanese and Philippine authorities.<sup>3</sup> Current statistics show that the number of Filipino "new comers" continue to be in the upward trajectory. See Table 1.

The Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that there are 193,488 registered Filipinos in Japan as of 2006 (see Table 1)<sup>4</sup> Not included in the figure are thousands of undocumented and overstaying Filipinos which can go as high as 40,000 to 50,000 based on FMC's own estimate.<sup>5</sup>

What is important to note is that based on studies on the movement of Filipinos overseas during the last ten years; Filipino migration to Japan has shifted heavily in favor of women. In fact, women now dominate the make up of Filipinos in Japan by 4 to 1.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. Foreign Nationals Registered in Japan by Nationality 2000 to 2006**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Total Number of Registered Foreign nationals</b>	1,686,444	1,778,462	1,851,758	1,915,030	1,973,747	2,011,555	2,084,191
<b>South and North Korea</b>	635,269 37.7%	632,405 35.6	625,422 33.8%	613,791 32.1%	607,419 30.8%	598,687 29.8%	598,219 28.7
<b>China</b>	335,575 19.9%	381,225 21.4%	424,282 22.9%	462,396 24.1%	487,570 24.7%	519,561 25.8%	560,741 26.9%
<b>Brazil</b>	254,394 15.1%	265,962 15.0%	268,332 14.5	274,700 14.3%	286,557 14.5%	302,080 15.0	312,979 15.0
<b>PHILIPPINES</b>	<b>144,871</b>	<b>156,667</b>	<b>169,359</b>	<b>185,237</b>	<b>199,394</b>	<b>187,261</b>	<b>193,488</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>Peru</b>	46,171 2.7%	50,052 2.8%	51,772 2.8%	53,649 2.8%	55,750 2.8%	57,728 2.8%	58,721 2.8%
<b>United States</b>	44,856 2.6%	46,244 2.6%	47,970 2.6%	47,836 2.5%	48,844 2.5%	49,390 2.5%	51,321 2.5%
<b>Others</b>	225,308 13.4%	245,907 13.8%	264,621 14.3%	277,421 14.5%	288,213 14.6%	296,848 14.8%	309,405 14.8%

A significant number of these women work as entertainers and hostesses in nightclubs and bars while others are employed as factory workers, domestic helpers, care givers, and trainees. Many are also wives or partners of Japanese citizens and other foreign residents in Japan.

<sup>3</sup>“Executive Summary Report: Filipino Migrant Center (FMC), 2007, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Statistical Report, Ministry of Justice, Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2007

<sup>5</sup>Executive summary Report: Filipino Migrant Center (FMC), 2007, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>“Migrants Have Rights Too”, KASANGGA: Know Your Rights Guide to Filipinos and other Foreign Migrants in Japan, published by the Kalipunan ng mga Filipinong Nagkakaisa (KAIFIN Center – Saitama), 2006

**Table 2: Number of Foreign Residents in Japan  
By Gender and Nationality (2006)<sup>7</sup>**

COUNTRY	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Korea	598,219	276,195 (46.2%)	322,024 (53.8%)
China	560,741	233,284 (41.6%)	327,547 (58.4%)
Brazil	312,979	171,499 (54.8%)	141,480 (45.2%)
<b>PHILIPPINES</b>	<b>193,488</b>	<b>41,178 (21.3%)</b>	<b>152,310 (78.8%)</b>
Peru	58,721	31,341 (53.4%)	27,380 (46.6%)
United States	51,321	33,441 (65.2%)	17,880 (34.8%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,084,919</b>	<b>968,391 (46.4%)</b>	<b>1,116,528 (53.6%)</b>

**Table 3: Number of Filipino Residents in Aichi Prefecture (2006)**

Name of City	Total
Nagoya City	6,425
Toyohashi	1,319
Ichinomiya	1,255
Okazaki	1,081
Toyota	1,003
<b>Combined total of 5 cities</b>	<b>11,083</b>
Others	10,346
<b>Total Number of Residents in Aichi-ken</b>	<b>21,429</b>

Second, more DV cases in Japan are surfacing. In a news article published in Mainichi Shimbun, it said that during the last four years (2002-2006) the number of women who sought help for DV-related problems has risen.<sup>8</sup>

*"Nationwide consultations for domestic violence rose to 58,528 cases in the fiscal year ending in March (2006), up 12 percent from a year earlier, according to the most recent count by the Cabinet Office's Gender Equality Bureau. The results mark the fourth straight year of increase, and a 63 percent jump over the 35,943 cases reported in the fiscal year ending in March 2002, the first year records were kept. The latest report was released late last month (May 2007)."*

Even if statistics did not indicate exactly how many cases involved Filipino women, there are reasons

<sup>7</sup> Statistical Report, Ministry of Justice, Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2006

<sup>8</sup> "More women seeking help for domestic violence in Japan, survey finds", The Mainichi Shimbun, published on June 14, 2007

to believe that the number is increasing. FMC's own record showed a significant increase in the number of distress calls from Filipino wives of Japanese men saying they were victims of battery and that they wanted to seek advice on what they can do to stop it. Also, the number of Filipino women who directly sought the help of FMC from 2006 to 2007 complaining about domestic violence has gone almost three-fold. In its Executive Summary Report for 2007, FMC noted an increase in the number of cases referred by city halls, other NGOs and by Filipinos who personally knew the victim.

*“While it is not a surprise anymore, the number of domestic violence cases referred to us from July 2006 to June 2007 recorded a big leap compared to the previous year (2005). From an average of 7 to 8 calls a month in 2005-2006, we now receive an average of 3 to 4 calls every week. Most of these calls were inquiries on filing legal cases against the husband, divorce, child custody, and how to avail of government shelter facilities... Complaints range from occasional beatings, verbal abuse, deprivation, and revocation of their spouse visa. For the entire 2007, FMC has recorded 52 cases of DV and DV-related complaints. FMC has referred a total of 16 cases applying for government shelters; 8 of these cases needed medical and legal assistance as well.”<sup>9</sup>*

Also disturbing is the number of high profile cases involving Filipinas. Consider these two cases: Rose, a burn victim, and Naty who was murdered by her Japanese husband along with the couple's 7-month old baby. These cases hugged the headlines of local newspapers and sent shock waves to Filipino communities all over Japan and the Philippines.

Rose (not her real name) is a single mother of three children. She was once married to a Japanese citizen whom she divorced in 2000. She has a 15 year-old son, Nico (not his real name) by her first Japanese boyfriend, and two daughters, Soila, 6 and Carly, 4 (not their real names) both by her former lived-in partner, Iwai (not his real name), also her abuser. She lived in a small rented apartment in a quiet neighborhood in Tokyo through help from a local ward office. She was then ready to move on and take on sole responsibility for her three growing up children.

Unfortunately, on November 18, 2007, at around 4 o'clock in the morning, she was awakened by a call from her former live-in partner, who commanded her to open the door of the apartment to allow him to come in. Fearing that her former live-in partner would create unnecessary commotion in the neighborhood, she waited for him to come and immediately opened the door. To her surprise, the man without any warning doused her with kerosene, and without a word, set her on fire. Rose suffered serious burns all over her body she practically went on a coma. It took Rose almost three months before she could regain full consciousness. The apartment where Rose and her three children lived was totally burned down. Luckily, her two daughters escaped without harm – the elder son was in a child welfare office at the time of the incident. Rose recalls:

*“My reason in coming to Japan is not different from many other Filipinas who saw in Japan the chance to improve our lives. I worked in a snack bar, but just about it. People may think of it as a “dirty job”, but for me, it was like any other job. I do what I am expected to do, and that is to entertain customers. I fell in love with a Japanese man and had his baby. I met another Japanese man whom I married and later divorced. I was not lucky until I met Iwai. I thought he was a kind man, but I was wrong. In the years that we lived together, he would constantly beat me up especially when he's drunk. He would not spare my son and his own daughters. When the local ward office*

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<sup>9</sup> Executive summary Report: Filipino Migrant Center (FMC), 2007, p. 7.

*decided to take my son and oppose. I thought he would be through the help of the local ward office. were no longer living in together at the visit us once-in-awhile. When the crime had a plan. He did not utter any word; he set me on fire. He had plans to kill me, and daughters. Luckily I survived, but honestly, I am not sure come back to normal again.”<sup>10</sup>*

*put him under their protective custody, I did not better off. Then, I decided to leave Iwai Unfortunately, he caught up with us. We time of the incident. He would just happened, he was drunk but he also just doused me with kerosene and perhaps even our two how things would*

Naty (not her real name), a 33-year old Filipina and her 7-month old baby were murdered by her Japanese husband on March 18, 2008. Friends of the murdered Filipina said her 43-year old husband was too jealous of their new-born baby. Naty would confide this to her friends. Apparently, the husband did not like the attention that Naty was giving their child. Later, the husband, according to Naty's friends, would complain about the baby's incessant crying at night. Since the birth of the child, Naty and other people who knew the couple noticed the sudden change in the husband. Then, news about the double murder happened that shocked the entire Filipino community in Japan.

In a letter sent to a television network in the Philippines that aired news about the murder, a woman who identified herself as a close friend of Naty revealed:

*“...contrary to what was earlier reported in Japanese newspapers, my friend and her 7-month old son were killed because of the husband's jealousy and possessiveness and not simply because of his indebtedness. He resented the attention given by my friend to their newborn baby which is only natural for a mother. Then, the husband would tell about how the couple used to be happy until the baby came along.”<sup>11</sup>*

Rose and Naty are just two examples of how domestic violence can be lethal. But perhaps, extreme cases like these somehow help create awareness and stimulate reactions. Over the past years, people in the community and media have shown greater interest on spousal violence, especially when “gaikokujins” (foreigners) are involved. As Donna Beltran of Gabriela Japan Coordinating Body in her speech delivered at a women's gathering in Saitama Prefecture said:

*“..the increasing number of DV involving Filipinas is creating a stir in the community and society as a whole. People have become more open to talk about domestic violence and the issue has caught media attention especially when in extremes cases like murder of a Filipina is involved...this could be positive, on the one hand, but on the other hand, it could be indicative of a worsening scenario.”<sup>12</sup>*

It is also important to note that Japan now has a law on spousal violence (2001) that legally declares abuse of one's spouse or partner as illegal. Some may argue that the law and the mechanisms it has put in place could be the reason why many victims now are coming out to seek help. Whether this claim is true or not, the fact that more Filipinas in domestic violence situations are surfacing to seek help is enough reason to be alarmed.

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<sup>10</sup> Fact sheet based on actual interview with a burn victim, documented by KAFIN, February 2008

<sup>11</sup> Pinoy Abroad, GMANewsTV online, March 23, 2008

<sup>12</sup> Donna Beltran, “Combating Domestic Violence”, speech delivered in a forum on Women and Migration from the Philippines, March 8, 2007, KAFIN Center, Saitama Prefecture.

In any case, the challenge now is how to take all these developments into consideration in mopping up ways to prevent domestic violence from reaching epidemic proportions before it is too late. Beyond the framework of support for the victims, utilizing existing laws and mechanisms to cut down on the number of DV cases, if not to totally eradicate DV, is a challenge to both governments and non-government entities. There is a need to combine support for DV victims with sustained campaigns and advocacy to encourage more people in the community to act. There is a need to educate and empower DV victims so they may stand on their own and become productive members of the community once again. And there is a need to transform organizations of Filipino migrants in Japan to serve as added mechanisms to empower them and to help counter the rise in domestic violence cases and other forms of abuse against Filipino women, in particular.

**Table 3: Number of Foreign Residents in Japan  
By Prefecture<sup>13</sup>**

RANK	PREFECTURE	TOTAL NUMBER
1	Tokyo	364,712 (2.8%)
2	Osaka	212,528 (2.4%)
3	Aichi	208,514 (2.6%)
4	Kanagawa	156,992
5	Saitama	108,379

But first things first, in order to address the challenge, a deeper understanding of the issue is imperative. People need to know before they can act. Who are the Filipina victims of domestic violence? What are their experiences in Japan as women, as migrants, as wives or fiancées of foreign husbands, and as victims of domestic violence? What are the mechanisms they used and what are available to them? What are their perspectives and how do their experiences have affected their purpose in coming to Japan?



