



Sociocultural Contexts' Impacts on the Resilience of a Female Violence Victim in *Left Hand* Webtoon

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Abstract. This study examines the impacts of sociocultural contexts on the resilience development of female sexual violence victims, focusing on the character Grace Isabella from the Webtoon series *Left Hand* by Callistahermin. The research aims to determine whether the lack of supportive sociocultural contexts affects the ability of victims to develop resilience. Using the theoretical framework on sociocultural context and sexual violence by Dworkin & Weaver, the study employs content analysis of both text and images within the Webtoon to assess Grace Isabella's experiences and responses to sexual violence. The findings reveal that Grace Isabella, as a victim of sexual violence, is not supported by sociocultural contexts that can foster resilience. The society in which she lives is a gender-inequal society that intensifies her vulnerability. Without the support of positive sociocultural contexts, Grace Isabella is unable to cope with her trauma, leading to prolonged depression and an inability to recover fully from the violence.

Keywords: sociocultural contexts, resilience, female victims, sexual violence

1 Introduction

Resilience is the capability of individuals or communities to adapt and recover when they are facing difficulty. It is a dynamic process that is influenced by personal factors, such as self-efficacy and confidence, and external factors, such as cultural values and social capital (Masten, 2014). The influence of sociocultural contexts in the development of resilience or cultural resilience is addressed by Dworkin & Weaver (2021), who mentioned that sociocultural contexts, namely norms, structures, and environmental stressors, are components that interplay with resilience.

For individuals, cultural resilience can become a mechanism that supports them to overcome difficulties like stress or trauma. Their already internalized cultural background and identity can provide a sense of purpose and belonging that strengthens them (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). The traditional rituals, or community support systems, that are deeply rooted can empower the individuals when they face difficulties (Kirmayer, 2011). When individuals have a strong connection to their cultures, they can be more confident, uphold their mental health, and overcome crises (Ungar, 2011).

Cultural resilience is crucial in helping female individuals who have experienced sexual violence to get a sense of control through cultural values, beliefs, and practices provided. For instance, in South Africa, the girls who were sexually abused made meaning of their traumatic experiences as God's will so that they did not blame themselves and became strong (Haffejee & Theron, 2017). Additionally, the traditional role of women as mothers in the case of female victims of rape in Rwanda helps the female victims to survive as well as empower them, improving their self-worth and their resilience (Clark, 2022). The cultural beliefs above are the values that protect the victims from the psychological impacts of trauma that, in turn, can promote the recovery (Ungar, 2011).

The theme of resilience, including the one developed by the female victims of sexual violence, is addressed by novel writers. Sharma studied the novels of an Indian writer, Shashi Deshpande (Sharma, 2021). She focused on the personal factors that influence the female characters in Deshpande's novels. She found that despite the female characters' difficulties in fighting the deeply rooted traditional patriarchy structure, their personal strength enables them to recover and regain their previous state. Additionally, Saelens and Larsen in their review mention that resilience is a central theme in young adult literature (Saelens & Larsen, 2023). They found that the teenage characters in the young adult novels show their resilience in the times of hardship and life changes. Although the novel characters struggle with their life changes, in the end, they can endure the challenges and overcome their adversity in their own ways. They conclude that resilience is important in adapting to changes and improving their lives for better ones. Similar findings are presented by Ivane and Riyandari in their study about Marin, the character in the novel *Rules for Being a Girl* who becomes a victim of sexual violence (Simen, 2023). They found that Marin develops resilience in her fight against sexual violence. Her struggles to get support from her school authority and her peers are not easy, but the supportive environment and relationships, as well as her strong desire to seek justice, help her to be resilient.

