

# Strong Women in Crime Fiction: Their Coping Mechanism Against Violence in Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill*

Juliet Samillano- Trujillo

**Abstract**— Women are human beings that have the right to live free from any violence but oftentimes they need to struggle to gain these basic rights. This paper examines and analyzes the major events as portrayal of gender-based violence in the crime fiction of Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill*. Specifically, it aims to determine the kinds of violence experienced by the women as depicted in the story; analyze the effects of gender violence experienced by the survivors; and determine the survivors' coping mechanism with the violence inflicted on them. The results show that women characters experienced physical, psychological and sexual abuse done by male perpetrators who used their power to inflict violence. These violence affect the survivors' physical and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, they are strong enough to cope with these traumatic experiences. Even though survivors experienced similar types of abuse, their coping mechanisms vary. The overall impact of violence also depends on the individual's natural reactions to stress and ways of coping with stressful situations.

**Keywords**— Crime fiction, violence against women, coping mechanism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women are human beings. They have the right to equal treatment in men's world. They have also the right to live life free from any violence. Oftentimes, they need to struggle to gain these basic rights. These are only few of the tenets of feminism. A feminist and social activist, bell hooks defines "feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000). This definition means that women have liberty to live away from any prejudice or discrimination that men is superior to the other. Nevertheless, hooks in depth criticism "is not based just on sex but on domination as the root of the problem, and it occurs when one person or group has power over another (Dicker, 2016).

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In the modern society, women are mostly the victims of gender-based violence. According to the (UNESCO, 2013), the gender violence is a "global phenomenon that knows no geographical, cultural, social, economic, ethnic, or other boundaries". It represents a "brutal violation of human rights, and worst manifestation of gender-based discrimination and a major obstacle in achieving gender equality" (Leach, 2013). Violence against women and girls is entrenched in gender-based discrimination and norms of society as well as gender stereotyping that perpetuate such violence (UN Women, 2011). Many studies over the world have shown that "10 to 70 percent of all women have reported being physically, sexually and emotionally assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives, and intimate partners commit 40 to 70 percent of femicides" (Bloom, 2008; UN, 2011; WHO, 2005). This widespread cases of violence against women weakens women's basic rights such as dignity, access to justice and gender equality. Due to this worldwide phenomenon, the United Nations created the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW). Since then, "massive training and programs all over the world have been made to overcome VAW" (Wolf, 2013). Despite of this recognition of gender-based violence as a "societal problem by international and European declarations, rates continue to be high in all countries" (Bloom, 2008; Schrötle and Martinez, 2006).

According to Wolf (2013), media play vital role in preventing violence against women. The proper dissemination of information through printed media, news broadcasting, film and television raises the public awareness with regard to victims and perpetrators. In the crime fiction genre, portrayals of women violence is inevitable. Some notables crime fiction writers like Jo Nesbo's *The Leopard*, James Patterson's *Kiss the Girls* depict violence against female characters. In this paper, Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill* novels were explored to determine the kinds of violence and how the women cope with violence inflicted to them. *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* is a crime, mystery, thriller, Scandinavian noir that tackles on "violent abuse of women in Sweden and focuses particularly on the warped philosophies and governmental failures that permit such acts" (SparkNotes Editors, 2012). *Garnethill* is the "Best

First Crime Novel of Denise Mina awarded by the Crime Writers' Association John Creasy Dagger" (Kirkus Review, 2000) that speaks to women's experiences in a refreshingly realistic way. Maureen O'Donnell, the female protagonist and sexual abuse survivor "woke up one morning to find her therapist boyfriend murdered in the middle of her living room and herself a prime suspect in a murder case. Determined to clear her name, Maureen undertakes her own investigation and learns of a similar murder at a local psychiatric hospital. She soon uncovered a trail of deception and repressed scandal that could clear her name - or make her the next victim." (Goodreads, 2001).

## II. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the major events as portrayal of gender-based violence in the Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill*. Specifically, it aims to (1) determine the kinds of violence experienced by the women as depicted in the story; (2) analyze the effects of gender violence experienced by the survivors; and (3) determine the survivors' coping mechanism with that violence inflicted on them.