## Objectives and Content of the Study

The study aims to deepen understanding of domestic violence as a serious and complex issue. It focuses on Filipinas who are either married or in a relationship with Japanese men and other foreign residents in Japan. The study shall delve on the demographic profile of the victims and their actual experiences; identify patterns of violence and vulnerabilities; and identify victims' survival mechanisms and perspectives.

The study also aims to gather views on existing laws and mechanisms - are these sufficient, relevant and effective to prevent domestic violence and support the victims?

Lastly, the study looks into the role of governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) not

<sup>13</sup> *Statistical Report Ministry of Justice, Immigration Bureau, 2007*

only in preventing domestic violence and giving support to the victims, but also in the area of protection and promotion of the rights and wellbeing of migrant Filipinos in Japan, in particular, and foreign migrants, in general.

The study shall cover the following parts:

**I. Domestic Violence: Case Studies on Filipino Migrant Women in Japan**

- A. Who are the victims? (demographic)
- B. Why they marry/have relationship with Japanese/foreign men?
- C. What are the experiences they underwent?
- D. What are the available mechanisms they used?
- E. What are their perspectives?

**II. Issues and Concerns**

- A. Gender and Racial Inequality and Discrimination
- B. Commodification of Women in Migration

**III. Role of Governments and Non-government Organizations (NGOs)**

**IV. Summary**

**V. Recommendations**



## Methodology and Limitations

The study relied on one-to-one interviews with victims and survivors of domestic violence based on a structured questionnaire, and interviews with counselors from government and NGOs dealing with issues of domestic violence.

The study also utilized available materials and literature, including researches, academic studies, and news articles on domestic violence.

The original design of the study would have included a focus group discussion (FGD) whereby a group of 10 to 15 women (all domestic violence victims and survivors) will gather together to discuss and share their experiences and perspectives. Another FGD would have gathered another group of 10 to 15 domestic violence victims together with non-victims to share their views about available mechanisms and the role of governments and NGOs to prevent domestic violence and support for the victims. However, because of time constraints and problems related to the security of the victims (most are housed in government shelters called “*bushiryo*” and were not allowed to be interviewed for security considerations), the FGDs did not materialized.

The original target respondents was 30 women, but this proved to be quite difficult given the fact that most of the target respondents are housed in government shelters and were discouraged from being interviewed. Others who are not in government shelters, on the other hand, were either reluctant to be interviewed or had difficulties finding time or were simply barred by their husbands from leaving the house. Others who do not have the proper visa fear of getting caught by the police or immigration. All-in-all, there were 13 respondents interviewed. Aside from allowing the interview, some of the respondents were generous enough to furnish us a written statement narrating their experiences as a DV victim.



## I. Overall Context of Domestic Violence Against Filipino Women in Japan

For purposes of this study, the term domestic violence or DV refers not only to the physical violence or attack to a person's body, but also the emotional and psychological abuse inflicted on another person that also results in serious harm and damage to that person. Also, DV victims as defined in this study shall focus on Filipino migrant women who are either wives, partners, or fiancées of Japanese citizens and other foreign residents in Japan.

Spousal violence against women, in general, has been an issue in Japanese society since time immemorial, or even before Japanese men came into close contact with Filipino women since the outbreak of World War II. It is embedded in the culture of Japanese society, a haunting reality that persists even today in the era of globalization and active movement of natural persons.

Dr. Sharman Babior, lecturer at the UCLA Anthropology Department, compared Japan's experience with other Western countries like the United States. In her study, she said that sexual abuse "is widespread and widely tolerated in Japan", and that problems associated with Western cultures like spousal abuse are also happening in Japan long time ago.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Babior had an extensive research on domestic violence across cultures which she began in the early 1980s. In one of her shocking revelations, Dr. Babior said that 14% of Japanese women who had gone to hospitals for treatment of injuries are actually victims of domestic violence and that according to police reports, one third of women who are killed each year are killed by their husbands.<sup>15</sup>

While maintaining her views that experiences in Japan and other Western countries have certain similarities, the context of spousal violence in Japan is very different from the West. Explains Babior:<sup>16</sup>

*"The setting for all of this of course, and it's a big category, is that Japan has a patriarchal system where there is a very well defined polarization between male and female roles...a society where there are sexual inequalities which are necessarily accepted as a given, and where sexual exploitation of women is not seen as being all-bad."*

What's even more shocking is Babior's revelation that many young Japanese do not see anything wrong in this kind of behavior of Japanese husbands or partners. She cited a survey that was conducted on young Japanese to get their views on spousal abuse. She said the survey revealed that 50% of the respondents consider such behavior as acceptable. "If you went back to their parents' or grandparents' generation, it was actually seen as okay to use violence against one's partner."<sup>17</sup>

Babior also blames the culture of insulating the family from the outside or the practice of keeping family secrets and protecting the image of family members and the concept of "female endurance" for

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<sup>14</sup> Lecture of Dr. Sharman Babior, UCLA Professor, cited in the article "Sexual Abuse and Human Trafficking in Japan" by Anson Musselman, UCLA International Institute.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3-4

the lack of awareness and the hidden nature of violence in Japan. Explains Babior:<sup>18</sup>

*"To endure on anybody's part is seen as an admirable quality and personality trait. So if you can endure a bad situation, this actually is something seen as being a positive, and something that is respected. This goes so far. When I talked to the government shelters they told me they always counseled women seeking shelter to try to shape up and go back to the relationship and bear it because it was far less damaging for society for them to keep their marriage together than to divorce. There was a sense that it's important to maintain families rather than have people that are divorced or separated because this can somehow shake-up the social fabric. Part of their counseling was to try to encourage the women to go back and try to make the relationship work."*

Filipino migrant women in domestic violence situations in Japan, therefore, should be viewed within the context of this societal milieu. In many ways, Filipino women may be different compared to Japanese women, but in the eyes of their Japanese husbands or partners, and even in the eyes of other members of the family and community, they are regarded the same way. However, there may be other reasons or factors that make Filipinos or women coming from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds more vulnerable to domestic violence. This will be discussed later in the study.

Similarly, it is important to view the issue within the context of Filipino migration to Japan. As one Filipino "old-timer" would say: "no Filipina would have suffered domestic violence in the hands of her Japanese husband if she did not come to Japan and marry the bastard in the first place!"

Interracial marriages between Filipina brides and Japanese men became a phenomenon in the 1980s. It was a situation where a huge demand for foreign brides (for unmarried Japanese men) was met by a huge supply of single women from poorer countries like the Philippines. As Prof. Fumie Kumagai of Kyorin University, Tokyo said:<sup>19</sup>

*"Interracial marriage is a form of exogamy in which a person marries outside of their social group. This form of marriage has existed ever since Japan opened her doors to the world in the Meiji era. During the first half of the 20th century Japan underwent strong influences of nationalism, and interracial marriage was strictly controlled. Immediately after the end of World War II, quite a few Japanese brides married American soldiers who were stationed in Japan. Under the bubble economy in the 1980s Japanese businessmen abroad married foreign brides. With the bursting of the bubble, and with the rapid*

*progress of Japan has emerged. That regions has occurred. To alleviate to farming regions in Japan."*

*globalization, a new issue relating to foreign brides in is, an acute shortage of brides in rural farming the situation, foreign brides have been brought in*

Prof. Kumagai adds that data highlights three important demographic features of foreign brides in Japan:<sup>20</sup>

*"First, of the total number of newly married couples, the proportion that has one foreign spouse has increased dramatically over the years (1965: .44%; 1990:*

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5

<sup>19</sup> "Interracial Marriage in Japan: A Strategy for Maintaining Rural Households" by Prof. Fumie Kumagai, Kyorin University, Tokyo, undated

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.2

*3.55%; 2005:5.81%). Second, of the annual interracial marriages, foreign brides now constitute the majority, rather than foreign grooms 1965: 25.7%; 1990: 38.0%; 2004: 78.2%). Third, these foreign brides come primarily from three regions in Asia, namely, China, the Philippines, and North and South Korea (in 2005, 35.2%, 30.9%, and 18.3%, respectively)".*

Prof. Kumagai's claim is supported by statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare where it says that fewer marriages have occurred between Japanese in recent years. From 764,161 marriages in 1995, records show that only 680,906 marriages were recorded in 2004, or a drop by 11%. Meanwhile, during the same period, interracial marriages, where one partner is Japanese, have jumped from 27,727 to 39,551 couples or an increase by 43%.<sup>21</sup>

While it is difficult to pinpoint any single factor for the foreign bride's phenomenon in Japan, previous studies identified various reasons that might have contributed to this.

Since 1955 the number of Japanese women joining the work force has increased 15% to 40%. As opposed to their traditional lay back role as housewives, joining the workforce has reduced the prospect of child bearing resulting in low birth rates for a number of decades now. This is particularly true to Japanese women in the rural areas who have the tendency to shun from the traditional role of housewife not just for the social stigma that goes with it, but also because they want to pursue other career opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

There is also the added burden for the wife to care for the husband's aging parents including hospice care. This task could be very daunting and traumatic as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships are often abusive. These are on top of the wife's other duties like child rearing, managing the household and finances of the family, and of course, sharing in the work in the farm.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Philippines back in the 70s and 80s, the crisis of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of the society wrought havoc on the economy leaving many Filipinos without jobs and a very bleak future. The economy needed hard currency and a way out for a fast-growing population. The government, under President Ferdinand Marcos, capitalized on the oil boom in Saudi Arabia and promoted labor export as a stop-gap measure to solve the country's rising unemployment and balance of trade deficit.

But the trend in labor migration back then was highly in favor of the males and the market for women migrant workers was limited mainly to domestic or household services. Thus, marrying foreign men from affluent countries like the US, Canada, Australia and Japan became "the other option" for Filipino women in dire conditions.

The phenomenon of interracial marriages between Filipino women and foreign men reached unprecedented proportion in the 1980s when it proliferated through the mail-order-bride trade where Filipinas are matched to foreigners who are looking for brides for a fee. The demand for Filipina brides was so big that soon bride-seeking-men from the US, Australia, Canada and Japan, among others, came to the Philippines in droves to personally seek for their elusive bride.

The Philippines became a virtual marketplace for foreign brides. In no time, hundreds of Japanese men would travel to remote barrios in the Philippines to find a "suitable bride". Sometimes aided by

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p.4

<sup>22</sup> "Interracial Marriage in Japan: A Strategy for Maintaining Rural Households" by Prof. Fumie Kumagai, Kyorin University, Tokyo, undated

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p.2

their own local officials who were quick to sign sister city agreements with their counterpart local officials. The result was an instant army of newly-weds where the husband is a middle-aged Japanese and the wife is a young and demure Filipina.

For Japanese men, it was the need to find a bride that will bear future generations of Japanese. But for the Filipina, it was more of an economic option than finding the man of their dreams.

The 1980s also witnessed another wave of women migrants from the Philippines coming to Japan. This time, they come to Japan not as foreign brides, but as “entertainers” although eventually many would end up marrying foreigners, particularly Japanese men.

Japan’s bubble economy gave rise to a lucrative entertainment industry that until today lures thousands of women from the Philippines and other poorer countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. These women basically work as entertainers and hostesses in nightclubs and bars that cater to middle-aged and mostly unattached Japanese men. These men patronize bars and night clubs not for its sheer entertainment but to find wives. Critics of the mail-order-brides trade surmise that the opening up of Japan's entertainment industry to foreign migrants may just be a continuation of Japan's idea of solving the problem of aging population and declining birth rate.<sup>24</sup>

As more and more Filipino women get integrated into Japanese society, and their contact with Japanese men becomes a partnership outside employer-employee relations, their vulnerability to domestic violence and other forms of sexual abuse becomes real. Thus, every Filipina who is either married or engaged in sexual or romantic relationship with Japanese men is vulnerable to DV in the same way Japanese women, in general, are vulnerable to DV and other forms of abuse. Perhaps, Filipinas, in particular, and foreign migrant women, in general, are more prone to domestic violence because they are non-Japanese, they don't speak the language and are alien to the culture, and because they come from a poor country.