The object of this study is *Left Hand*, a webtoon written by Callistahermin (Left hand, n.d.). The main character in the story is Grace Isabella, a modern woman who has a successful career. In the beginning of the story, Grace Isabella is a perfect representation of an independent and confident woman. As a woman who has a prominent position in her office, she is unaffected by people's judgmental comments about her and her being single. Her world starts to crumble when she experiences an attempted rape that injures her physically and causes psychological trauma. She experiences the negative effects of the attempted rape in the forms of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder like emotional outbursts, avoidance behavior, emotional numbness, hallucinations, depression, and sleep disturbance (Hartono, 2024). The webtoon shows that Grace Isabella's successful career and her accustomed independence and confidence cannot help her develop resilience that can support the process of her recovery.

Grace Isabella's failure to develop resilience despite her having strong character traits is worth studying further. The sociocultural contexts that Grace Isabella belongs to are the main focus of this study. It is assumed that the absence of sociocultural contexts supporting the development of resilience could potentially have negative effects on victims of sexual violence. It can leave the victims without any sense of purpose in

life and without any resources that can help the victim recover. The lack of supportive and empowering cultural values may lead the victims to feel isolated and helpless (Dworkin & Weaver, 2021). Additionally, the absence of sociocultural contexts that support the development of resilience hinders the victims from getting the social support necessary for their recovery. As a result, the victims may lose the feeling of self-worth and experience mental health disorders (Ungar, 2011).

2 Review of Literature

The resilience that is influenced by the sociocultural contexts, or cultural resilience, can be defined as the ability of an individual or a community to use their cultural values, traditions, and practices when they are facing difficulties. The values, beliefs, and practices shared in the community can support individuals and the community to cope with and recover from the challenges or trauma (Ungar, 2011). The shared cultures can help those during the time of the crises (Kirmayer, 2011); for example, in the time of colonization, the indigenous communities develop resilience by maintaining their language and cultural practices (Burack, Bombay, & Kirmayer, 2024).

The components within the sociocultural contexts that affect the development of resilience are addressed by Dworkin & Weaver (2021). They particularly mention that norms, structures, and environmental stressors play a significant role in the mental health of victims of sexual violence. The components they mention are norms, structures, and environmental stressors.

2.1 Norms

The first component is norms. They define norms as shared ideas, beliefs, ideologies, and values existing in a society or community. Norms have an important role in determining the victims' reaction to the sexual violence, as they influence the victims' way of thinking, their openness to share the experience of assault, their approach to choosing types of help, and their interaction with the system that supports them. Norms may affect the victims in two different ways. Supportive norms can help the victims to recover and improve their mental health, whereas the unsupportive norms may contribute to worsening the victims' mental health as they may blame and isolate the victims.

As mentioned by Dworkin & Weaver (2021), shared ideas include norms. The shared ideas are the cultural value of collective identity, in which an individual is no longer an independent being but a part of a larger group. Becoming a part of a larger community helps to provide a sense of belonging to a communal network that avoids the feeling of isolation often experienced by the victims. As a part of a community, an individual can draw strength from their cultural heritage. For example, stories about survival and resilience shared by people living in the community can strengthen the victims during their hardship and inspire them to be strong (Ungar, 2013).

In addition to shared ideas, local and traditional beliefs are included in norms. For the victims of sexual violence, these beliefs have a role in developing the resilience of the victims by offering a way to recover through frameworks rooted in their cultural context. Local and traditional beliefs can play a crucial role in helping victims of sexual

violence develop resilience by providing culturally rooted frameworks for healing and recovery. For example, in many Nigeria, the community believes that cleansing ritual allows victims to purify themselves symbolically, thus enabling them to recover their sense of purity and dignity (Babatunde, 2018).

The next in norms is ideologies. It provides the victims of sexual violence with a way to foster empowerment. One of the ideologies that supports the victims of sexual violence is feminism. The feminists who fight for gender equality and challenge the imbalance of power that causes sexual violence can encourage the victims, especially female victims, to reclaim their agency (Hooks, 2000). Feminist ideology also helps the survival of the sexual violence victims by promoting the idea that they must not dwell on the feeling of guilt and shame but to focus on their recovery (Crumpton, 2014).