The method used to answer these objectives is through content analysis. According to (Macnamara, 2005) content analysis is used to study a broad range of 'texts' from transcripts of different forms of media. In this study, the crime novels of Stieg Larson and Denise Mina were analyzed using the feminist theory in determining the various violence experienced by the survivors and their coping mechanism.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

In order to examine the kind of violence experienced by women in the crime novels as well as their coping mechanism against violence, we need to have a deeper understanding of the problem and clarify the complexity and real contexts of this global phenomenon. According to DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2011), "new theories are being constructed and violence against women tested, one thing we do not have is an agreed upon firm definition of violence against women". Nevertheless, Levy (2008) quoted Liz Kelly's definition of violence against women which involves "behavior that is violent, using physical force or threat, is intimidating, coercive, or damaging to women"; it includes "physical, visual, verbal or sexual acts that are experienced by a woman or girl at the time or later as a threat, invasion or assault" and acts "that have the effect of hurting or degrading her and/or taking away her ability to control contact (intimate or otherwise) with another individual." In feminist theory, violence emphasizes gender and power inequality in opposite-sex relationships. According to Pence & Paymar (1993) the gender specific term such as "male refers to batterers and female refer to those who are battered". This explains that the primary aggressors are typically men, and the victims are women. hooks (1984) quoted Susan Schechter's that "violence against women is rooted in male domination". It is clear that men abuse, coerce, and exploit women. In the feminist theory,

this male domination is known as patriarchy. According to Wilson (2000) patriarchy is a cardinal concept of the radical second-wave feminists, in which Walby defines it as "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Since then, the violence against women has been the major issue scrutinized by feminist theory. It was in the second wave feminism that "women's rights movements in pursuing their careers, and addressing violence against women" (Bieniek 2015) was highlighted. The focus of this school of feminist thought emerged as a "theoretical opposition of women's sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and disenfranchisement (Shikha, 2007). According to hooks, (2000) the feminist focuses on "male violence against women, and children were also victims of adult patriarchal violence enacted by women and men". hooks suggests that "women are portrayed as the only victims of violence in a zealous effort by reformist feminists to bring focus to the violence against women" (Feminist Legal Theory, 2011). Furthermore, to give us the clear context of violence against women, Levy (2008) highlighted its four important elements. According to him, violence against women defines as "violent a range of different kinds of behavior that include coercion and emotional abuse; second, these behaviors are recognized as harmful as experienced by the woman or girl; third, it focuses on the effect of the behavior on the victim, rather than on the intentions or perceptions of the perpetrator. ; and lastly, it emphasizes the effect of taking away a woman's ability to control contact with another person, which is a major aspect of violence against women as a social problem" (Levy (2008). These are the grounded theories of this paper. Thus, in determining the kinds of violence experienced by the women in the novels; discovering the devastating effect of violence to them; and their coping mechanisms against it, we can help raise awareness on violence against women as a global phenomenon.

## IV. ANALYSIS OF STRONG WOMEN IN CRIME FICTION AND THEIR COPING MECHANISM AGAINST VIOLENCE

Crime fiction is a male dominated genre. It is a genre about "the transgression of a country's legal, moral and social values, about understanding how and why this transgression occurred and, with the solving of the case, it is about returning to the normative centre of that society" (Seago, 2014). This explains that crime fiction is all about crime, detection, the motives of criminals and "the state penal code matters more than the Ten Commandments and the threat of arrest and punishment more than the prospect of hell" (Rzepka, 2010). The evolution of the crime fiction shifts the portrayal of women characters from conservative to more liberated roles. In the beginning of crime fiction history, "female characters in the stories were victims or accomplices to the criminal or the women who helped solve the crime always had a man to rely on, but starting in the 1980's, there is diversion in the genre, from being conservative, with sometimes sexist gender roles and marginal female characters, to representing a feminist ideology with a woman hero at its center" (Krohn & Halmstad 2011). The representation of strong women in

crime novels of Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill*, carries this feminist ideology as the researcher will explore the portrayals of violence, its effect and women coping mechanism on violence inflicted on them. Violence Experienced by Women in Crime Novels

Violence exists in every aspect of human life. Most of the victims of violence are women. According to feminist theory, "the main factors that contribute to violence against women include historically male-dominated social structures and socialization practices teaching men and women gender-specific roles" (Levy, 2008). In the Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill* crime novels, the violence experienced by the female protagonists were caused by male domination. These women in novels experienced various types of violence, which the researcher thematized these into three aspects such as physical violence, psychological abuse and sexual violence.

