

**CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN PROTECTION DESK (WCPD) IN HANDLING CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW (CICL) CASES IN SELECTED CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES IN PANGASINAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) require specialized interventions that balance public safety with the protection of children's rights under the Philippine juvenile justice system. Despite the enactment of Republic Act No. 9344, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630, Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers continue to encounter operational challenges that affect the effective implementation of child-sensitive procedures. This study assessed the operational challenges experienced by WCPD officers in handling CICL cases in selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan and examined whether these challenges were associated with the officers' demographic characteristics. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed involving 45 WCPD officers from six police stations selected through total enumeration. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and Pearson product-moment correlation. The findings revealed that officers encountered moderate challenges during the initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical phases of handling CICL cases. The most common operational concerns included verifying the child's age due to the absence of birth records, parental interference during investigations, delays in coordination with the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) and Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), inadequate child-friendly facilities, and insufficient

logistical and financial resources. Correlation analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between officers' demographic profiles and the operational challenges they encountered, indicating that the identified problems are largely institutional rather than individual. The study recommends strengthening inter-agency coordination, enhancing specialized training, improving logistical support, upgrading child-friendly facilities, and increasing institutional investment in juvenile justice implementation to ensure more effective and child-sensitive policing.

**Keywords:** *Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), Women and Children Protection Desk, juvenile justice, operational challenges, child-sensitive policing*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The protection of children involved in the criminal justice system remains a fundamental responsibility of governments committed to upholding human rights and the rule of law. Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) represent one of the most vulnerable sectors of society because of their age, developmental stage, and limited capacity to fully understand the consequences of their actions. International legal instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules), emphasize that children who come into contact with the justice system should be treated in a manner that promotes rehabilitation, reintegration, and the child's best interests rather than punitive sanctions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Brown et al., 1992; Goldson & Muncie, 2020; United Nations Children's Fund, 2021; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

In the Philippines, juvenile justice is principally governed by Republic Act No. 9344, otherwise known as the *Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006*, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630 (Republic Act No. 9344, 2006; Republic Act No. 10630, 2013). These laws established a child-sensitive justice framework that requires law enforcement officers to observe special procedures during the apprehension, investigation, diversion, and referral of CICL. The legislation recognizes that children differ significantly from adult offenders and therefore require legal safeguards that protect their dignity while promoting accountability and rehabilitation.

Within the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) serves as the primary unit responsible for implementing these child-sensitive procedures. WCPD officers perform multiple responsibilities, including the initial custody of children, documentation of incidents, coordination with the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) and the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), conduct of investigations, and referral of children to appropriate intervention programs. These responsibilities require officers to possess not only legal knowledge but also communication skills, psychological sensitivity, and effective coordination with various institutions involved in juvenile justice.

Despite the comprehensive legal framework, several studies have reported persistent implementation challenges. Research has shown that police officers frequently experience delays

in inter-agency coordination, shortages of child-friendly facilities, insufficient logistical support, and limited opportunities for advanced specialized training (ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, 2023; Australian Institute of Criminology, 2020; Haines et al., 2020; International Justice Mission, 2023; Zhang & Wang, 2021). These institutional limitations often reduce the effectiveness of child-sensitive policing and create operational barriers that may compromise the timely delivery of services to CICL. Similar concerns have been documented by national agencies responsible for monitoring juvenile justice implementation, suggesting that many police stations continue to experience deficiencies in infrastructure, manpower, and financial resources necessary for child protection (Arafat, 2022; Dela Cruz & Bautista, 2021; ECPAT Philippines, 2024; UNICEF, 2021).

Within Pangasinan, WCPD officers assigned to police stations in Dagupan City, San Carlos City, Urdaneta City, Calasiao, Bayambang, and Malasiqui routinely handle cases involving children in conflict with the law. While these officers implement the provisions of Republic Act No. 9344, they continue to encounter operational concerns during age verification, discernment assessment, investigation, temporary custody, and coordination with partner agencies. These practical challenges demonstrate that the successful implementation of juvenile justice depends not only on the competence of individual officers but also on the institutional support available within police organizations (Ferrer, 2024; Garcia et al., 2023; Mamaril, 2025; Pangasinan Police Provincial Office, 2024; Pangasinan State University–Binmaley Campus, 2022; Vicente, 2022).

Although previous studies have examined juvenile justice implementation in the Philippines, limited empirical evidence specifically focuses on the operational experiences of WCPD officers assigned to local police stations in Pangasinan. Understanding these challenges is essential because frontline officers directly influence whether the legal rights of children are effectively protected during police intervention.