The stories and experiences of the thirteen (13) Filipina DV victims will help shed more light on the truth about this thesis. In addition, academic studies and those done by various DV support groups are also important in deepening our understanding of domestic violence in Japan involving Filipino migrant women.

### **A. Who are the victims? (demographic)**

#### **Origin in the Philippines**

There has been a dearth of information on the exact origins of Filipino women who choose to marry foreign men, in general. However, there are many allusions that majority of these women come from the rural areas in the Philippines. A newspaper story written about the Philippines seems to corroborate this assumption when it said that a Filipino mayor was critical of the foreign bride’s trade in his country because his government was “giving away unspoiled women from the countryside.”<sup>25</sup> Countryside in this regard is assumed to mean provinces outside the city or remote “barrios” or “barangays”.

Looking at the demographic background of the respondents further confirms this assumption. Out of the thirteen (13) women interviewed, only 3 lived in Manila, the premier city and capital of the Philippines while nine (9) said they live in the province – five (5) in Luzon, three (3) in Mindanao, and

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p.4

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.4-5.

one (1) in the Visayas. Only five (5) said their family live in urban centers while seven (7) in surrounding barrios (outskirt). One respondent did not say where her family lives.

A survey conducted by the Commission for Filipinos Overseas (CFO) shows a different pattern on the origin of Filipina spouses and fiancées of Japanese *nationals*. From 1998 to 2002, out of the 69,114 surveyed (including 680 Filipino males who are spouse or fiancée of Japanese women), 32,883 or 63.10% listed their point of origin in the National Capital Region (NCR) followed by Southern Tagalog with 7,191 (13.80%), Central Luzon with 6,111 (11.70%), and Southern Mindanao with 1,710 (3.30%). See Table 4.<sup>26</sup>

However, it is important to note that not all women who listed the NCR as their point of origin actually live there. Many of them, in fact, hail from different provinces outside the NCR. The reason why they migrated to the city is primarily to find work abroad. It is a common practice by talent and promotions agencies to use the address of the agency as reference for their talents when the latter apply for their entertainer's visa for the first time. This practice is convenient for these agencies that handle the affairs Filipinas aspiring to work as entertainers in Japan.<sup>27</sup>

### Age Group

Out of the thirteen (13) respondents, ten (10) come from the younger age bracket (21-35 years old), while three (3) are from the older age group (36-45 years old). At the time of marriage though, all except for two (2) respondents who were 18 and 20 years old when they got married, fall within the younger age group.

The CFO survey reveals the same age pattern. According to the CFO data, the average of Filipinas married to Japanese men from 1989 to 2002 is 26 years old or just about the same age most women in the Philippines marry.

**Table 4: Data on the Geographical Distribution of Filipina Spouse/Fiancée of Japanese Nationals by Region in the Philippines (1989-2002)**

Region	Total Number	Percentage
<b>National Capital Region</b>	<b>32,883</b>	<b>63.10%</b>
<b>Southern Luzon</b>	<b>7,191</b>	<b>13.80%</b>
<b>Central Luzon</b>	<b>6,111</b>	<b>11.70%</b>
Southern Mindanao	1,710	3.30%
Central Visayas	1,275	2.40%
Western Visayas	773	1.50%
Ilocos Region	560	1.10%
Bicol Region	447	0.90%
Eastern Visayas	232	0.40%
Northern Mindanao	183	0.40%
CARAGA	208	0.40%
Cagayan Valley	180	0.30%
Western Mindanao	114	0.20%
Cordillera Admin. Region	118	0.20%
Central Mindanao	55	0.10%
ARMM	5	0.00%
Not reported	71	0.10%

<sup>26</sup> CFO Statistical

<sup>27</sup> Executive Summary Report, Filipino Migrant Center (FIMC), 2004, p. 4

Note: The data include 608 Filipino males (1%) who are also spouse/fiancée of Japanese women.

**Table 5: Number of Filipino Spouse/Fiancée of Japanese Nationals by Age Group (1989-2002)<sup>28</sup>**

AGE GROUP	FIGURE	Percentage
25 - 29	25,740	37.23%
20 - 24	25,168	36.40%
30 - 34	10,431	15.09%
15-19	3,205	4.64%
35-39	3,042	4.40%
40-44	804	1.16%
45-49	216	0.31%
55 and Above	83	0.12%
50-54	64	0.09%
No response	388	0.56%
	69,141	100%

Note: The data include 608 Filipino males (1%) who are also spouse/fiancée of Japanese women.

Data from the interviews also show that contrary to common notion, almost all of the respondents did not marry their Japanese/foreigner boyfriend right away. Of the thirteen (13) respondents, 8 got married after more than 6 months to 1 year of courtship and dating, while only four (4) decided to marry in the first five months. However, 2 of the respondents admitted that they were in a live-in arrangement (with Japanese boyfriend) for some period of time before they decided to marry. One respondent did not answer.

This information is significant in understanding the make up of Filipinas who choose to marry Japanese men, or foreigners, in general. There is a prevailing notion in Japan that Filipino women, particularly those working as entertainers who have no long-term or legal residence status enter into “instant marriage” with Japanese men, in particular, for the visa or the opportunity to stay legally in Japan. Immigration officials adhere to this notion and believe that many Filipina enter into bogus or “imitation marriage” to secure residence status or to avoid deportation. The marriage is not actually consumed and the Filipina is obligated to pay money to the “fake husband” until she becomes eligible to apply for permanent status.

Similarly, the image of Filipinas as a wife or girlfriend of an “old and ugly”, but “rich” “sacho” (company owner/manager) is damaging yet lurks in minds of many ordinary Japanese. Donna Beltran of Gabriela has these to say:

*“While it is true that some women marry men who are old enough to be their father or grandfather, this doesn’t mean that they are only after the money or visa. Perhaps, some women like older men for their own comfort and security.*

<sup>28</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

*One must remember that Filipina entertainers in Japan are mostly very young and they may be attracted to men who can be their husband and father at the same time. What is wrong with that?*<sup>29</sup>

The problem, according to Beltran, is that people have the tendency to generalize. She further argues that Filipino women, in general, value the family very much and that marriage in a predominantly Christian country like the Philippines is regarded as sacred. Says Beltran:<sup>30</sup>

*“Of course, there are Filipinas who by virtue of their own circumstances, values other things than sheer love for a chosen partner. But even in this case, the family comes first. Most Filipino women may be poor, but like women from other cultures they have values that we hold on to no matter what. In the case of the Philippines, women value the family very much and we adhere to the adage that 'love conquers all'.”*

### **Socio-Economic and Cultural Background**

In general, Filipino migrants come from low-income families, and therefore, the decision to come to Japan, either for work or to marry Japanese or foreigners is motivated somehow by economic needs. The lack of viable economic opportunities in the Philippines drove them to try their luck in Japan even if it meant being separated from their loved ones. This is more compelling for the women who are forced to work as entertainers or marry Japanese citizens because back home women are discriminated against and have far lesser opportunities than men.

Emmie de Jesus, Secretary General of GABRIELA, a feminist movement in the Philippines sums up the condition of women in the Philippines in her paper delivered during the International Conference on Border Controls and the Rights of Immigrant Brides held in Taipei. Notes de Jesus:<sup>31</sup>

*“The Philippines economic situation can be best mirrored in the situation of Filipino women and children where poverty is the number one problem as that of the majority of the population. Issues of unemployment, low wages, minimal or no benefits at all if employed, job insecurity, are faced by the labor force where women are culturally regarded as “reserved” labor force only...Culturally, the patriarchal attitude towards women is still dominant in the psyche of Filipinos. This low regard for women is apparent as can be seen in the economic and social dynamics of the society...Thus, to live and earn 'abroad' by whatever means is now a dream for many Filipinos...a lure for Filipino women, to marry foreigners so they can go to live abroad.”*

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that majority of victims of domestic violence who were interviewed come from poor families in the Philippines – lower-middle to low income strata. Almost all said their family back home had no steady source of income and that the reason why they came to Japan is precisely to help alleviate that condition.

Poverty played an important factor why only 1 of the 13 respondents completed college and only 3

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<sup>29</sup> *Women in Migration: The Journey of Filipinos to Japan*, a speech delivered by Donna Beltran in celebration of International Women's Day, March 8, 2006, Saitama

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Emmie de Jesus, “Marriage to a Foreigner as an Option for a Better Life”, paper delivered during the International Conference on Border Control and the Rights of Immigrant Brides, Taipei, September 29-30, 2007.

managed to get some college education and another three (3) finished some technical or vocational course. However, it is worth noting that all except one (1) of the thirteen respondent finished secondary education. The parents' lack of ability to support their education aggravated by the high cost of education in the Philippines were cited as reasons for their inability to pursue higher education. Nevertheless, comparing this with data on the husbands/partners of the thirteen DV victims, these Filipinas are adequately educated than the latter.

- **Ara:** *"I had to stop my studies and find work because my father is the only one working in the family and we are five siblings in the family all studying at the same time."*
- **Zeny:** *"I would have wanted to pursue my studies, but I don't think it would secure me a better future. Even college graduates in the Philippines find it difficult to get a job. I thought going to Japan would give me sort of a head start, especially since many go to college to work abroad anyway."*
- **Mabby:** *"Women are not given the same opportunities like men. So if I am to choose between studies and work, I'll choose work."*

In the CFO survey, 64.40% or 36,613 of the 69,141 surveyed Filipina wives/fiancées of Japanese nationals from 1989 to 2002 finished high school and vocational courses. Also significant is that 20.40% or 14,112 had some college education and 6,212 or 9% finished a degree in college.

Again, these data contradict common perceptions that Filipino women who marry Japanese men and other foreigners lack intellectual capacity to deal with their new environment. What these data say, however, is that victims of domestic violence are not just the meek and uneducated Filipinas. (See Table 6)<sup>32</sup>

**Table 6: Data on Educational Background of Filipina Spouse/Fiancée of Japanese Nationals (1989 to 2002)**

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	TOTAL NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
High School/ Vocational	44,511	64.40%
College Level	14,112	20.40%
College/Post Graduate	6,212	9.00%
Elementary Level/Graduate	3,254	4.70%
No Response / Not Reported	917	1.30%
No Formal Education	135	0.20%
Spouse/Fiancée Surveyed	69,141	100%

Majority of the respondents (7) worked as entertainers or contract workers (CWs) in nightclubs and snack bars where most of them (5) met their husband for the first time. Two (2) of the respondents, Len and Erin (not their real names), worked as sales coordinator and staff at a sports and country club, respectively, while Jan (not her real name) said she was not working at that time. The remaining 3 had no response.

<sup>32</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004



It is also worth noting that only one (1) respondent who worked as an entertainer before marrying her Japanese husband continues to do so until now. On the other hand, Jan who said she didn't have work prior to marrying her Japanese-Filipino boyfriend now works in a club. Five (5) of the other respondents currently work in factories, 2 are employed in the service industry, and 3 are presently out of job. All except 1 mentioned no other source of income. Ara (not her real name) the only one currently unemployed relies solely on the income of her Japanese husband.

Putting all these together, Filipino women who are DV victims are no different from their Japanese counterparts. They are adequately educated and mostly of mature age when they married their Japanese husbands. Perhaps, one difference lies in the fact that Filipinas apart from taking care of their family in Japan have the added responsibility of caring for their families back in the Philippines who rely heavily on their support. This, as most respondents agree, compels them to work even after marrying their husbands whom traditional Japanese wives don't normally do as they tend to follow tradition by concentrating on work inside the house and taking care of children. Also, the reality being that husbands of majority of the respondents are ordinary salary men contribute to the decision of Filipina wives to pursue work while juggling with their other responsibilities as wife and mother to their Japanese children.

## **B. Why they marry/have relationship with foreigners?**

As mentioned earlier, poverty and the desire for a stable future (economically or financially) is a common reason why Filipinos migrate to Japan. The same reason is true why Filipinas chose to marry foreigners, particularly Japanese men.