#### A. Physical violence

Physical abuse may refer to any of the actions such "spitting, scratching, biting, grabbing, shaking, shoving, pushing, restraining, throwing, twisting, slapping (with open or closed hand), punching, choking, burning, and/or use of weapons (e.g., household objects, knives, guns) against the victim" (Ganley, 1998). In the crime novels of Larsson and Mina, the female characters experienced this kind of violence.

The women in the *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* such as Lisbeth Salander and Cecilia Vanger are survivors of physical violence. Lisbeth is the female protagonist and Armansky's star researcher in Milton Security. Armansky's described her as "pale, anorexic young woman who had hair as short as a fuse, and a pierced nose and eyebrows, had a wasp tattoo about an inch long on her neck, a tattooed loop around the biceps of her left arm, had a dragon tattoo on her left shoulder blade and looked as though she had just emerged from a week-long orgy with a gang of hard rockers" (Larsson, 2009).

She always labeled in her casebook as "introverted, socially inhibited, lacking in empathy, ego-fixated, psychopathic and asocial behavior, difficulty in cooperating, and incapable of assimilating learning" (Larsson, 2009). But Weida (2012) described Salander as a "brilliant hacker and private investigator with a photographic memory". Even though, she has been damaged but she projects counterculture of coolness and takes brutal revenge on those who have hurt her. These behavior and personality of Lisbeth was influenced by her experiences since birth. She witnessed and experienced physical violence. She has an abusive father who often abused the girls' mother. When she attended middle school, she had a fight with a much bigger and stronger boy. "She was no match for him physically. He slapped her when she tried to fight back. But nothing did any good, she was so obviously defenceless. Finally the boy punched her in the face; it split open her lip and made her see stars. They left her on the ground behind the gym. She stayed at home for two days." (Larsson, 284).

Celcelia Vanger was a daughter of Harald, brother of Henrik Vanger. She married Jerry Karlsson and maltreated her. She was a victim of domestic violence. Her husband's

outbursts were inexplicable and the attacks were not often so severe that she was actually injured. For her, it had taken the form of unceasing abuse. She experienced "blows to the head, violent shoving, moody threats, and being knocked to the kitchen floor. It ended with him flinging some scissors at her which lodged in her shoulder blade. He drove her to the hospital, making up a story about a bizarre accident which all the staff in the emergency room saw through at once. She had felt ashamed. They gave her twelve stitches and kept her in the hospital for two days. Then her uncle picked her up and drove her to his house." (Larsson, p.399).

In Denise Mina's *Garnethill*, Yvonne Urquhart was one of the survivors of physical violence in Northern Psychiatric Hospital. She was a patient in George I ward of the said hospital. When Maureen, the female protagonist of *Garnethill* novel investigated the murder of Douglas, her boyfriend, she discovered the list of female patients in the Northern Psychiatric Hospital. She found out that Yvonne was in Daniel House Nursing Home for treatment. She asked her if she had been at the Northern, and if she remember Siobhain McCloud, and Douglas with the dark eyes and the low voice. But she never received any response from Yvonne. She noticed Yvonne's feet when she stood up.

"They were curled over the arch like a ballerina's point. The light from the hall shone under the table, illuminating the dry, flaky skin on her skinny legs. An inch above the ankle the skin color changed. It was a ribbon of pink shiny skin, like snakeskin, running all the way around her calf. And then Maureen realized it was a scar. From a rope burn." (Mina, p.187).

This is the evidence of what Martin, staff in the Northern Psychiatric Hospital told her during her investigation. He confessed to her that some female patients in George I experienced "Burn marks. They'd been tied up or something. They'd burn marks on their bodies from the rope. And they were hurt." (Mina, 2008).

The statements above show how women are being physically abused by male. According to Tracy (2017), majority of physically abused victims are women and the perpetrators are males. She further added that "the causes of physical abuse may be related to one of the personality characteristics noted in male physical abusers, possibly their desire for unquestioned obedience and their lack of compassion for those they consider weak or inferior. Lastly, the causes of physical abuse should be attributed to power and control which are the prevalent motivations for physical abuse (Tracy, 2017)".