Accordingly, this study assessed the operational challenges encountered by Women and Children Protection Desk officers in handling Children in Conflict with the Law in selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan. Specifically, the study determined the demographic profile of WCPD officers, examined the operational challenges experienced during initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical operations, analyzed the relationship between officers' demographic characteristics and the challenges encountered, and proposed evidence-based recommendations to strengthen child-sensitive policing within the Philippine National Police. The findings are expected to contribute to policy development, institutional reforms, and enhanced inter-agency collaboration aimed at improving juvenile justice implementation.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the operational challenges encountered by Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers in handling Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) cases in selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan. The descriptive component was used to determine the demographic profile of the respondents

and to assess the level of operational challenges encountered during the initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical operations. The correlational component examined whether a significant relationship existed between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the operational challenges they experienced. This research design was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to describe existing conditions while determining whether the respondents' professional characteristics influenced the challenges encountered during juvenile case handling.

### **Study Area and Participants**

The study was conducted in six Philippine National Police (PNP) stations with operational Women and Children Protection Desks (WCPD) located in Dagupan City, San Carlos City, Urdaneta City, Calasiao, Bayambang, and Malasiqui, Pangasinan. These police stations were selected because they regularly handle cases involving Children in Conflict with the Law and implement the provisions of Republic Act No. 9344, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630 (Pangasinan Police Provincial Office, 2024).

The respondents consisted of 45 WCPD officers assigned to the selected police stations. A total enumeration sampling technique was employed, allowing all qualified WCPD officers assigned during the conduct of the study to participate. This approach ensured that the findings represented the operational experiences of the entire accessible population rather than a sample subset.

### **Research Instrument**

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire based on Republic Act No. 9344, Republic Act No. 10630, Philippine National Police operational procedures, and related literature on juvenile justice implementation. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent expert validation by specialists in criminology, juvenile justice, and research methodology to establish content validity. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on the validators' recommendations.

The questionnaire consisted of three major sections. The first section collected demographic information, including the respondents' length of service and specialized training related to juvenile justice. The second section measured the operational challenges encountered during the handling of CICL cases across three dimensions: initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical and infrastructural support. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale, where higher weighted mean values indicated greater operational challenges. The final section contained open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide recommendations for improving WCPD operations in handling CICL cases.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Prior to data collection, the researchers secured approval from the research adviser, the Criminology Program Chair, the Dean of the College of Criminal Justice Education, and the concerned police authorities. Formal letters requesting permission to conduct the study were submitted to the Chiefs of Police of the participating police stations.

After obtaining the necessary approvals, the researchers coordinated with designated WCPD officers to schedule questionnaire administration. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant, and informed consent was obtained before distributing the questionnaires. Respondents completed the questionnaires voluntarily, and all accomplished instruments were immediately retrieved, checked for completeness, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Weighted means were computed to determine the level of operational challenges encountered during the initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical operations.

To examine the relationship between the respondents' demographic characteristics and operational challenges, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's  $r$ ) was utilized. Statistical significance was tested at the 0.05 level of significance, providing the basis for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study strictly adhered to established ethical standards for social science research. Approval to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate university officials and participating police stations before data collection commenced. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the objectives of the research, their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, and the confidentiality of their responses.

To protect participants' identities, questionnaires did not contain personally identifying information, and all collected data were treated with strict confidentiality. The researchers ensured that the information gathered was used exclusively for academic purposes and reported only in aggregate form to prevent the identification of individual respondents or participating police stations. These measures safeguarded the privacy, dignity, and professional integrity of all participants throughout the conduct of the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings of the study on the operational challenges encountered by Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers in handling Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) in selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan. The results are organized according to the study objectives, including the respondents' demographic profile, operational challenges encountered during initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical operations, and the relationship between officers' demographic characteristics and operational challenges.

## Demographic Profile of the Respondents

**Table 1**

*Demographic Profile of the WCPD Officers (N = 45)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Service	Less than 1 year	20	44.4
	1–3 years	12	26.7
	4–6 years	8	17.8
	7 years and above	5	11.1
Specialized Training	With Specialized Investigation Course	34	75.6
	Without Specialized Investigation Course	11	24.4

*Note: N = 45 respondents.*

The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents (44.4%) had less than one year of assignment in the Women and Children Protection Desk, while only 11.1% had more than seven years of experience. In terms of specialized training, 75.6% had completed the Specialized Investigation Course, whereas 24.4% had not yet received such training. These findings suggest that although most officers possess the basic training required for WCPD duties, relatively few have extensive field experience in handling CICL cases.