A study on the psychosocial profile and perspectives of foreign brides conducted by the Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) confirms that Filipino women desire to marry foreigners from more affluent countries (Americans, Australians, Europeans, Japanese, etc.) for various reasons, including love and the desire to live abroad. But beneath all these is their desire to uplift themselves and the search for a better future.<sup>33</sup>

*"...not all foreign brides marry for the upward economic mobility (hypergamy) or for opportunities to work and stay abroad. Some really marry for love.*

*Whatever their principal reason is for marrying their foreign husbands, the desire to have a better life (economically or financially) is shared as a common purpose."*

The manner of meeting their Japanese husband/partner is also an interesting point of discussion. Majority of respondents (9) said they met their husband/partner at their place of work or while working in the club. They are mainly customers of the club and their relationship developed. One (1) said they were high school sweethearts, another one (1) through a common friend, and one (1) respondent said they met in a disco club Brazil. One respondent did not answer. The same pattern was affirmed by the CFO study of 1,441 Filipino spouses/fiancées of Japanese nationals from 1989 to 2000. See table below.<sup>34</sup> And when asked what their reasons are in choosing to marry their husbands, respondents mentioned various reasons: economic stability (6); visa (2); and love (7). Other reasons given were: wish to live abroad (2); and support for family in the Philippines (2). One respondent did not answer.

Here are some views from the respondents why they chose to marry their husbands:

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<sup>33</sup> "Psychosocial Profile and Perspectives of Foreign Brides", Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Hong Kong, 2007

<sup>34</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

- **Ara:** “I thought marrying a Japanese will help me become more stable economically. It’s difficult to find a decent job in the Philippines that’s why I took my chance to go to Japan. I wanted also to try living abroad. I also thought all Japanese are kind-hearted.”
- **Gen:** “I was an overstay and I wanted to stay longer in Japan to continue working so that I can help my family back in the Philippines. He also courted me for about a month, and I learned to love him.”
- **Annie:** “He courted me and I thought we will be both happy.
- **Rose:** “I was a CW and it was my third time to come to Japan and getting an entertainer’s visa was becoming more and more difficult that’s why I accepted his marriage proposal. I was very helpful to me and funny, I thought I will be happy with him.
- **Erin:** “I married him because I loved him.”
- **Maria:** “He followed me to the Philippines; I thought he truly loved me.”
- **Jocy:** “I loved him.”
- **Jan:** “We were in love.”
- **Mabby:** “For economic security because I had no livelihood back in the Philippines.”
- **Angie:** “I thought he was a kind person and he accepted my son from a previous marriage.”
- **Zeny:** “I was hoping that it would drastically change my life, positively.”
- **Len:** “I married him because I loved him.”
- **Marie:** “I wanted to go to Japan and also for my future.”

It is often argued that interracial marriages, is a bigger challenge for couples who come from different cultural background. But it becomes doubly challenging if the marriage is borne by other motivations than sheer love.

**Table 7: CFO Survey on Manner of Acquaintance Between Filipino and Japanese Spouse/Fiancées (1989-2000)<sup>35</sup>**

MANNER OF INTRODUCTION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
<b>Place of Work</b>	<b>31,023</b>	<b>44.87%</b>
Penpal Referred by Relative	18,554	26.84%
Personal Introduction	18,492	26.75%
Penpal Thru Ads/Columns/Penpal Clubs	521	0.75%
Marriage Bureau *	253	0.37%
Not Reported	231	0.33%
Thru Other Entities**	49	0.07%
Thru Internet	18	0.03%

*Note: The data include 608 Filipino males (1%) who are also spouse/fiancée of Japanese women.*

### C. What are the experiences they underwent?

<sup>35</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

It is very difficult to determine the exact number of victims and the patterns of violence and abuse against Filipina DV victims in Japan as most cases go unreported.

However, based on FMC's own record and accounts of cases involving Filipina DV victims and based on documented cases by other support-NGOs, it appears that the number is on the rise. In 2007 alone, FMC recorded an average of 3 to 4 calls a week from Filipinas claiming to be victims of domestic violence and handled an average of 4 to 5 DV cases each month. This is a stark contrast to records during the previous year where only an average 7 to 10 calls were received each month and a total of only 22 DV cases handled for the entire year. But what really is the anatomy of a Filipina DV victim? What forms of violence do they go through? And how do they cope in the face of such violence?

In order to understand the pains and sufferings of Filipina DV victims, it is important to know of their actual experiences in Japan and how they adapt to their new environment. Hopefully, in doing so, we can identify factors or conditions that contribute to their vulnerability to domestic violence.

First, going back to the question of why they choose to marry or have relationship with foreigners, particularly Japanese men, respondents gave various reasons but almost all thirteen respondents mentioned economic as one of their motivations for marrying their husbands – six (6) said it was their primary consideration.

Agalyn Nagase, National Coordinator of the Kalipunan ng mga Filipinong Nagkakaisa or KAFIN, a community-based organization of Filipino migrants based in seven cities around Japan, thinks that the desire for stability (economically or financially) is not necessarily tantamount to economic desperation. But this is how many ordinary Japanese view Filipinas who marry Japanese men. Worse, according to Nagase, is that Filipinas who work at night as entertainers or hostesses are looked down upon and this further adds to the woman's vulnerability to domestic violence. Notes Agase:<sup>36</sup>

*"The stigma attached to the Filipina, or the perception that women who come from poorer countries like the Philippines to work as entertainers in Japan are 'bad women' is hurting these Filipinas. And the added perception that they marry Japanese men only for the visa and for the husband's money is distorting the image of Filipinas in Japan and creating conditions that further isolate them from the community and threatens their very existence in society."*

In the APMM study on the psychosocial profile and perspectives of foreign brides, it said that the desire to have a better life is shared by most foreign brides. The study notes:<sup>37</sup>

*"...this universal desire, as anyone from any race or creed would have, is somewhat met by social prejudice (i.e. the "inferior other", "pariah", etc.) which make their lives more difficult under new conditions and environment. Such prejudices obscure the fact that there is a natural tendency for people from poor countries to be attracted to go to more affluent countries, on the one hand, and the need of more affluent countries with a crisis of its own, to attract people, especially women, from poor countries as cheap and docile labor and 'safety nets' to its aging population and de-population problems, on the other hand. Such prejudices hedge the class contradictions existing between rich and poor*

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<sup>36</sup> "Criminalization of Migrants", paper presented during the International Conference on Border Controls and the Rights of Immigrants Brides, Taipei, September 29-30, 2007

<sup>37</sup> "Psychosocial Profile and Perspectives of Foreign Brides", Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Hong Kong, 2007

*countries, and the role of neoliberal globalization in their lives."*

Not many Japanese understand these realities. What they only see are images of Filipinas who crowded the entertainment districts of Japan serving drinks and entertaining Japanese customers.

A number of victims confirm these social prejudices. They say that their Japanese husbands look down on them because they are non-Japanese and because they come from the Philippines which is known in Japan as a poor country. Some who used to work as entertainers get less respect.

The APMM study adds that these social prejudices create problems and difficulties not only in relation to the husband but also to in-laws. Worries about the Filipina wife running away after getting her visa and stealing money from the husband are common. Even the practice of sending money to families in the Philippines is "unwelcome" and often a source of conflict not just with the husband but also with the in-laws.<sup>38</sup>

But those interviewed affirm that their marriage is for real and not "imitation" which immigration insists to be common among Japanese-Filipino marriages. To prove their point, respondents said they did not marry their Japanese/foreigner boyfriend right away. They all went through the traditional process of courtship, getting-to-know-you period, and dating that took months or more than a year as in the case of 2 respondents, before they decided to marry their husbands. However, they say that even long engagement is not a sure fire formula for marriage to succeed because any marriage entails a lot of challenge and adjustment on the part of both husband and wife.

Of the thirteen (13) respondents, 8 got married after more than 6 months to 1 year of courtship and dating, while only four (4) decided to marry in the first five months. However, 2 of the respondents admitted getting into a live-in arrangement (with boyfriend) for some period of time before they both decided to marry.

Again, this pattern is supported by data from the CFO study that reveals the same pattern from 1989 to 2002. The study says that 18,130 or 26.20% of the total 69,141 Filipino spouse/fiancées waited for 3 to 6 months before they married their husband or agreed to a live in arrangement with their partners. Only 4,898 or 7.10% took the plunge after only 1 month or less. See Table 8.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 8: Period of Acquaintance of Filipino and Japanese Spouse/Fiancée (1989 to 2002)**

PERIOD OF ACQUAINTANCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
More than 3 Mos. to 6 Mos.	18,130	26.20%
More than 6 Mos. to 1 Year	13,706	19.80%
More than 2 Years	11,633	16.80%
More than 1 Year to 2 Years	10,016	14.50%
More than 1 Mo. to 3 Mos.	6,664	9.60%
<b>1 Month &amp; Less</b>	<b>4,898</b>	<b>7.10%</b>
Not Reported	4,094	5.90%

*Note: The data include 608 Filipino males, or 1% of the 69,141 total numbers of Filipinos surveyed.*

This information is significant because it rebuffs one prevailing notion that Filipinas, particularly those who work as entertainers and hostesses and those without long term residence status or overstays jump into "quick" or "instant" marriage with Japanese men who are old enough to be their father just for money or visa, or both.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

In a forum on Filipino women migrants in Japan, Donna Beltran of Gabriela-Japan Coordinating Body expressed concern about these women who are being stereotyped as “bad women”. Beltran says:<sup>40</sup>

*“While it is true that some women marry men who are old enough to be their father or grandfather, this doesn’t mean that they are only after the money or visa. Perhaps, some women like older men for their own comfort and security. One must remember that Filipina entertainers in Japan are mostly very young and they may be attracted to men who can be both their husband and father at the same time. In this modern age, this pattern has become universal, practiced even by women in the West. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with this behavior.”*

Surprisingly, the CFO survey show that Japanese men who choose to marry Filipina although not young, are neither too old. Out of the 69,141 Japanese included in the survey, 17.86% or 12,350 were in the 35-39 age bracket and 12,083 or 17.48% were 30-34 years old. On the other hand, only 3,585 (5.18%) and 5,001 or (7.23%) were 55 years old and above and 50-54 years old, respectively.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 9: Data on the Age of Japanese Spouse/Fiancée (1989-2002)**

FIGURE	AGE GROUP	PERCENTAGE
12,350	35 - 39	17.86%
12,083	30 - 34	17.48%
11,858	40 - 44	17.15%
10,093	25 - 29	14.60%
9,070	45 - 49	13.12%
5,001	50 - 54	7.23%
4,388	20 - 24	6.35%
3,584	55 and Above	5.18%
506	15-19	0.30%
208	No response	0.73%
69,141		100%

Note: Data includes 608 Japanese women who were also spouse/fiancée of Filipino males

**Table 10: Comparative data on the Civil Status of both Japanese and Filipino Spouse/Fiancée (1989 to 2002)<sup>42</sup>**

	FILIPINO		JAPANESE		
Single/Never Married	65,559	94.80%	39,769	57.52%	Single/Never Married
Lived-In/Unwed	2,187	3.20%	27,106	39.20%	Separated/Divorced
Separated/Divorced	766	0.70%	1,441	2.08%	Widower
Widower	487	1.10%	744	1.08%	Live-in/unwed

<sup>40</sup> Donna Beltran, “Combating Domestic Violence”, speech delivered in a forum on Women and Migration from the Philippines, March 8, 2007, KAFIN Center, Saitama Prefecture.

<sup>41</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

<sup>42</sup> CFO Statistical Data on Filipino Spouse/Fiancées of Japanese, 2004

## Understanding DV: Case Studies of Filipino Migrant Women in Japan

Annulled	76	0.10%		61	0.09%	Annulled
No Response	66	0.10%		20	0.03%	No Response
Total	69,141	100%		69,141	100%	Total

*Note: Data includes 608 Filipino males and Japanese female spouse/fiancée*

The problem, according to Beltran, is that “people have the tendency to make unfair judgment.” She argued that Filipino women value the family very much and marriage in a predominantly Christian country like the Philippines is regarded as sacred...”There is a need to free Filipino women from this kind of bondage if we like to see ourselves fulfilling our purpose in coming to Japan.<sup>43</sup>

The image of Filipino women as coming from a Third world country and as night club workers puts them in disadvantaged position from the very start. These social prejudices and other problems like language barrier and difference in culture and tradition create conditions that make them more vulnerable to violence and abuse like those experienced by the thirteen respondents to this study.