#### B. Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is a form of abuse caused by "verbal abuse such as humbling, insulting, ridiculing, humiliating, using mental games and ironies to cause confusion;- intimidation through scaring with looks, gestures or screams; throwing objects or destroying property ; threats like to hurt, kill, commit suicide, take the children with him; isolation such as abusive control of the other person's life by watching over her acts and movements, listening to her conversation, impeding that she makes friends and disdain by treating the other person as inferior, making important decisions without consulting the other" (Casique & Furegato,

2006) that may result in “psychological trauma” (Dutton, 1994).

The female characters in the Stieg Larsson’s novel experienced this kind of violence. Lisbeth Salander and Cecilia Vanger were not only victims of physical violence but also a psychological violence. Lisbeth had an abusive father and grew up in unhealthy environment. She witnessed how her mother was brutally abused by her father. Salander’s mother was brought to Äppelviken Nursing Home in Upplands-Väsby because she suffered “permanent brain damaged from domestic abuse, her twin sister had checked out, and Salander had been victim of political intrigue, illegal activities, and secret plots by even more secret police, that resulted in her incarceration in a psychiatric hospital drugged and physically restrained” (Rutledge, 2011). Salander was “entrusted to the locked ward at St. Stefan’s Psychiatric Clinic for Children in Uppsala. With regards to her personal record, the opinion concluded that there was grave risk of alcohol and drug abuse, and she lacked self-awareness. Anyone who read her casebook might be tempted to conclude that Salander was seriously retarded” (Larsson, 194). These hostile marks on Salander influenced her behavior in the society. Her being anti-social and believing that all men are untrustworthy perverted idiots caused by her bad experiences. Nevertheless, she is willing to consider each man as an independent entity, and she is willing to respect a man who respects and loves her in return.

Cecilia Vanger, one of Henrik’s cousins and works as a headmistress had experienced psychological abuse in the form of verbal abuse from her father.

*“One sunny autumn day Harald Vanger, her father had been in a good mood, almost friendly. But without warning, a long way into the woods, he began to berate her with humiliating invective and revolting remarks about her morals and sexual predilections. He snarled that no wonder such a whore could never keep a man. Her brother apparently did not notice that every word from their father struck her like a whiplash.”* (Larsson, p. 317).

These remarks froze Cecilia Vanger that she wanted to kill her father and brother.

In the *Garnethill* novel, Maureen O’Donnell also experienced psychological abuse from her family. Her mother and sisters refused to believe about the sexual abuse of their father and they also believed that she murdered her boyfriend. According to Liam, her brother, nobody in the family believes her. During the confrontation with her brother, he said:

*“None of them believe you, Mauri. They don’t believe anything they don’t want to. Mum thinks you might not have remembered about Douglas properly. There’s been all this stuff in the papers about memory.”* (Mina, p.114).

Maureen was hurt and angered upon hearing this. “She slumped over the table, muttering curses to herself. Maureen scrubbed at her eyes, dragging the soft skin on her eyelids back and forward, trying to get it together. *“They think I’m completely mental, don’t they?”* she said. (Mina, p.115).

The statements above give the clear representation about various ways of psychological violence experienced by the female characters. According to the World Health Organization, undermining an individual’s sense of self-esteem can have serious mental and physical health

consequences and for some women, the incessant insults and tyrannies which constitute emotional abuse may be more painful than the physical attacks because they effectively undermine women’s security and self-confidence (Garg et al, 2008).

### C. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, including rape, is one of the most significant aspects of discriminatory violence against women (Amnesty International, 2011). The realities of “rape and sexual abuse in armed conflict” (Askin, 1997) and in “peacetime have been documented extensively over many years” (UN, 2006). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) sexual violence refers to “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”.

The women characters in Larsson’s novel extremely experienced sexual violence. Lisbeth Salander and Harriet Vanger were survivors of the sexual assault in the novel. Throughout the text, Salander occupies the role of both victim and survivor. She was repeatedly sexually assaulted by her guardian, Nils Bjurman. Bjurman was appointed as her second guardian when Palmgren got sick. He uses his authority to control Salander. Salander experienced the first initial sexual assault when she asked money for her computer.

