

Good News and Bad News for Women

As countries around the world observe Gender Month, let us look at the good news and bad news about Filipino women.

The good news is that the Philippines is among the top 10 countries that have achieved the greatest equality between men and women. The Philippines placed ninth among 134 countries on the Gender Gap Report of 2010 issued by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF), which measures male-female equality in the areas of politics, education, employment and health.

Democracy watchdogs have noted that Filipinos have elected two women presidents and there are more female than male voters registered by the Commission on Elections. Filipino female voter turnout is also higher than that of male voters. More women are enrolled in colleges and universities.; they also outnumber the men in graduate program enrollments for MAs, MSs and PhDs.

Filipino women have gained equal status in professions once dominated by men—such as law, medicine, engineering, accounting and journalism. As many women hold chief executive officer (CEO) positions as men in the country's top private corporations. A majority of the country's 10 million Overseas Filipino workers are women. In matters of health, Filipino women enjoy more longevity than the men, says the World Health Organization.

However, amidst the good news is the sad news over the state of violence against women or VAW in the Philippines. Instances of VAW include forced prostitution, illegal recruitment, battering, rape, incest and violence in armed conflict. The most vulnerable victims of violence, it must be noted, are women from poor families.

The latest statistics provided by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) show that in 2009 the number of violence cases reported to the police rose by 37.4 percent from the 2008 report. Concerned agencies in the present administration still believe that, with proper law enforcement and a renewed commitment to protecting women and children, this figure can be brought down.

There are enough laws in the country that, if well enforced, will greatly reduce violence against women. The laws include the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 (RA 9262) and relevant provisions of the Revised Penal Code. Strengthened government efforts and continued cooperation among the government and civil society groups are also critical to effectively fighting violence against women.

The DSWD has been assisting violence victims through local centers which provide a substitute for home care. The DOH and the privately-run Women's Crisis Center have been jointly providing a supportive environment in which women who have survived violence can interact with other survivors through group counseling, education programs, recreation activities or skills training.

While gender issues continue to be a matter for contention for many, we remember that Scripture exhorts men and women to lovingly assume the roles God has ordained for them. Followers of Christ are called to unity, mutual submission, and service, whatever their race, social status, or gender. As St. Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, “In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This editorial was written by Prof. Francisco Llaguno, journalist and ISACC contributor.