### Incidence and Patterns of Violence

Results from interviews with the victims did not show any particular pattern on when DV actually started. Some of the respondents said their relationship with their husband or partner was smooth and happy in the beginning, and it was only after several years of marriage or after having children when the first incidence of violence occurred. Other respondents said it was very soon after they got married like in the case of Zeny who said that her husband became violent only four days after she arrived from the Philippines:

*“I was already sleeping when he grabbed me by the neck and beat me up. I thought he was trying to kill me.” In any case, almost all said they did not imagine that their husband would resort to violence.”*

Here is how other respondents narrated their experiences as victims of domestic violence:

**Ara:** *“It was only a month after we got married when my husband hit me for the first time. I felt I was being used as a shock absorber because my Japanese husband would always quarrel with my in-laws about many things. It was occasional beatings coupled by the pressure to do many chores inside the house and in the family business. I thought I was more like a maid than a wife since my in-laws also had the liberty to demand things from me.”*

**Gen:** *“My Japanese husband and I decided to live-in together first, and we were okay then. The beating started after we got married. His attitude slowly changed. He would drink very often and when he is drunk, he would hit forced me to have sex. And whenever I refuse, he would hit me. became constant as well as the cursing and shouting. He would money and would always threaten to call the police or was an overstay. He treated me like a toy. I think he loved me.”*

*me and  
The beating  
not give me any  
immigration because I  
he loved his pets more than*

**Annie:** *“He became violent one year after the birth of my son. I think he was frustrated because we could not marry and the annulment of my first marriage was taking so long. He would beat be occasionally and would curse me and prohibit me from going out of the house to see my sister and friends. He would*

<sup>43</sup> Donna Beltran, “Combating Domestic Violence”, speech delivered in a forum on Women and Migration from the Philippines, March 8, 2007, KAFIN Center, Saitama Prefecture.

tremendous  
things at me. At

*constantly nag me about the money he spent for the annulment.”*

**Rose:** “My husband is a drug addict. He would beat me every time I asked him to stop using drugs. He had acquired huge debt which I think put pressure on him too. He would occasionally beat me and throw one point it became unbearable so I left and ran away.” ”

**Erin:** “I went to the city hall to complain about my husband who threatened me that he will hire a Yakuza to kill me if I didn't follow him. He became physical to me after this. My husband has been restricting my movement since I came to Japan. He won't allow me to go out and mingle with Filipinos and even Japanese. He won't even allow me to get to the groceries or to call my mother in the Philippines. He is always jealous and possessive of me.”

**Maria:** “He would hit me every time I asked him to go and find work. He was very irresponsible and always dependent on his mother. By the time we moved to our own apartment, the beating became more frequent. I had to find work myself to support our two children.”

like a  
company

**Jocy:** “He started beating me one month after I came to Japan to live with him. I was already pregnant then but it did not matter to him. He treated me slave by forcing me to work all day just like a paid worker in his own even just days after I had delivered our baby.”

**Mabby:** “My husband would strangle me, grab me by the hair and bang my head to the wall. He is very cruel to me from 2003 until I decided to run away.”

**Angie:** “My husband looked down on me. For one whole year of living with my husband, I probably took all kinds of beating, cursing, slapping, etc.”

**Jan:** “He forced me to have sex with another man and he seemed to enjoy watching it”

**Marie:** “My husband was too jealous of my own family in the Philippines he didn't want me to connect with them anymore. It happened in 2006 and my first instinct was to run away”

DV victims complain that they suffer abuse not only from their husbands but also from their in-laws. Maria for example complained that her parents-in-law demanded too much from her to the point where she felt she's treated more like a housemaid than a daughter-in-law. She further said that each time she made a mistake, she would be cursed and reprimanded. And whenever she and her husband had a quarrel, both would openly side with her husband. She said she would nag her husband about finding their own apartment so that they can move out of his parent's house. But this too had become an issue and cause of more frequent quarrels. However, others felt their parents-in-law were generally supportive and affectionate, but sometimes blame them whenever violence in the house erupts.

Views of respondents about why they experienced DV vary. Some attribute DV to their husband's low regard for Filipinas, particularly those who used to work in “omise” (night club). They tend to think that Japanese people, in general look down on Filipinas because they are non-Japanese and they come from a poorer country. Other victims think that language and cultural difference is a major factor. They think that their inability to communicate well often results in misunderstandings with the husband, on the one hand, and with in-laws, on the other hand.

But if there is one issue that Filipina wives and their Japanese husbands often quarrel about, it is the practice by Filipinos of sending money to dependent families in the Philippines. Some of the respondents said that the reason why they work is because they do not want to obligate their husbands to support their families back home. But it seems that the problem is not just the issue of

supporting the extended family in the Philippines.

Virgie Ishihara, in her paper presented to the International Conference on Border Controls and the Rights of Foreign Brides held in Taiwan, summarized the difficult experiences many Filipina wives of Japanese men go through that often lead to domestic violence:

*“Because many of them worked as entertainers or hostesses in night clubs and bars, Japanese males think they are cheap, lowly and cunning. Some men had to shell out hefty sums of money to have these Filipinas released by their promoter before they could marry them. Unfortunately, this haunts the Filipina no end. I hear several stories about Japanese husbands telling their wife to be good to him because he spent a lot of money to buy her. The poor Filipina in this case is treated like a commodity; a personal property and no longer as a human being...Even the practice of sending money to their families in the Philippines is often a major issue between the husband and wife. Although many Filipina pursue work even after getting married, the idea of extending support to extended families back home is something unusual to and rejected by Japanese husbands, especially when it involves children from a previous marriage. Many Japanese husbands still think of the traditional role of as being in the house and taking care of her family... So if the Filipina insists on supporting her family in the Philippines and decides to continue work in the club, this often results in misunderstandings that sometimes escalate into violence.”*

It is also important to know how DV victims respond to spousal violence. In an interview with counselors of KAFIN Center in Saitama Prefecture, a Philippine NGO assisting women in distress, they said that responses vary. There are victims who would fight back at the first instance of violence, and there are those who would bear for years in order to protect the family from breaking down.

According to Donna who has been a counselor with KAFIN since 2004, she had talked to some Filipina wives who did not allow their husbands lay hands on them. At the first sign of abuse, they immediately packed up and left their husbands. But Donna said these Filipinas are more like the exceptions to the rule. According to her, the overwhelming majority of DV victims bear the abuse of their husbands because of many reasons.

Dina, who has been with KAFIN for just over a year, said that most victims, particularly those new in Japan, were afraid to leave the house because they knew no one that can help them and without a job they didn't have the money to live on their own. On the other hand, she said that those who have been in Japan longer and have jobs to support themselves were afraid to lose their visa which usually happens when they decide to leave the house. This is true because the renewal of a spouse visa depends on a “guarantee letter” from the Japanese spouse.

The guarantee letter is very important for non-permanent resident foreign spouses because this serves as proof of one's marital relationship with a Japanese citizen. Surprisingly, the guarantee letter is more important than the marriage certificate as far as immigration is concerned. Without the guarantee letter from the Japanese spouse, it would be almost impossible to get an extension of a spouse visa.

The guarantee letter or the absence of it is also the reason why many victims are reluctant to file for a divorce. Dina, said that most victims would endure years of violence and abuse from their Japanese



husbands to preserve their legal status in Japan. But the sad part is it takes many years before a foreign spouse of a Japanese can become eligible for permanent residency. This is particularly true in the case of foreign spouses without children.

Thus, we can say that the condition of Filipina wives of Japanese men and other foreign residents in Japan who experience domestic violence is one of heightened marginalization. They are the victims of violence and abuse yet their condition is often exacerbated by unfair and discriminatory policies of the State. A Filipina wife of a Japanese citizen without children can lose her spouse visa and risk deportation if she divorces her husband. Even if she does not file a divorce she is ineligible to extend her spouse visa if she is found living separately from her Japanese husband.

This policy is grossly disadvantageous and unjust to foreign wives who are subjected to domestic violence since they face the prospect of not being able to renew their spouse visa, and therefore, risk deportation should they attempt to flee physical abuse.

Like in the case of Ara (not her real name). She met her Japanese husband in 2004 who was a customer at a club in Nagoya where she worked as a “talent”. It was her first trip to Japan. She said, at first, she was not keen on marrying her husband because he didn't know him well. She would have preferred to wait a little longer to get to know him more, but after a couple of trips to Japan as an entertainer, she decided to accept her husband's proposal for marriage. Ara said she came to Japan for work and to support her family back in the Philippines. Ara has a seven- year-old daughter from a previous relationship with another Filipino.

*“I wanted to stay longer in Japan because my entertainer's visa only allows me to stay in Japan for a maximum of 6 months. The rigors of applying for an entertainer's visa after every 6 months, not to mention the amount of money that she had to put up for each application made her decide to accept the offer of marriage. It was smooth-sailing for us the first few months, but after that, the cursing and occasional beating began. Several times I thought about filing for a divorce, but each time I would back down for fear of losing my visa.”*

According to Agalyn Nagase of KAFIN Center in Saitama, the key issue here is maintaining legal status so that women can have the ability to escape from an abusive situation and continue with their productive life in Japan. Nagase further said:

*“Having a legal status in Japan is a dream for many aspiring women from the Philippines who wish to work abroad. Japan has been a significant destination for its proximity and the potential income. Often, Filipina wives of Japanese men who are subjected to domestic violence do have the freedom of choice. Their stay in Japan is tied to their husband and attempts to get out of violent situations is like a life and death decision.”*

This reality is compounded by another reality that Filipina wives in Japan are socially isolated. Language barrier is a perennial problem. While many acquire the language after staying in Japan for some time, acquiring the confidence to speak, much less read in the local language is very difficult. This situation creates the feeling of isolation which gets worst when husbands are not supportive.

#### **D. What are available mechanisms they used?**

There are available mechanisms to help and support domestic violence victims in Japan but somehow they are limited and often inaccessible to women migrants, in general. Their lack of physical

mobility and language skill exacerbate the situation. The fact that there is now an existing law on spousal violence is a positive development. However, there is more to the issue than meets the eye. So that any law would be rendered inutile if it does not address the very root causes of domestic violence.

At the very first occurrence of domestic violence, the natural instinct is, of course, to call the police. But for many Filipina DV victims the thought of calling the police to intervene on their behalf is met with mixed reactions.

Many Filipina DV victims are hesitant to call the police because of their previous bad encounters. According to Agalyn Nagase of KAFIN Center in Saitama, many Filipinas suffering from domestic violence are discouraged to call the police because they do not believe that they (the police) can help them deal with their abusive husbands. Nagase said KAFIN has been receiving numerous complaints about how local police authorities tend to react indifferently to their calls for help.

*“Some police would not budge unless violence becomes very apparent. Others are discouraged by their inaction to the point where they would advise the victims to just go back to their husband and to resolve the problem by themselves. They often say it’s a domestic problem or a marital problem that only the wife and husband can resolve; and that the police cannot do anything about it. They sometimes would even discourage victims to file charges against their husband because it would entail time and money. They don’t seem to understand that slaps on the face or verbal threats are precursors of more serious physical violence that may happen anytime soon. Perhaps when victims are already black and blue from constant beatings or could hardly walk a DV through the station – that’s the only time the police perhaps would act on case,” Nagase laments.*

In an article published by the Asia-Pacific on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), it said that:

*“It is difficult for migrant women to access information on public support systems, and the availability of the support is limited depending on her legal status. At public service centers, instead of receiving support and care women are sometimes suggested that they should return to their home countries. When they have to seek help at the police station they are often arrested for not having a valid visa. A Philippine woman with two babies who escaped from the violent husband and came to the police seeking help was arrested for violation of immigration laws instead of finding safety at the police station. The woman finally had to return to her violent husband for fear of arrest and deportation because of her illegal status. The usual excuse of the police is it is difficult to identify a migrant woman as a victim of domestic violence since interviewing is impossible due to the language barrier.”<sup>44</sup>*

This argument perhaps explains why only one (1) of the thirteen (13) respondents called the police to ask for help. Table 11 below shows the common reactions of victims to domestic violence.

