News
Ministry



A group of children pray together with the sisters in the Holy Trinity Home for Children, an orphanage dedicated to caring for sexually abused and impoverished children. (Courtesy of Trinitarian Handmaids of the Divine Word)



by Oliver Samson

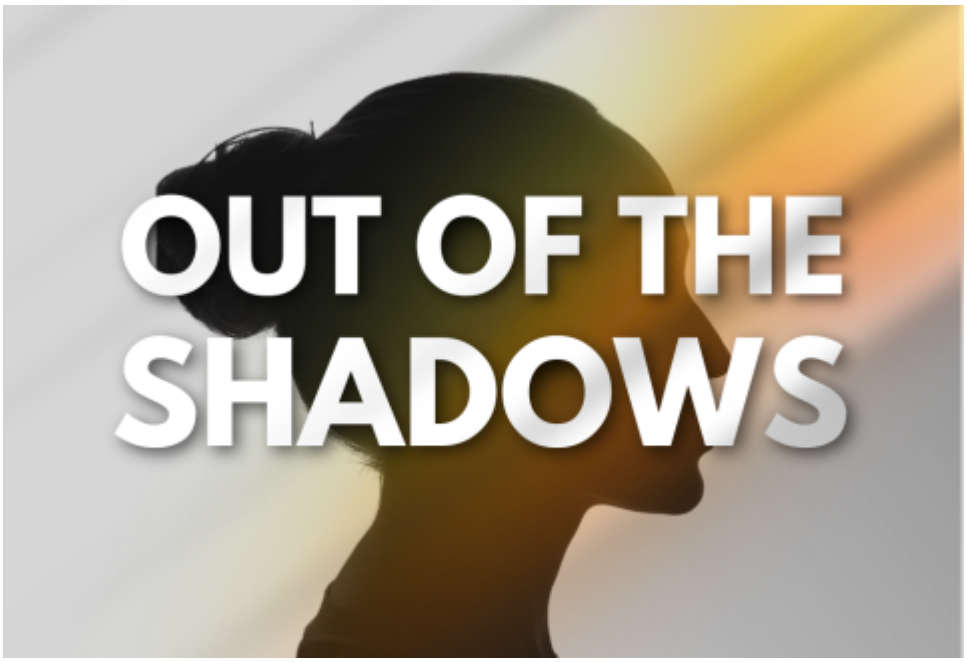
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Quezon City, Philippines — June 23, 2025

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Editor's note: *This story is part of Global Sisters Report's yearlong series, "Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women," which will focus on the ways Catholic sisters are responding to this global phenomenon.*



(GSR logo/Olivia Bardo)

The Holy Trinity Home for Children in Quezon City has been a shelter for young sexual abuse victims for many years. Sr. Lerry Tapales, who is currently in charge of the shelter, said the Trinitarian Handmaids of the Divine Word initially opened their doors to neglected and financially challenged children and children with special needs to help address the cycle of poverty. As time passed, social workers and local government units started referring sexually abused children to the orphanage.

Tapales explained that the idea to establish the orphanage came after a woman whose husband had just died asked the Trinitarian Handmaids of the Divine Word to look after her three children in the congregation's convent while she searched for a job. The home was established in 1993, just a year after the congregation was co-founded by Mother Elena Suico and Msgr. Fidelis Limcaco in May 1992.

Currently, most of its young residents are victims of sexual abuse.

"One of the girls was forced by her own mother into prostitution and abused by 10 men," said Mother Jovelyn Adcan, the congregation's executive director and servant general.

The sisters are now working on filing charges against the mother of the girl, who is only 9 years old, Adcan said.



Mother Jovelyn Adcan (left) and Sr. Lerry Tapales care for sexually abused and impoverished children at the Holy Trinity Home for Children in Quezon City, Philippines. (Oliver Samson)

"Most of the girls in the shelter were sexually abused at home by the stepfather," Tapales said.

Tapales said that sexually abused residents regularly see a doctor for their mental health. Some children take medications to cope and recover from their experience, and two of the girls have shown suicidal tendencies.

Depending on their progress, some children must receive treatment monthly, and others visit the doctor every two to three months.

Fortunately, consultations and checkups for children at the state-owned National Center for Mental Health are free, Tapales said.

Sponsors pay for their medications, but the congregation pays 1,000 pesos (about US$18) per child for a psychological evaluation since they bring the children to a private hospital.

After their evaluation, the children undergo counseling to help them cope with the trauma they experienced from the abuse. The sisters pay 600 pesos (about US$11) per session.

The sisters at the orphanage hope a psychiatrist and a psychologist will one day volunteer to come to the orphanage and regularly check on the young victims of sexual abuse.

Tapales said the orphanage has 11 young residents but can accommodate up to 25 children. Aside from sexually abused children, they currently shelter a few neglected children due to poverty.

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Most of the children come from Metro Manila, but in the past, some came from the provinces. In the early 2000s, the number of residents reached almost 50.

Tapales said that as of this year, the Department of Social Welfare and Development only allows children to stay at their orphanage for three years. In the past, children could stay until they finished their studies.

"We try our best to reconcile the children with their families. But if there is a risk that the abuse may happen, we look for foster parents. We have one successful case; the perpetrator is now in jail," Tapales said.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development sometimes allows children to stay in the orphanage for up to five years, depending on the situation, said Adcan, who studied social work. She added that some children don't want to return to their homes, and others don't even want the person who abused them to go to jail.

Tapales said that one of their children, a 9-year-old girl, has expressed interest in having foster parents. So, the sisters are looking for foster parents who can adopt her.



The Holy Trinity Home for Children is at the corner of two busy streets in Quezon City, Philippines, where sisters care for sexually abused and impoverished children. (Oliver Samson)

As part of the children's reintegration into society, the sisters send them to elementary and high school to pursue their studies.

Tapales said two former residents have graduated from college, adding that this was when the children were not yet limited to stay for three years.

The two who graduated from college are now working, and one is married. Some residents have finished their studies while they reconciled with their families. Three former residents are now working overseas.

Children at the orphanage learn how to wash their clothes and cook food. The older children help the young ones with their laundry and assist the cook in preparing their meals.

"The children's favorite pastime is watching movies in a function hall," Tapales said.



Young residents keep physically fit at the Holy Trinity Home for Children in Quezon City, Philippines. (Courtesy of Trinitarian Handmaids of the Divine Word)

Adcan said children also go out at times. They visit eco-parks, go swimming and eat outside. The orphanage also has a game room where they can play board games and pray.

"Most of the time, our sponsors bring food for the children," she said.

Adcan said that many of the children are emotionally disconnected and noncommunicative. They don't often talk with others due to the trauma they experienced, except for the sisters, orphanage staff and visiting family members.

"We have seen the need for parents to be educated on how to handle their children," Tapales said. "They should know their responsibilities as parents so that their children are not abused."

Adcan added that children are vulnerable to abuse on social media and that parents and children should be cautious because the exploitation of children can start through social media.

"The children in the orphanage should never lose hope," Tapales said. "They should see the hands of God and his love for them despite what happened to them."

This story appears in the **Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women** feature series. View the full series.