The cultural values are also the sociocultural component. The positive cultural values of a society provide support for the victims of sexual violence to develop resilience, as they may provide a safe environment that encourages the recovery of the victims. Examples of cultural values are family solidarity, respect for dignity, and collective making meaning (Kelmendi & Hamby, 2023). Those cultural values help the victims of violence to feel understood and supported, so that they regain their sense of self-worth and confidence. On the solidarity, McElvaney et al. said that friends and family can give support by believing in the victims and give opportunity to the victims to disclose their stressful feelings (McElvaney, McDonnell Murray, & Dunne, 2022). The support from the family and friends can prevent the victims from isolating and shunning themselves from people around them (Pessoa, Coimbra, Noltemeyer, & Bottrell, 2017).

2.2 Structures

Sociocultural structures are the organizational systems and institutions to which individuals belong. The structures can include healthcare systems, legal frameworks, social support networks, and community organizations. The same as norms, positive support from the structure, such as the support system's availability, responsiveness, and quality, can encourage the victims' mental health. Meanwhile, the unsupportive structures can hinder the victims from recovery and even increase stress.

The first sociocultural structure is the healthcare system for the victims of violence. Countries that have healthcare systems for sexual violence victims are, for example, the United States and South Africa. The United States has Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) with healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and advocates for the victims that provide service and care for the victims (Henninger, Iwasaki, Carlucci, & Lating, 2020). SARTs enable the victims to get psychological support, medical attention, and medical exams. The services help victims gain the support that is important for their recovery and resilience.

Other than the healthcare system are the legal frameworks. Legal frameworks that provide support and ensure justice and safety to protect the victims of sexual violence. European countries have a legal framework named the Istanbul Convention. It is a European convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence that requires the states to provide legislative and policy frameworks for victims' support, including access to resources like legal aid and crisis centers that help the resilience of the victims (Europe, 2011).

Social support networks are important structures that support the victims of sexual violence by offering psychological and practical assistance. One of the social support networks is a peer support group. In this group, the sexual violence victims have a place to talk about their experiences in a safe and supportive space that may help to lessen the feeling of isolation and shame (Cody, Bovarnick, & Peace, 2023). Family support is another social support network, as family can give emotional support to the victims to get a feeling of self-worth and confidence. Additionally, social support networks exist in the form of rape crisis centers that support sexual violence victims by offering services of counseling, legal advocacy, and safe houses (Mears, 2021). Recently, online social support has become increasingly important. Virtual support provides the victims with platforms to talk about their experiences, receive advice, and get support from other individuals who sympathize with them (Bowen, 2022).

2.3 Environmental structures

The last component of sociocultural contexts is environmental stressors that include discrimination, social inequalities, economic hardships, and community violence. These stressors can hinder the recovery process as they may increase vulnerable feelings and decrease mental health.

The first stressor is discrimination. The ability of sexual violence victims to be resilient can be challenged by the discrimination, as it reinforces stigma that may reduce the victims' recovery process. One example of discrimination is gender-based discrimination, where female victims of sexual violence are often led into believing that they have contributed to the sexual violence that happened to them (Lelaurain, Fonte, Marie-Anastasié, Lo Monaco, & Apostolidis, 2018). Moreover, they are often held responsible for the violence. As a result, the female victims cannot recover because they feel shame and guilty. In a male-dominated society where women are subordinated, the female victims face difficulty finding help or expressing their experiences as they are not considered important (True, 2021). In addition to gender-based discrimination, racial and ethnic discrimination can worsen the marginalization of the sexual violence victims, especially when the victims are women from the minority group (O'Neal, 2017). The victims may not have adequate support as they have more limited access to healthcare and legal systems.

The second stressor is social inequalities. These inequalities limit the access of the sexual violence victims to essential resources, such as healthcare and legal services. For example, the victims who come from low-income families do not have the capability to move from their abusive environments because they are financially dependent on their abusers (Britt, 2018). As a result, they are trapped in the cycle of violence without any opportunities to escape. Furthermore, inequalities in education may influence the ability of the victims to develop resilience as they may not understand their rights to health and legal assistance as well as other resources (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, gender inequality in societies, particularly in patriarchal societies, puts female victims in a marginalized position of being socially ostracized or victimized (True, 2021).