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<sup>44</sup> Forum News Vol. 19, No. 2, May-august 2006, Asia Pacific On Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

Table 11: Victims' Reactions to DV

VICTIMS' REACTIONS TO DV	RANK	DV 1	DV 2	DV 3	DV 4	DV 5	DV 6	DV 7	DV 8	DV 9	DV 10	DV 11	DV 12	DV 13
Fought back	3		1				1				1	1		
Called the police	5									1				
Sought help from neighbor/friend	1	1		1	1	1				1	1			
Visited hospital														
Ran away	2					1				1	1	1		1
Filed for divorce	4		1				1					1		
Kept silent	2		1					1	1		1	1		
Others														

There is also a social dimension why Filipina DV victims are reluctant to go to the police. For one, being non-Japanese, they are afraid that they will not be listened to; and that the police would only condone acts of another Japanese even if these are against the law. In other words, Filipina DV victims are wary of the biases against them because of their socio-cultural background. Those with visa problems are more reluctant because having no proper visa they fear arrest. They are also worried of deportation and the prospect of not seeing their children ever again is horrifying to these women.

Under the 2001 law on spousal violence, the police are not explicitly instructed to make any arrest even if spousal violence has been established. The reason for this is because while the law legally declares DV as illegal, it has not elevated spousal violence as a criminal act against another person. The most it can offer the victim is a “protection order”. Meaning, the Filipina who has been repeatedly abused may be shielded from further harm, but the abuser may remain as a free man. He may be prevented from inflicting further harm on his wife or partner, but he sure can to somebody else, perhaps another Filipina.

Nagase believes that this is what is lacking in the present DV law. She said that “the present law is reactive and has no teeth. It is focused more on support for the victims and lacks sincerity in preventing domestic violence. “How can you prevent DV if the perpetrators of violence against innocent victims can move around freely after committing the act?”

Majority (7 respondents) turn to their neighbors and friends for immediate help. And they either run away from their husband or partner and/or file for a divorce to end the ordeal. Some of the respondents sought the help of NGOs (non-government organization) that helps victims of domestic violence while others took a while before they could figure out what they could do next.

Here are the views of the thirteen (13) respondents when asked about how they managed to get out from situations of violence:

- Ara:** *"I called a friend and she brought me to a Philippine NGO helping disadvantaged Filipinos like me. There, I received counseling and was given all sorts of information that I can use in the future. I have maintained contact with this NGO, especially whenever I need information or to consult something."*
- Gen:** *"I didn't know what to do until I met with an NGO who assisted me and taught me what I should do and not do."*
- Annie:** *"I tried to run away, but I had to return because of my child. I also didn't have a visa that's why I wasn't sure what to do. Then I sought the help of an NGO. Little-by-little, I managed to overcome. I did it for my child."*
- Rose:** *"I went to the ward office to ask help, but came back to my husband. The next time, I thought they will not help me anymore, but they did. I met an NGO and from then it was easier to file for a divorce"*
- Erin:** *"I sought the help of a friend and ran away. I went to an NGO and they took me to the ward office. I am since living in a government shelter. I had no information that's why it was difficult in the beginning. Now, I have more information to deal with my husband. I have no intention of going back to live with him again. I am doing this for my son."*
- Maria:** *"I kept silent in the beginning, but later when the beating became frequent, I fought back, filed a divorce and took my children to the Philippines."*
- Jocy:** *"I just kept silent until I could not bear his treatment anymore. Now, I am fighting for the custody of our 5-year old daughter."*
- Mabby:** *"At first, I called the police, but nothing happened. I sought the help of neighbors, but still nothing happened, he did not change. Finally, I ran away"*
- Angie:** *"I fought back but he used my children to stop me. I also called the police, but they were not helpful. I ran away because I thought that was the best thing to do."*
- Jocy:** *"He treated me like a slave so when I got the chance, I left him and ran away. I did it more than once and then came back to him until finally I got the resolve to do it. I sought help from an NGO. Later, I divorced him although it took a long legal process before I finally got my freedom back."*
- Zeny:** *"I kept silent in the beginning, but fought back when I had enough already. Filing for a divorce was the best thing I did."*

Surprisingly, only 1 victim sought the help of the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo or the Philippine Consulate in Osaka. Traditionally, Filipino migrants who are experiencing problems whether it is related to their work or domestic problems seek help or protection from Philippine embassies and consulates abroad. In Japan, both the embassy in Tokyo and the consulate in Osaka do not have adequate facilities (if there is any) or programs to meet the needs of domestic violence victims. Often, Filipinos complain about lack of information, distance of travel, indifference of staff members, among others, as reasons why they did not ask help, nor attempted to seek advice from these government mission offices.

The truth is many Filipinos in Japan complain about the indifference of staff and personnel in both mission offices. Records of complaints file up, according to Virgie Ishihara, Executive Director of the Filipino Migrant Center in Nagoya. Complaints range from lack of information, indifference by embassy or consulate personnel, heavy exactions on consular and other services rendered, neglect of

Filipinos having labor-related problems, or victims of trafficking and spousal violence in Japan. Filipina DV victims are no exceptions. They hardly contact the embassy in Tokyo or the consulate in Osaka for various reasons. Here is what some of the respondents said about their experiences:

**Ara:** *"It is very difficult to contact their number. Consulate staff would sometimes yell at you. I felt if I ask help, they might scold me and give me different advice like what they did to people I know. They wanted to apply for their passport and they were advice to go to the police first (to report lost of passport), but all of them were overstay. What if they get arrested?"*

**Gen:** *"I didn't know how to contact the Philippine Consulate. Instead, I contacted a lawyer (Atty. Kagiya) and he referred me to FMC and now Kakekomi Aichi and they were both very helpful.*

**Annie:** *"No, I did not seek help from the Philippine embassy because I think we have much bigger problems in the Philippines that they have to take care*

of."

**Rose:** *"I contacted the Japanese government instead."*

**Erin:** *"I went to the embassy to ask help because my husband kept on watching me, but I was only advised to go to the city hall. They did not give any real action."*

**Maria:** *"No, because Fukuoka was too far and it was difficult to call. And if one calls, consulate staffs are often indifferent."*

**Jocy:** *"I never thought of calling or asking help from the Philippine embassy."*

**Mabby:** *"No, I did not ask or call because the phone is always busy and I don't think they have ever helped Filipinos in Japan."*

**Angie:** *"No, because the Philippine Consulate is too far."*

**Jan:** *"I called and asked help. The lawyer at the Philippine Consulate advised me to go back to my husband. He said I was lucky (he) did not asked for a Y 5,000 (consultation fee)."*

**Zeny:** *"Yes, but I asked the help of an NGO instead and they were very helpful."*

**Len:** *"They were reluctant to help and often indifferent to Filipinas like me. Maybe, they look down on us because we are just entertainers before."*

**Marie:** *"No, I have no information on how to contact them."*

When asked why it took them long to decide to leave their situation of violence, here are the response of some of the respondents:

**Gen:** *"I was an overstay. I had no visa and didn't know what to do. I also had difficulty with the language although I have a sister who had been prodding me to leave my husband."*

**Annie:** *"I ran away 3 times before but came back because I didn't have the courage to leave him...I didn't have money and job. I also didn't have a visa."*

**Maria:** *"I endured five years living with an irresponsible husband. I suffered physical violence for most of the time we were together, but I managed to endure until I got my own job and saved enough money to leave for the Philippines with my two children."*

**Jocy:** *"I was pregnant when I started having trouble with my Japanese husband. Then, when I had my child, he threatened to take her away from me if I divorce him. I could not bear it anymore that's why after two attempts of running away from him, I finally decided to file for a divorce through the help of FMC."*

There are many factors that restrict Filipina DV victims from getting out of situations of violence. Lack

of visa and fear of deportation, child custody, family support, language problem, lack of financial capacity, and fear of reprisal from abusive spouse are the most common reasons for their indecisiveness and apprehensions.

### E. What are their perspectives?

Life overseas is not as rosy as many might want to imagine. From the stories of the thirteen respondents alone, it is easy to understand that venturing into an unfamiliar environment is always a big challenge, particularly for women. Adapting to a new role in totally new and unexplored surroundings is often made more difficult by various issues and problems that are common not only among Filipinos but foreign migrants, in general, regardless of where they come from and what their objectives are in coming to Japan.

As shown in the testimonies of the victims, most of them came to Japan mainly for economic reasons. The same is true why these women had chosen to stay in spite of their sad experiences. When asked what they plan to do now, most of the respondents said they are not sure. However, all affirmed their decision to stay in Japan in spite of their sad experiences to go on with their life and the dreams that made them decide to go to Japan. While some regret their decision to marry their husband, many of the respondents believe that it is just a phase in their lives, that their experiences were not extraordinary, and no matter how sad these experiences are, there will always a bright side to look forward to.

Majority of the respondents believe that domestic violence cannot be stopped. They share in the belief that gender and racial violence happen to anyone not only in Japan, but elsewhere even in the Philippines. In many cases, it can be prevented if only the law could be made stronger and punitive measures are much higher to make offenders think twice before committing the act. They are also one in telling other victims to come out and speak up, to fight at the very onset of violence for there are NGOs which can very well assist them in their time of need.

On views about the attitude of ordinary Japanese people towards DV victims, some of the respondents believe that the Japanese people are generally sympathetic while others think they could not care less because they think it's just "normal" in Japan. One respondent even said that her husband bragged about her mother's ordeal in the hands of his own father to rationalize his own behavior towards her.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their experience in coming to Japan and marrying their husbands, and what they plan to do now after overcoming their sad experience as DV victims. Here are what they have to say:

**Ara:** *"I came to Japan to uplift my family. Somehow, I am able to fulfill that. What I regret though is marrying for reasons other than love. I am determined to find work and will not depend on my husband. This way, I can continue supporting my family back home, especially because I have a child to support back in the Philippines."*

**Gen:** *"I do not regret coming to Japan. Maybe, if there is one lesson I learned from my experience, it is knowing, first and foremost, who the person you will marry. It can happen anywhere not just in this country. The important thing is to be strong even in the face of difficult challenges."*

**Annie:** *"No regrets because my life is getting better. I am with my son and I have work to continue."*

**Rose:** *"Maybe, I regret marrying my husband, but I do not coming to Japan. I*

*have learned a lot from what happened to me.”*

**Erin:** “I truly regret marrying my husband. He threatened my life and my experience became my trauma.”

**Maria:** “*I came to Japan to help my family so I do not regret my decision to come to Japan. In the beginning, I pitied myself. But now that I have a child, I will try to support him even without his father.*”

**Jocy:** “*If I have no child, maybe I would have regretted it. But I have never thought about it because I have a child to support come what may.*”

**Mabby:** “*Coming to Japan helped me and my family a lot. Looking back, I have other blessings to be thankful for.*”

**Angie:** “*I made a mistake marrying my husband. I didn't know he would be irresponsible and would even hurt me. I can go on with my life without him.*”

**Jan:** “*I came to Japan for work. If I can continue working, I will stay in Japan. I have a daughter to look after and I will not stop until I get custody of her.*”

**Zeny:** “*I am in Japan now and I have a baby to raise. Looking back, I cannot be faulted for coming to Japan. I had bad and good experience. What matters is how you face life's many challenges.*”

All the respondents echo the same advice to other Filipina DV victims who have yet to come out and free themselves from their own situations of violence: “not to be afraid”, “to learn how to fight at the very onset of violence”, and “to speak up and ask for help”. They are one in saying that domestic violence may not be totally stopped, but there are NGOs and kind-hearted friends in the community who can help women get out of situations of violence so they can continue with their life and become productive members of the community once again.

## II. Issues and Concerns

Migrant women in Japan are faced with a multitude of problems. From the time they left the home country until the time they settled in the host country they face tremendous amount of challenge both as women and as migrants. At home and at work, being non-Japanese in a highly patriarchal society, they come face-to-face with racial and gender inequalities, alienation, and discrimination. And as citizens of a Third World country, their marginalization is heightened by State policies that equate nationality with criminality.