*“He put his hand over her right breast and left it there. Suddenly, he put his other hand around her neck and pulled her down to her knees with her face in front of his crotch as he lowered his zip. Salander turned her face away and tried to get up, but he held her in a tight grip. In terms of physical strength, she was no match for him. He pulled her closer. Salander opened her lips and took him in her mouth. He kept his grip on her neck and pulled her fiercely towards him. She felt like gagging the whole ten minutes he took to bump and grind; when finally he came, he was holding her so tight she could hardly breathe* (Larsson, p.275.) The second sexual assault was the worst experience she ever had. When she asked money for her food, her guardian brutally raped her.

*“Bjurman grabbed her by the shoulder and threw her on to the bed. He pulled up her arm, placed the handcuffs around one of the bedposts, and locked her other hand. It did not take him long to pull off her boots and jeans. Salander opened her mouth to scream. He grabbed her hair and stuffed the knickers in her mouth. She felt him putting something around her ankles, spread her legs apart and tie them so that she was lying there completely vulnerable. She could hardly breathe. Then she felt an excruciating pain as he forced something up her anus”* (Larsson, p 310).

Harriet Vanger, Henrik Vanger’s missing great-niece and the subject of Blomkvist’s search also experienced sexual assault from her brother and father, Gottfried Vanger. “Gottfried Vanger was the first serial killer in Hedeby. Twisted beyond measure, Gottfried molested and abused both of his children and inducted Martin into the practice as well” (SparkNotes Editors. (2012). Harriet confessed to Mikael the reason of her disappearance for forty years.

*“I was fourteen when he raped me the first time. He forced both me and Martin to do things with him. Sometime around midnight he*

was totally insane. He put a T-shirt around my neck and pulled it as tight as he could. I blacked out and he really was trying to kill me. I managed to get away I was naked and I ran without thinking, I'd ended up on the jetty by the water. He came staggering after me. I was strong enough to shove an old drunk into the water and he died. When I looked up, Martin was there. He looked terrified, but at the same time he was grinning. He came up to me, grabbed me by the hair, and led me back to the cabin—to Gottfried's bed. He tied me up and raped me while our father was still floating in the water. And I couldn't even offer any resistance." (Larsson, p 634).

In Denise Mina's novel, the female protagonist also experienced sexual abuse from her father. Maureen O'Donnell experienced sexual abuse when she was twelve years old. This happened at the caravan in St. Andrews, the sea lapping over her black gutties.

*"The rest of them were on the beach, out of sight, behind the rock, and Michael, her father was coming after her. She scrabbled over the rocks on all fours, trying to get away, trying to look as if she wasn't running, scratching her knees on the jagged granite. He panicked when he saw the blood dribbling down her skinny legs. He'd slapped her on the side of the head and, lifting her by her upper arm, put her into the cupboard, locking it and taking the key with him. She could smell the blood as she sat in the dark cupboard and she knew what it was. She hoped she would die before he came back. It was his fingernail that had cut her, it was his nail."* (Mina, p. 47).

The highlighted lines above describe how women in crime fiction were sexually abused. It is evident that the perpetrators took control of the victims. Most of the victims' perpetrators have the authority and power over them. Lisbeth Salander was sexually assaulted by her guardian, while Harriet Vanger was abused by her father and brother and Maureen was sexually abused by her father. According to Kalra & Bhugra (2013), "the incident of sexual violence involves elements of control, power, domination, and humiliation. In order to gain power and control over their victims, perpetrators of sexual violence resort to practices such as abduction, isolation, manipulation, coercion, threats, and sexual abuse". In the case of female characters in the novels, the offenders find the act sexually gratifying and it attributed to power for men. The male power and domination is greatly linked to the term patriarchy. According to Tracy (2007) "during this period of early modern feminism, the perspective developed that patriarchy, in any and all forms, is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women, for patriarchy is seen as the overarching social construct which ultimately engenders abuse".

#### *D. Effects of Violence Experienced by Women in Crime Novels*

Women experienced violence have multitude devastating effects on their quality of life or well-being. Sinha & Hutchins (2013) quoted Johnson et al that "women's overall quality of life can be adversely affected over an entire lifetime, which can, in turn, impact their participation and engagement in various aspects of life and society". In the two novels, women who were exposed to violence often experience physical, mental or psychological effects.