The next stressor is economic hardship. Similar to economic inequality, economic hardship restricts the access of the victims of sexual violence to necessary resources to develop resilience. Victims who are in financial difficulty may not be able to afford

healthcare services, such as counseling and medical care, as well as legal services (Britt, 2018). The influence of economic hardship on the inability of the victims to be resilient worsens when the hardship makes the victims dependent on the abusers. The fear of becoming homeless, jobless, or deprived prevents the victims from leaving the abusive environment.

The last stressor is community violence. Living in a community that allows violence to happen perpetuates a cycle of fear, trauma, and insecurity. The examples of community violence are domestic violence or gang-related violence. The feelings of being unsafe and vulnerable because of the constant exposure to threats or harmful acts are obstructive for the victims' recovery (Diette, Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2017). This ongoing exposure to violence can lead to mental health outcomes, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Nöthling, Suliman, Martin, Simmons, & Seedat, 2019).

3 Method

Content analysis is the method used in this study. It is a method that helps to analyze and interpret the textual as well as the visual content of a literary work (Krippendorff, 2019). In analyzing the literary work, content analysis helps to find the themes, patterns, or elements that specifically show, for example, character or language. To a certain extent, it allows the quantification through categorizing and counting certain text from which the meaning or implied meaning can be drawn later on. This method provides a structured way to cut apart complex narratives into more considerable chunks.

The object of this study is *Left-Hand*, a Webtoon series written by Callistahermin. The webtoon is published on November 24th, 2020 in Indonesia Webtoon. The language used in the series is Indonesian. This study focuses on Season 1 (episodes 1 to 73), which presents Grace Isabella's experiencing attempted rape and how she struggles with the effects of it.

The theory used to help analyze the content of the novel is sociocultural contexts and sexual violence proposed by Dworkin and Weaver [2]. The use of sociocultural contexts to analyze the novel allows the finding and discussion of how sociocultural contexts influence the character's ability to develop resilience that contributes to the character's recovery from the effects of attempted rape. The sociocultural contexts that are used include norms (shared ideas, beliefs, ideologies, and values), structures (healthcare systems, legal frameworks, social support networks, community organizations), and environmental stressors (discrimination, social inequalities, economic hardships, and community violence).

4 Results and Discussion

Using Dworkin & Weaver's (2021) framework, the sociocultural contexts that are presented in *Left Hand* are shared ideas, ideologies, and values, which are parts of the norms; a social support network, which is part of the structures; and discrimination and social inequalities as parts of the environmental stressors.

4.1 Collective identity, ideology of patriarchy, and Confucian values

The setting of place in *Left Hand* is South Korea. One component of norms, the shared ideas—in this case, the shared ideas of what South Korean is—can be seen in the representation of collective identity. Korean society prioritizes group over individualism as a result of society's roots in Confucian principles, which consider social harmony, family loyalty, and group cohesion as their utmost importance (Mitu, 2015). In Korea, to promote the collective identity, individuals are encouraged to match their actions and decisions with those of their family or community. The identity is shown by the concept of "uri" (우리), meaning "we" or "ours," *versus* them (*nam* 남), which emphasizes the idea of shared identity (Oh, 2022). This collective idea has really been embedded in Korean culture up until now, when individualism is increasingly embraced by younger people. In the *Left Hand*, this collective identity is represented by people around Grace Isabella who expect her to conform to society norms that the woman her age should have been married or at least show interest in finding a serious partner. The webtoon shows that Grace Isabella's friends and working colleagues want her to match the action of the community. For Grace Isabella herself, although she is initially being herself by disregarding people's comments about her singleness, she finally conforms to society's expectation to date a man.