### A. Gender and Racial Inequality and Discrimination

Japan's patriarchal system puts Filipino women in double disadvantaged position. As women they are the “inferior one” who plays second fiddle to men. And as migrants, particularly coming from a poor country, they are treated as “incorrigibles” who cannot be trusted and must be restrained all the time. Their image as “gold-diggers” who cheat and manipulate people to get what they desire and get away with troubles they make is painted by governmental agencies and played up in media to condition the minds of the general public.

Filipinas are portrayed as “social problems” and often linked to “fake” or “imitation” marriage as well as prostitution.<sup>45</sup> This conditioning creates deep and lasting impressions that add up to the problems they face as they try to blend in society and deal with people in the community, particularly members of the husband's immediate family.

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<sup>45</sup> Prof. Hshiao-Chuan Hsia, Associate Professor of the Graduate Institute for Social Transformation studies of Shih Hsin University in Taiwan and Consultant of Trans Asia Sisters Association (TASAT)

They are scrutinized, criticized, and always suspect of wrongdoings inside their own homes. Families of husbands accuse them of marrying just for the money especially when they insist on supporting their families back home. And when they get their visa, the husband and his family suspect that they would just take off.

This observation is echoed by the APMM study on the Psychosocial Profile and Perspectives of Foreign Brides. It says:<sup>46</sup>

*“Oftentimes, the 'underdevelopment' of the foreign brides country of origin, is interpreted (or rather misinterpreted) as typical or stereotype 'characteristics of the foreign bride' – that is they just marry their foreign husband for the money. Worse, it is seen as an added burden to the agricultural and working class families of their husbands which are not wealthy to begin with.”<sup>47</sup>*

Racial and gender inequalities and discrimination are problems faced by Filipino women who are married to Japanese men. These are common problems hurdled by women and migrants, especially by those who come from economically poor countries. These are compounded by other factors like language barrier, difference in culture and tradition and for many, and their background as nightclub hostesses that deepen their isolation in society.

Nobue Suzuki, Professor of Anthropology at Chiba University, discussed this kind of racist and discriminatory portrayal of what she calls “women of humble backgrounds”:<sup>48</sup>

*“At the height of globalization and the denationalization of movements of capital, goods, images, and ideas, peoples' international migrations have generated high barriers in host countries. This is particularly so in post-9-11 era and peoples' migration are often received by tight securitization for the protection of the home society's “homeland”...Despite the many success of feminist movements in the past several decades, women's geographical and economic mobility continues to be received negatively, if not condoned, especially that of women of (perceived) humble backgrounds.”<sup>49</sup>*

Suzuki further stressed that while not all Filipinas working in nightclubs engaged in “prostitution”, she nevertheless retorts that:

*“As entertainers in night business from a Third World (read: poor) country, these women were commonly conceived as engaging in some kind of sex work. At bars and nightclubs in Japan, one of the most important task is communication with the customers which is accompanied by other services – verbally welcoming them, handling wet cold or warm towels for refreshment, making drinks, lighting cigarettes, offering food, and singing and dancing with them. Prostitution has taken place at some establishment and sexual gestures are commonly displayed. However, their operations have been grossly misunderstood by many people in the world as well as in Japan and paid sex is not a fix feature at many clubs.”<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> “Psychosocial Profile and Perspectives of Foreign Brides”, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Hong Kong, 2007

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36

<sup>48</sup> Nobue Suzuki, “Settling in Japan: Filipino Women's Acts of Empowerment And Disempowerment”, paper delivered at the International Conference on Border Controls and the Rights of Immigrant Brides, September 29-30, 2007, Taipei

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.



Because of the nature of their job, society in general, tend to perceive these women as “hustlers” who are willing to accept proposals for marriage from customers they hardly knew or old enough to be their father in exchange for a visa or a chance to prolong their stay in Japan. Such is the image of a “Japayuki” where Filipinas are portrayed as “bad women” who can sacrifice love for long term economic stability.

Discrimination in the field of labor and employment is also a problem for women migrants in Japan. Suzuki also explains this in her paper, thus:

*“While many other countries experiencing labor shortage have accepted foreign workers under various contracts, Japan has kept its doors shut even to this day to foreign workers with no recognizable profession or skills. Filipinas have come to Japan on different visas, but the majority who came from the 1970s served as entertainers at night establishments. Despite their services that were remunerated with pay, they were not legally recognized as workers.”*

*“Although real cases of abuse need to be legally and practically attended, similar to the discourse of domestic workers abroad, unattached working-class Filipinas in Japan who are conceived as “sex workers” have been met with the “3-D” stigmas of disease, depravity, and drugs. These women may have benefited from the work of those who have tried to “uplift” their status at home and abroad. Simultaneously, the pervasive views of Filipinas and attached stigmas thereof in Japan and elsewhere have in fact paradoxically reinforced the patriarchal values and control as well as the market logic and discipline. These have also reduced the existence of the Filipinas to helpless women in need of rescue and rehabilitation.”<sup>51</sup>*

All these considered, it is easy to understand why society tends to look down on these women. It is like a curse that Filipino women in Japan cannot escape no matter how much they try to evade it. Perhaps the only way to stop the curse is to transform society and to liberate women by women using their collective power.

## **B. Criminalizing Migrants and the Role of the State**

In Japan, as in most receiving countries, immigration control is seen within the purview of crime control. Simply put, equating criminality with foreign migrants is what's shaping Japan's immigration policy today.

Japan has always been wary of foreign migrants. A homogeneous society, it has openly rejected the idea of multi-ethnicity and diversity. But over the last two decades – pushed by its own needs and desires - this attitude has somehow changed albeit with caution. As shown by the number of foreign migrants, particularly from poor countries like the Philippines, entering the country on a steady flow beginning in the late 70s, Japan has slowly opened its doors to foreign migrants to fill in demands for labor and brides. Many thought this would lead to a happy ending – Japan opening up to the outside world, no longer homogeneous; at last a society embracing multiculturalism and diversity.

But Japan's swivel door opens and closes on foreign migrants depending on who's the one benefiting from it. Like other migrant-recipient countries, in times of economic downturns, foreign migrants are

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

almost always the first to suffer rejection and isolation. And perhaps the easy way to rationalize this now is by associating migrants with criminality.

Ryoko Yamamoto, examined this discourse in her paper entitled Migrant Support NGOs and the Challenge to the Discourse on Foreign Criminality in Japan:<sup>52</sup>

*“At the turn of the century, Japan faced the collapse of two myths that it had embraced for decades: the myth of homogeneity and the myth of public safety. A new influx of migrants in the 1980s substantially increased the number and diversity of foreign-national residents in Japan, making multi-ethnicity in Japan more visible. Around the same time, the image of Japan as a safe country also was challenged. Public concerns about crime increased as the crime rate almost doubled and the clearance rate (more commonly referred as the “arrest rate”) dropped from 60% to 23% between 1983 and 2003.”*

Yamamoto adds that foreign migrants, especially undocumented, are construed as big threat to public safety and this is magnified by the National Police Agency and amplified by (conservative) politicians and mass media. She notes that this is very clear in the 2003 pronouncement issued by Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Metropolitan Police Department, the Japanese Ministry of Justice and the Tokyo Immigration Bureau which says: “Many illegal residents are engaged in illegal employment. Furthermore, not a small number of them are engaged in crime to get easy money...for national security, the problem of these illegal residents requires immediate attention.” Yamamoto adds that in order to counter crime problems in the metropolis, the statement mentioned that in five years time, fifty percent of unauthorized residents in Tokyo will be swiped out.<sup>53</sup>

The continued crackdown on “overstays” and undocumented migrants is part of this plan that mirrors Japan's current policy on migrants. NGOs and migrant-support groups consider this as ethnic cleansing with racial undertones. Others think Japan is retreating back to the old ways by shutting its doors once again. But the truth is Japan is in a dilemma. It needs foreign migrants to fill in jobs still shunned by ordinary Japanese, and it needs women who can bear future generations of Japanese caused by the aging population and low birth rate. On the other hand, the economy is still in a quagmire. Having been on a long period of economic slowdown problems in the economy is creating serious alarm that could trigger unrest in labor. Getting rid of “undesirable” migrants by associating them with criminality is almost a plausible excuse. The problem, however, is that State policies alone do not automatically identify who's undesirable and who's not. In the eyes of ordinary Japanese, more so in the eyes of the police and immigration officers, being non-Japanese can be equated with being undesirable.

Foreign migrants, particularly women are already in disadvantaged position because of their Third World background. But when State policies equate criminality with being non-Japanese, it not only widens the gap between migrants and the rest of society, it also deepens other problems like racism and discrimination that are already embedded in society.

Yamamoto explained in her paper, that:

*“The discourse of foreign criminality dichotomizes society into potential criminals and victims along national lines; foreigners are portrayed as potential offenders*

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<sup>52</sup> Ryoko Yamamoto, “Migrant Support NGOs and the Challenge to the Discourse on Foreign Criminality in Japan”, an article posted on Focus Japan based on her dissertation as a post graduate candidate in Sociology at the University of Hawaii at Minoa, September 15, 2007

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

*who need to be controlled, while the Japanese public is depicted as potential victims who need to be protected. Between foreign offenders and Japanese victims, the Japanese state positions itself as the guardian of the latter. In one fell swoop, the foreign criminality discourse foreignizes crime and nationalizes public safety, subsequently constructing immigration control as a security measure to protect good Japanese people from malicious foreign predators.*<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, Japan's stringent visa policy also serves the same purpose. By making it hard, at times almost impossible for foreigners to secure legal residence status, immigration becomes an instrument that heightens the marginalization of migrants.

Thus, for wives of Japanese citizens, the process of securing and extending their spouse visas is not an easy task. The required "letter of guarantee" from the Japanese husband is not only unnecessary, but it has become an instrument used by abusive husbands to take full control of their migrant wife. As revealed by victims of spousal violence, this single sheet of paper prevents many victims from getting out of their situations of violence for fear of losing their legal status and custody of their children once they are deported.

For applicants who have no legal status prior to marrying their Japanese husband, the far more challenging. From the start of the application process, immigration officials assume the position that applicants coming in from a status as "illegal", "undocumented" or "overstay", are construed as applying for a spouse visa based on either "fake" or "imitation" marriage. As such, applicants are often compelled to submit tons of documents to disprove fraud and are made to wait longer than usual before their application for spouse visa is completed. Unfortunately in this case, many end up spending too much time and money but not getting any visa.

Migrant support NGOs argue that in doing this, the Japanese government is not only punishing the applicant, but it is creating conditions that worsens the condition of migrants, particularly women. They believe that the Japanese government has all the power and resources at its disposal to prove whether a marriage is legit or not. They resist the fact that government agencies are passing on the burden to migrants whose only wish is to legalize their stay in order to lead a normal and productive life in Japan.

The Japanese government sees alienating and removing "undesirable" aliens and restricting their visas as a solution to the crime problem. For migrant support groups, it is an injustice because it dehumanizes migrants who contribute immensely not only to the economy of the sending country, but also in the economy of the receiving country. It's supposed to be a give-and-take situation but under current conditions, Japan clearly is the biggest taker while foreign migrants scramble for whatever there is left to take.

### III. Summary and Conclusions

The study given all its limitations provide important basic information on Filipino migrants in Japan, particularly Filipinas in domestic violence situations - who they are, why they marry or have relationship with foreigners, particularly Japanese men, their experiences and survival mechanisms, views about DV and other issues affecting them, and perspectives in Japan. It is hoped that with these information it will help deepen our understanding of the issue and use it to overcome DV as a serious problem confronting the Filipino community in Japan.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

Domestic violence no doubt is a serious problem in Japan confronting women, in general. It is rooted in the fact that Japan remains basically as a patriarchal society where traditional views of women as being “inferior” than men remains as the dominant view among many Japanese men, or even Japanese women for that matter. Filipino women and those from other countries are no exceptions. In fact, as this study reveals, they are even more vulnerable to domestic violence and their vulnerability stems from a disadvantaged position as women coming from an “inferior” socio-cultural background who have been given the opportunity to uplift themselves by living or working in a relatively affluent environment. This vulnerability is aggravated by the actual conditions they face once in Japan where they experience social isolation and discrimination due to language barrier, difference in culture and tradition and a host of other issues and problems that go with overseas migration.