#### *E. Psychological effect*

Violence experienced by the survivors has both immediate

and long term impact on the mental, emotional or psychological well-being of the survivors. It is sad to note how it affects the life of the women. The effect upon women's psychological or emotional state is prevalent in the crime fiction. Advokat Bjurman described Lisbeth Salander as "a sick, murderous, insane fucking person. A loose cannon. A whore." (Larsson, 2010). This description based on the clinical record of Salander and with his brief conversation to Dr. Teleborian whom he finds Lisbeth as "psychotic, obsessive, paranoid, schizophrenic, and an egomaniacal psychopath" (Larsson, p. 319). Even her allies, Holger Palmgren and Mikael Blomkvist, have that speculation that Lisbeth has Asperger's syndrome (Simms & Martin, 2012). Her social isolation caused by her experiences in life. She became known as "the girl with two brain cells—one for breathing and one for standing up. She never talked about herself. Her attitude encouraged neither trust nor friendship." (Larsson, p.45). Another character in the novel, is Cecilia Vanger. Cecilia experienced emotional problem caused by verbal abuse of her father and domestic violence done by her husband. She manifests psychological effect every time her father verbally abused her.

*"She looked at her father and brother and realized that she was holding a loaded shotgun in her hand. She closed her eyes. Her only option at that moment seemed to be to raise the gun and fire both barrels but she laid down the weapon at her feet, turned on her heel, and went back to where they had parked the car. You ruined my life, Cecilia Vanger thought. You ruined my life when I was just a child."* (Larsson, p.318).

Harriet Vanger, on the other hand, lived her life in Hedestad with fear. She confessed with Mikael about it.

*"I was sixteen. I was scared. I was ashamed. I was desperate. I was all alone. The only ones who knew the truth were Anita and Martin. I had told Anita about the sexual assaults, but I didn't have the courage to tell her that my father was also an insane killer of women. Anita had never known about that. But I did tell her about the crime that I committed myself. It was so horrible and I prayed to God to forgive me. And I hid inside a convent for several years."* (Larsson, p. 630).

In the case of Maureen O'Donnell of Mina's *Garnethill*, she experienced psychological problem. In fact she undergone a psychiatric treatment due to sexual abuse of her father.

*"Maureen was standing under the shower, washing the shampoo out of her hair, when she felt a familiar shiver. The ghost of her father was in the bathroom. She was very small and was standing in the bath, waiting to get out. He bent down and put his face level to hers. She rinsed her hair quickly and opened her eyes but he was still there with her, she could almost smell him. She turned on the cold water and stood underneath it, sweating." (Mina, p.90).*

The effect on Maureen was marked. The memories seemed so tangible and the emotions attached to it were so intense, overwhelming, like a searing physical pain.

The highlighted statements give the clear representation of how violence psychologically affects the survivors. According to Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1997), that the "emotional and psychological trauma from childhood abuse is often repressed and may surface once the client is in a safe setting, such as an inpatient substance abuse treatment facility".

### F. Physical effect

The physical violence experience by women is the “most evident and difficult to hide, as it affects their physical appearance. Women suffering some kind of physical aggression are mostly experience numerous acts of violence over time” (Casique, & Furegato, 2006). It also affects their physical health. Among the women characters in the novel experienced various violence, only Lisbeth and Yvonne Urquhart have encountered problem with regards to their physical well-being. Lisbeth Salander after the sexual assaults, she “*spent the week in bed with pain in her abdomen, bleeding from her rectum, and less visible wounds that would take longer to heal*” (Larsson, p 313). She also marked a simple little tattoo depicting a narrow band and asked to have it put on her ankle as a reminder” (p.314) that added many tattoos in physical appearance. Yvonne on the other hand, she was admitted in Daniel House Nursing Home. When Maureen visited her, “*she was sitting in an orthopedic armchair; cushions had been placed between her hips and the chair sides to stop her slipping over. Both her hands were curled shut like a stroke victim’s and swatches of heavily talcumed cotton wool had been worked between the fingers to stop her getting contact sores.*” (Mina, p.186). It is evident that the women abuse results in physical injury and physical illness. The highlighted lines support the notion that violence against women is a serious threat to health and well-being.

### G. Coping Mechanism of Women Survivors in Crime Fiction

Coping has been suggested as an important element in understanding the long-term functioning of survivors of violence against women. Mitchell et al. (2006) define coping as “actions used to minimize stress” and it involves “multiple behavioral manifestations, ranging from positive to negative, from help-seeking, to self-destructive behaviors, understand, make sense of, and deal with personal or circumstantial critical situations (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In the crime fiction, women characters response differently on the violence inflicted to them. The general impact of violence depends on the personality of survivors’ natural reactions and ways of coping with stressful situations. Since women in crime fiction have strong character, they have their own way to cope with the violence they experienced.