The second norm found in *Left Hand* is the ideology of patriarchy. The webtoon shows that in Korea, the setting of the story, instead of feminist ideology, patriarchal ideology is more obviously shown. In general, patriarchy is an ideology where men dominate the power and roles in society while women are positioned in the subordinate roles and considered powerless. In a patriarchal society, men have all or most of the power and interests in society or group, while women are limited in their access to power or public interest (Abraham, 2019). Patriarchy ideology puts women in their domestic roles as wives, mothers, or the ones who run the household. The restriction of women's roles by patriarchal culture creates an imbalance of position between men and women. As a result, women experience injustice that puts women in a lower position than men.

In *Left Hand*, the ideology of patriarchy can be seen on several occasions. The most visible instance of patriarchy ideology is when Grace Isabella becomes the victim of people's constant gossip. The gossip starts with the fact that she is still single, although she has a successful career. Society's expectation that a woman's roles should be those around the domestic sphere roles, such as a wife or a mother is the justification used by people around Grace Isabella to judge her unfairly. People around Grace consider that having a career is supposed to be a man's role, not a woman's role; thus, Grace Isabella's singleness is seen as a failure to meet the ideal. The second occasion is shown in episode 31 when a man makes a comment on Grace Isabella's intelligence, stating that she should not present herself as a smart woman who tries to outsmart him because a smart woman is only good at putting on make-up and dressing up. In the same episode, through the voice of Chris, a close friend of Grace, her own mother's thinking that she is problematic because she is not married can be heard. Expecting Grace to conform to the domestic roles, this man and Grace's mother indeed represent the expectations of patriarchal society. The following occasion is when, after seeing Grace Isabella has

depression and unable to recover, her older brother, Daniel, is the one who makes the decision that she must move into his house. Despite having a successful career, Isabella is unable to make a sound decision after the attempted rape. Therefore, in this part, Daniel takes on the role of an older brother and the typical role of a man as a leader and decision-maker. The next occasion is when a male character named Hansel. This character is cast as a hero who saves Grace Isabella from her misery and helps her to recover. Hansel plays a role as an authoritative person, a role that stereotypically belongs to a man.

The ideology of patriarchy in Korea, according to Manek, is rooted in the Confucian values that, similar to patriarchy ideology, put men in an authoritative position and women in a subordinate position in the family and society (Manek, 2023). Confucian values are heavily embedded in the social structure in Korea. Traditionally, men in Confucian ideals were the head of the family and the decision-makers, whereas women were the wives and mothers (You, 2022). The implementation of Confucian values is not limited to the roles within the family but is extended to the workplace and other public roles. Furthermore, Manek said that based on Confucian teachings, Korean society deems the chastity of women as important (Manek, 2023). Women who are considered to break the femininity standard will be stigmatized with negative connotation. However, Oh recently wrote that unlike the public assumption, Confucian values in Korean society are not in their extreme form (Oh, 2022). Oh, argued that in some cases, Korean women's roles are even more significant than those of Western women.

In *Left Hand*, after the attempted rape, Grace Isabella carries the burden of being a tainted woman. She hides the wound in the neck to avoid the judgment from the public. At the same time, the wound always reminds her of the tragedy and of her inability to keep her chastity. The Confucian values that categorize women in the subordinate position make the situation worse because people closer to her disregard the dire nature of Grace's condition. They do not consider her important enough to get full support. Even though right after the incident of the attempted rape, her friends accompany her and offer her a temporary place to stay, they quickly resume their daily routines and leave Grace alone to struggle with her mental health.

4.2 Family and Friends' Support

The sociocultural contexts of structures found in *Left Hand* are the community organizations in the form of family or friend's support. McElvaney et al. (2022) mention that family often provides emotional support and practical support, such as financial assistance or physical assistance to attend therapies (McElvaney, McDonnell Murray, & Dunne, 2022). In many cases, family also provides a place for the victims to move into. In addition to family, support from friends can help speed up the recovery of the victims from the effects of the violence (Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn, & Ward, 2010). Friends can become the place where the victims of sexual violence go to talk about their feelings of shame, embarrassment, and fear. Moreover, Choi et al. stated that the friends of the victims can support them by giving their time to listen to the victim's story empathically (Choi, Park, Lutze, & Neuilly, 2021)