Coming from a different socio-economic and cultural background, adjustment to their new environment is particularly challenging for the Filipina wife or partner of Japanese men and other foreign residents in Japan. They are looked down upon because they come from a poor country, and they are perceived as “bad women” because of the type of work they do prior or even after marrying their husband. These views are often shared by the family of the husband, particularly the in-laws. This is more pronounced in the rural areas of Japan where immediate and extended families of the husband often live in the same house shared by the couple. There is no worry when the family of the husband is supportive of the Filipina. However, it is a big challenge when they contribute in perpetuating situations of violence inside the home.

Government statistics show that the number of DV cases in Japan is increasing. Although it did not indicate how many victims are Filipina, records from non-government organizations assisting foreign migrant women show that the number is on the rise. With the passing of Japan's law on spousal violence in 2001 and the setting up of Women's Counseling Centers all over Japan, the rise in DV cases, as a whole, may be indicative of only two things: either the law and the mechanisms it has put in place are working and victims are coming out to avail them, or the problem has worsened.

Compared to ten years ago, many Filipina DV victims now are coming out and speaking up. However, more still are reluctant to come forward and their reasons vary. Most common fear is losing one's immigration status and the thought of deportation is most haunting to them, particularly for those who have no visa (undocumented) and those without children. Others worry about the custody of their child or losing economic independence including the ability to support their families back in the Philippines. Fear of reprisals from abusive husbands or partners is also a serious concern to many of the victims.

On the origin of Filipina DV victims, the study showed that there are no particular patterns in age, place of origin, background in education, and even in the manner of meeting foreign spouses or partners. What these say is that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. On the side of the Japanese or foreign husband or partner, it appears that abusers often come from low income families, the poorly educated, and men who have had failed marriages or relationships. But, given the limited number of cases cited in this study, such observation may not be conclusive.

Many of the Filipina victims of domestic violence came to Japan as immigrant brides and contract workers (entertainers) who eventually marry Japanese citizens or foreigners from other countries. In both cases, the exodus is propelled mainly by the failures of economic structures in the Philippines, on the one hand, and Japan's demand for immigrant brides to counter the shortage of it. Even the entry of Filipina entertainers in the 1980s is seen within the context of Japan's drive to remedy the aging population and declining birth rate. Apparently this scheme was thought of as a better scheme than the mail-order-bride scheme which is prone to many problems and criticized by many.

Simply put, abject poverty, lack of jobs, low wages, high cost of living, unfair and discriminatory treatment of women (especially in the rural areas), etc., are common problems faced by women in the Philippines that push many to train their eyes overseas. Marrying foreigners, in general, and Japanese men, in particular is seen as an option to escape these problems. On the other hand, the tightening of immigration controls in Japan caught up with those who chose to work as entertainers. As an option to legalize their status and to prolong their stay in Japan, many Filipina entertainers eventually took the path of marrying Japanese men and other foreign residents for reasons ranging from economic security, love, and the opportunity to remain in Japan.

The study shows that Filipinas, in particular and foreign migrant women, in general are vulnerable to domestic violence. The context of their vulnerability stems from the fact that Japan is a patriarchal society where spousal violence is tolerated and to some extent considered “normal”. This is aggravated by their cultural and economic background which is regarded as “inferior” by the husband and his family. Language barrier and differences in culture and practices are also factors that add to the vulnerability of Filipinas to DV.

Filipina DV victims experience various forms of violence and abuse - from verbal and emotional abuse to physical violence and in extreme cases even murder of the victim. There is no pattern when the actual violence begins. There are cases where violence occurs in the early stages of marriage and there are cases where violence starts after several years of marriage and after having children.

Statistics on the number of marriages between Filipina and Japanese men that end up in divorce is significant in that it shows that support systems to help couples adjust to their situations are either inadequate or ineffective.

Meanwhile, mechanisms to prevent DV and to support victims appear to be inadequate and inefficient. Information is not readily accessible and authorities like the police and local social welfare offices are seen as not responsive and often indifferent to DV victims.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo and the Philippine Consulate General's Office in Osaka are both seen as mere extensions of the bureaucracy in the Philippines. Viewed as not responsive and insensitive to the needs and problems of the Filipino community, both agencies are regarded as inutile. Numerous bad encounters and the slow and inefficient services they offer migrant Filipinos, including victims of domestic violence are discouraging many from seeking their help. Instead, most DV victims and for that matter most Filipinos in Japan turn to NGOs in their time of need.

Although there are positive developments like the passing of a law on spousal violence in 2001 and the setting up of women's counseling centers all over Japan; however, much remains to be done in order to minimize incidence of domestic violence and to effectively and efficiently help victims. To totally stop domestic violence from happening may be a tall order under current situations in Japan. But as long as statistics show numbers of victims, the search for the right cure, so to speak, must continue.

## IV. Recommendations

While FMC believes that the solution to the problem of domestic violence and other forms of abuse of Filipino migrant women in Japan is rooted in the prevailing social, economic and political structures in the Philippines that push many Filipinos to try their luck overseas, and the condition in Japan, it is important that measures that are adequate, relevant, and effective be established in order to address

the problems faced by Filipinos abroad and for the protection and promotion of their rights and wellbeing as migrants and as human beings.

Migration or the movement of natural persons is an inherent right of any individual, it is important that this be the choice of the individual and that he or she is not forced by circumstances that are not of his or her making.

Meanwhile, receiving countries like Japan should accord migrants, regardless of their immigration status, equal rights and equal treatment of the law, and provide them necessary useful information and adequate support mechanisms, especially in their times of needs.

Addressing the problem of domestic violence and other forms of abuse against Filipino migrant women in Japan, in particular, is an urgent call to both Japan and Philippine governments, on the one hand, and the people in the community, including support NGOs and community-based formations of migrants themselves, on the other.

FMC is forwarding these social and legal measures as recommendations based on the findings of this study. FMC believes that these recommendations are necessary not only for the support of victims and prevention of domestic violence and other forms of abuse committed against women, in general; but most importantly, these are measures for the defense of the inherent rights of Filipinas in Japan as women, as migrants, and as human beings.

### **Social Measures**

1. Efforts should be made to periodically study the condition of foreign migrants in Japan, in general, and the particular situation of undocumented migrants to identify measures that can help resolve their status and thereby reduce their vulnerability to domestic violence and other problems while working or staying in Japan. Periodic studies should also be undertaken to monitor changes in the nature and conditions of work and the social mechanism that are available to them.
2. Social programs should be made available for abused foreign spouses or partners regardless of their immigration status in Japan. As women and as human beings, they have rights that should be guaranteed and protected, and to deprive them of means to survive and overcome domestic violence simply because they are undocumented or illegal is a violation of that inherent rights.
3. Organizations and networks of foreign migrants, in general, and women, in particular must be encouraged and supported. Programs that empower them at home, at the workplace and in the community must be put in place to shield them from domestic violence and other forms of racism, discrimination and abuse.
4. Mechanisms, including vital information and facilities not only about domestic violence, but on issues and concerns that affect the foreign migrant community, in general, and women migrants, in particular, must be made available and accessible to them at all times.
5. Rescue Centers, not just counseling centers must be established and professionalized in every prefecture or municipality, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week to answer distress calls, rescue victims, and provide medical, legal and other services and assistance to the victims.
6. Simplify bureaucratic procedures and ensure that programs and services at the local Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers are client-friendly to encourage more victims to come out

and avail of its services. Make sure that language and translation assistance is always available to victims who are not able to communicate well in Japanese.

7. Periodic trainings, including value formations must be given to counselors, staff members and volunteers in Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers to make their work more effective in helping and supporting DV victims.

8. Provide funding for private shelters operated by NGOs involved in assisting victims of domestic violence. DV victims, particularly those without legal status are often reluctant to seek help from the local Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers for fear of deportation. Privately-run shelters and halfway houses are positive alternatives that can work hand-in-hand with local agencies.

8. The Philippine government must create its own information, counseling, and rescue centers to help Filipina DV victims. It must build and operate its own facility to house/shelter Filipina victims of domestic violence in Japan.

### **Legal Measures**

There is a need to review the existing law on spousal violence and plan of actions based on the needs and actual condition of victims in the different prefectures.

1. Amend the Domestic Violence Law of 2001 to:

a) Criminalize spousal abuse and accord violators harsher penalties.

The current law lacks the necessary teeth to run after abusive husbands and partners, particularly Japanese men who often take advantage of their victims' ignorance of the legal system and procedures in Japan to avoid prosecution. In many instances, abusive spouses even manage to turn the blame on the victims because the latter often have difficulty with the language.

b) Prosecute violators of spousal abuse not the victims, especially foreign spouses or partners of Japanese citizens who have no legal status of residence in Japan. Priority should be on the protection and support to victims and the immigration status of the victim should not get in the way of this objective. Many victims of domestic violence are reluctant to report their case to the police or other government agencies for fear of arrest and deportation. Violators of spousal abuse, on the other hand, use this to perpetuate abuse of their foreign spouse or partners.

c) Define the role of police authorities in handling cases involving domestic violence. Give them the power to run after or arrest abusive spouses or partners.

d) Expand the issuance of Protection Order to include not just victims of physical abuse, but also those suffering from serious emotional and psychological abuse from abusive spouses or partners.

As can be gleaned from many previous studies on spousal violence, it is often the emotional and psychological violence of abusive spouse or partner that leaves indelible marks on the victims. Also, emotional and psychological violence could be as deadly and often the precursor of physical violence as shown by many previous cases of DV.

e) Include in the protection order provisions that prohibit threats done through the telephone and other means of communication like post mail, fax, emails, text messaging, etc.

f) Make basic plans for the implementation of policies and measures for the prevention of spousal violence and the protection of victims uniform to all prefectures to safeguard against discrimination and to ensure equal treatment of the victims.

As victims trying to flee from their abusive spouses or partners often have the tendency to move from one prefecture to another, it would benefit the victims if different prefectures subscribe to common plans of action and programs.

2. Amend certain provisions in the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act to:

a) Allow victims of domestic violence who are without legal residence status and not in a marital relationship to stay in Japan to pursue legal actions against the abuser, and to provide the victim all legal and other material support.

b) Allow foreign spouses of Japanese citizens and other foreign nationals with legal residents status to obtain legal status of residence even in the event of separation or divorce.

There are cases where undocumented foreign spouses of Japanese citizens and other foreign nationals with legal residence status are prevented by their abusive husbands from obtaining legal status of residence (change of status). Often, the abusers use this as leverage to control their foreign spouses who are dependent on their support. This practice puts foreign spouses virtually under the mercy of their abusive partners and therefore should be corrected in order to protect the rights of the victims.

c) Make parents of a Japanese child qualify for residency visa, including permanent residence visa, without the letter of guarantee currently required for the granting of such visa.

Application for a long term and permanent residency visa for foreign spouses of Japanese nationals requires a written guarantee of sponsorship by the Japanese spouse. This practice is discriminatory and unjust for the foreign spouse because it practically puts the latter at the mercy of abusive Japanese spouses. Without the letter of guarantee from the Japanese spouse, the foreign spouse could not renew her visa which based on the study is one of the reasons why Filipina victims are often reluctant to run away from their husbands or file for a divorce.

This practice is also used by abusive Japanese spouses to deny access to the children. Unable to extend her visa, the Filipina spouse by law is forced to go back to the Philippines without the children. The children, being Japanese citizens do not have to leave or can be physically prevented by the Japanese spouse from leaving Japan.

d) Make non-married and non-custodial parent of a Japanese child eligible for long-term visa and allow them to have access to gainful employment without the mandatory letter of guarantee currently required for the granting of such visa.

e) Grant permanent residence visa to a non-married and non-custodial parent of Japanese child under the same procedure and condition applicable to a spouse of a Japanese national.

3. Grant amnesty to foreign nationals who have overstayed their visa for a long period of time, particularly those who have minor children who may be displaced once deported back to the parents' home country. ###