### H. Anger and Retaliation

This stage occurs when the victims reflect on the abusive experiences that they have gone through and the thought of all this makes them feel angry. During this stage the survivors retaliate and prepare to fight. This happened to the female protagonist of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Lisbeth Salander. She experienced physical and sexual violence which resort to feeling angry and having the tendency to retaliate. She took revenge to take control of her life against the perpetrator, Bjurman.

“*Salander went back to the house of his guardian and took the initial step to the bed. She pulled something out of her jacket pocket which he thought was a mobile telephone. She shoved the taser into his left armpit and fired off 75,000 volts. Bjurman’s body seemed to be paralyzed. When he slowly regained control over his body he*

*discovered that he was lying naked on his bed, his wrists in handcuffs and his legs spread painfully apart. He had stinging burn marks where electrodes had touched his body.*” (Larsson, p 317).

She also tattooed him as reminder of her control over him.

“*She worked steadily for two hours. Her artistic talents were limited. The letters looked at best impressionistic. She had used red and blue ink. The message was written in caps over five lines that covered his belly, from his nipples to just above his genitals: I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST.*” (Larsson p328).

The statements indicate that unresolved, vindictive anger gradually turns the victim into a hard woman. Lisbeth’s action shows that violence breeds violence and the victim may ultimately become very violent. It is evident that she return evil for evil. Lisbeth’s acts of revenge against Bjurman are also entirely consistent with her desire to assert herself as independent in the face of the bogus manipulation of the guardianship order. Revenge is one “end,” but a second “end” is achieving independence and producing a unified sense of self (Rees, 2012).

### I. Apathy

The survivors get confused when violence becomes a culture. According to Maselesele, (2011), the survivors get confused and do not know how they should respond to this. At this stage the survivors do not know what to do. Most of them feel very helpless. When they realize that they cannot control their anger they eventually withdraw. This happens to Cecilia Vanger, a survivor of domestic violence and verbal abuse. Everytime her father verbally abuse her, she wanted to kill him. But “*instead she laid down the weapon at her feet, turned on her heel, and went back to where they had parked the car. She left them high and dry, driving home alone. Since that day she refused to let her father into her house and had never been in his*” (Larsson, p. 318). The same thing what she did to her husband. After a battering that resulted to her hospitalization, she ended up his relationship to him and never spoke to his husband. Her husband had been “*remorseful of flinging some scissors at her which lodged in her shoulder blade and panicky and drove her to the hospital, making up a story about a bizarre accident which all the staff in the emergency room saw through at once. She had felt ashamed. They gave her twelve stitches and kept her in the hospital for two days. Then her uncle picked her up and drove her to his house.*” (Larsson, p.319).

Kearney (2001) describes this stage of enduring as shrinking of self which involved restraining one’s emotional responses in order to avoid flare-ups, perform unwanted tasks or accept undeserved punishment. Walker (1984) refers to this as a situation of “learned helplessness”. The woman alienates herself from the abuser. Olson (2002) cites that a woman withdraws and does not make any decisions to ensure peace. Withdrawal from any decision making also contributes to tension building and poor communication in the family. Peterson et al. (1993) argue that victims of domestic violence experience passivity rather than learned helplessness as a way of protecting themselves from being assaulted.

### J. Creating New Identity

Creating new identity makes recovery both difficult and rewarding. Recovery is difficult because you have to change

your life, and all change is difficult, even good change. Recovery is rewarding because you get the chance to change your life. Most people sleepwalk through life. This happens in one of the female characters in *The Girl with Dragon Tattoo*. Harriet Vanger's disappearance for forty years earlier was her escape from her brother, who abused her sexually.

*"I was afraid of Martin and I realized that I'd never be safe the rest of my life. So, I went to Anita when she arrived on the island and told her that I had to escape. She gave me her passport. We looked almost exactly like each other, and all I had to do was dye my hair blonde. For four years I lived in a convent in Italy—I wasn't a nun. Then I met Spencer Cochran. I fell in love. He did too. That's all there was to it. 'Anita' Vanger married him in 1971. Very sadly, he died eight years ago, and I became the owner of the station."* (Larsson, p. 627).