In the story, Grace Isabella has family and friends who are willing to support her. Grace Isabella's family is represented by her two brothers, Daniel the older brother and Esa the younger brother, because her father hardly exists and her mother is toxic, not a caring and attentive mother. Although she is not very close to her rather dysfunctional family, she is lucky to have supportive brothers. After the incident of attempted rape, Grace Isabella moves out of her apartment, fearing that the perpetrator may reappear. She does not inform any of her family about her moving out until her brothers, who happen to visit her old apartment and find it empty. Their brothers then try to find her by waiting outside her office. Initially, it is not easy for Grace to disclose to her brothers about the attack. However, they suspect what happens from the wound in Grace's neck. After discovering that Grace Isabella is experiencing sexual violence, Daniel asks Grace to move to his house to recover. Living in Daniel's house makes access to family support easier in ways that both Daniel and Esa can take care of her. Grace's condition is improving after she stays in Daniel's house.

4.3 Discrimination and Social Inequalities

The last sociocultural context, according to Dworkin and Weaver (2021), is environmental stressors. In *Left Hand*, there are two environmental stressors represented. They are discrimination and social inequalities. The discrimination experienced by Grace is gender-based discrimination. As explained in the review of literature, gender-based discrimination usually happens in a male-dominated society where women are marginalized because they are considered powerless and not important. In the case of sexual violence, in the gender-discriminated society, the female victims are often made into the ones to blame for the sexual violence that happened to them and are held responsible for it. As a result, the female victims have difficulty talking about the incident and seeking help from other people.

In the case of Grace Isabella, gender-based discrimination leaves her with the feeling of unworthy and powerlessness. As a woman who is the victim of sexual violence, Grace Isabella cannot openly express and share her experience because she may be afraid of the negative stigma from society. Female victims of sexual violence are often stigmatized as the provocateur of the violence through their clothing or actions. This stigma is also addressed to Grace Isabella by Kyle, the violent perpetrator. When he is reprimanded for making unwanted sexual advances to Grace in her apartment, he responds by stating that it is Grace Isabella who invites him to the apartment. His reply shows gender-based discrimination where men are stereotypically considered more trustworthy than women. Another discrimination is that in Korean society, where chastity is believed to be important, a victim of sexual violence may be stereotyped as "tainted" or "damaged." As a result, the victims may feel isolated and tend to be silent. They are afraid that when they speak up, other people will find out that they are "damaged" and exclude them from the interaction. Additionally, victims may be afraid of the revenge from the perpetrator.

The next environmental stressor is social inequality. In *Left Hand*, the social inequality experienced by Grace Isabella is gender inequality. This kind of inequality often puts men in a favorable position, thus giving them more power and access to resources, while women are put in an unfavorable position with more limited access to the same

resources, such as education, employment, and healthcare. In relation to victims of sexual violence, gender inequality places female victims in a marginalized position of being victimized or socially excluded (True, 2021). In the story, Grace Isabella is put in an unfavorable position not because she has limited access to education and employment but because she is a woman. As a victim of sexual violence, Grace Isabella becomes traumatic and depressed. On the other hand, Kyle, the perpetrator of the violence, is left unpunished. No legal measure is taken against Kyle even though Grace Isabella reports the incident to the police.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Grace Isabella's character in the Webtoon *Left Hand* shows the impacts of sociocultural contexts on the resilience development of female victims of violence. The study highlights the sociocultural contexts of norms in the form of shared ideas, ideologies, and values; structures in the form of social support networks, especially family and friends' support; and environmental stressors in the form of gender-based discrimination and social (gender) inequalities. The analysis reveals that the existing norms, particularly the patriarchal ideology, significantly have an impact on the victims' recovery processes. Furthermore, Grace's struggle with the expectations of society shows how sociocultural context can worsen the trauma of sexual violence. The findings emphasize the need to transform towards more supportive sociocultural contexts that empower victims and develop resilience. By understanding the interaction between resilience and the victims' recovery, a society that supports the victims and challenges unsupportive norms.

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