These lines give the clear picture of how Harriet Vanger, created her new identity and to have a new life. She hid for the purpose. She got married and had two sons and one daughter. She is the owner of Cochran Farm, one of the largest ranches in Australia. Her self-determination and self-choice of escaping from the violence is one way of her recovery process. The opportunity to choose one's long-term goals, the methods to be used to get to those goals (Farkas, 2007) and her self-determination in having new life helped Harriet Vanger overcome the traumatic experience.

#### K. Seeking Professional Help

The individuals can cope with negative life events through seeking help from other persons especially from professionals. According to Prossman et al (2013) healthcare services who express concern and support, provide information and actively inquire with an empathetic, patient-centered and nonjudgmental approach make abused women aware that alternatives to their violent situation exist and help them to continue the process of change and acceptance of professional support. Maureen O'Donnell, a protagonist of Denise Mina's *Garnethill* overcomes the effect of sexual abuse through professional help. She is psychiatric patient of Northern Psychiatric Hospital for a month.

*"Her current therapist, Dr. Louisa Wishart, said that her terror was a fear of vulnerability, not loss of dignity. She had been attending the Albert since Angus Farrell at the Rainbow Clinic referred her eight months before. By the time she had her first session with Louisa she knew she was going to be all right, that therapy was an empty gesture to medicalize a deep sadness. She tried to stop going to Louisa but her mother, Winnie, caused an almighty fuss, phoning her four times a day to ask how she was. She went back to the Albert in her therapy."* (Mina, p.4).

Aside from the doctor's help, Leslie also plays a big role on helping Maureen handling her psychological problem caused by sexual abused. Leslie worked in the shelter with women who had been systematically beaten and raped by their partners. *"In Leslie's world men rape children, they kick women in the tits and teeth and shove bottles up their backsides, they steal their money and leave them for dead and then feel wronged when they leave"* (Mina, p.4). When Maureen was hospitalized, Leslie came to the hospital every day, working her visits around her shifts at the shelter. She treated the hospital stay as if it was

something that was happening to both of them together. She knew that it was her friendship with Leslie that prompted her to get angry and get better (Mina, p.14). Her brother Liam also helped Maureen. When she hadn't been at work for three days and hadn't called.

*"Liam went looking for her and found her hiding in the hall cupboard in Garnethill. She had been there for two days and had urinated and defecated in the corner. She remembered Liam wrapping her in a blanket and carrying her downstairs to his car. He pulled the blanket over her face and whispered to her all the way to hospital, telling her she was safe, still safe, be brave."* (Mina, p. 12).

In the lines above, the survivor easily overcomes her traumatic experience with the help of the psychiatrist, social service agency staff and loving brother. Maureen obtains help primarily within the context of informal and formal support. According to Liang et al (2005) both informal and formal social support serve to protect women against ongoing violence, perhaps in part by triggering battered women's own coping efforts. Friends and relatives often provide women with informal supports (Horton & Johnson, 1993) while formal support may be provided by the police, actors within the criminal justice system, social service agency staff, medical services personnel, crisis hotline workers, mental health professionals, clergy members, domestic violence advocates, and staff at battered women's shelters (Goodman et al, 2003).

#### V. IMPLICATIONS

Every woman has the right to live life free from harm or violence. Based on the representation of events in the novels, the violence against women was caused by male domination. It gives us the awareness that violence needs to be eliminated because of its psychological and physical impact to the life of women. Survivors feel socially isolated, unable to make friends as easily due to social discomfort or confusion over what is acceptable. These effects of gender violence on their lives cause negative coping mechanisms. There is an urgent need to eliminate gender violence and condemn it to offer survivors real opportunities for success, whether socially, economically or politically, and to contribute in making community as a central agency that promotes values of equality and non-violence.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Violence is a global phenomenon that mostly victimized women. In the representation of the violence against women in the novels of Stieg Larson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Denise Mina's *Garnethill*, the following conclusions were drawn:

Women characters experienced physical, psychological and sexual violence done by male perpetrators. Most of the abusers used their power to inflict violence.

These violence affect the survivors' physical and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, they are strong enough to cope with these traumatic experiences.

Even though survivors experience similar types of abuse, their coping mechanisms vary from person to person. The

overall impact of violence also depends on the individual's natural reactions to stress and ways of coping with stressful situations.

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