## Operational Challenges During Initial Contact

**Table 2**

*Operational Challenges Encountered During Initial Contact*

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Difficulty determining the child's exact age due to absence of birth documents	2.44	Moderate Challenge
Parents or guardians are uncooperative or hostile	2.18	Moderate Challenge
Difficulty determining the child's discernment	2.05	Moderate Challenge
Delay in contacting the Public Attorney's Office (PAO)	2.01	Moderate Challenge
Other indicators	1.70–1.96	Moderate Challenge
Overall Mean	1.97	Moderate Challenge

*Note. Higher mean scores indicate greater operational challenges.*

The findings show that WCPD officers experienced an overall moderate level of challenge during the initial contact phase (M = 1.97). The most frequently encountered difficulty involved determining the child's exact age because birth certificates or official identification documents were often unavailable (M = 2.44). Officers also reported moderate challenges related to managing uncooperative parents or guardians, assessing the child's discernment, and

coordinating with the Public Attorney's Office (Arafat, 2022; Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council, 2022).

These findings indicate that the initial stages of juvenile case handling are frequently complicated by legal verification requirements and coordination issues. Age verification is particularly important because it directly determines criminal responsibility and eligibility for diversion under Republic Act No. 9344. Consequently, delays in confirming the child's identity may postpone subsequent child protection procedures.

### Operational Challenges During Actual Investigation

**Table 3**

*Operational Challenges Encountered During Actual Investigation*

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Parents or guardians coach the child during interviews	2.40	Moderate Challenge
Difficulty obtaining information from traumatized children	2.16	Moderate Challenge
Delay in the arrival of LSWDO personnel	2.10	Moderate Challenge
Lack of advanced child-sensitive interviewing skills	2.04	Moderate Challenge
Workload due to simultaneous handling of CICL and VAWC cases	1.84	Moderate Challenge
Overall Mean	1.93	Moderate Challenge

The respondents likewise reported a moderate level of challenge during the conduct of actual investigations (M = 1.93). The highest-rated concern involved parental or guardian interference during interviews (M = 2.40), particularly when adults coached children regarding their responses (International Journal of Multidisciplinary Applied Business and Education Research, 2025). Moderate challenges were likewise observed in interviewing traumatized children, coordinating with the Local Social Welfare and Development Office, and managing multiple sensitive investigations simultaneously (Abrams et al., 2021; McMullen, 2005; Garcia et al., 2023; Vicente, 2022).

These results demonstrate that investigative challenges extend beyond legal procedures and involve emotional, behavioral, and institutional factors. Effective investigation of CICL cases therefore depends on strong collaboration among police officers, social workers, legal representatives, and family members while maintaining the integrity of child-sensitive investigative procedures.

## Logistic and Infrastructural Challenges

**Table 4**

*Logistic and Infrastructural Challenges Encountered by WCPD Officers*

Indicator	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Congested temporary holding areas	2.11	Moderate Challenge
Lack of basic supplies for children under custody	2.11	Moderate Challenge
Lack of service vehicles	1.91	Moderate Challenge
Lack of recording equipment	1.84	Moderate Challenge
Absence of private child-friendly investigation room	1.80	Moderate Challenge
Insufficient budget for medico-legal examination	1.69	Moderate Challenge
Overall Mean	1.91	Moderate Challenge

The respondents also experienced moderate logistical and infrastructural challenges (M = 1.91). The highest-rated concerns were the congestion of temporary holding areas and the lack of basic provisions such as food, water, and hygiene kits for children under police custody (both M = 2.11). Additional concerns included limited transportation, inadequate recording equipment, absence of private interview rooms, and insufficient financial support for medico-legal examinations.

These findings suggest that institutional resource limitations continue to affect the quality of child-sensitive policing. Although officers perform their duties within existing legal frameworks, inadequate facilities and logistical resources may delay the implementation of juvenile justice procedures and reduce the overall quality of care provided to children while under police custody (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council, 2021; Vicente, 2022).

## Relationship Between the Respondents' Profile and Operational Challenges

**Table 5**

*Relationship Between Demographic Profile and Operational Challenges*

Variables	Pearson's <i>r</i>	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Demographic Profile and Operational Challenges	0.210	0.167	Fail to Reject $H_0$	Not Significant

*Note.*  $\alpha = .05$ .

The correlation analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.210 with a p-value of 0.167, which exceeded the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' demographic profile and the operational challenges they encountered.

This finding suggests that the operational difficulties experienced by WCPD officers are largely systemic rather than individual. Regardless of length of service or specialized training, officers

reported similar levels of challenge, indicating that institutional constraints, inter-agency coordination, and logistical limitations are the primary factors influencing the implementation of child-sensitive policing.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined the operational challenges encountered by Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers in handling Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) in selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan. The findings indicate that WCPD officers generally experience moderate operational challenges throughout the different stages of juvenile case handling, including initial contact, actual investigation, and logistical support. The most prominent challenges involved verifying the child's age due to the absence of official documents, managing parental or guardian interference during investigations, delays in coordination with the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) and the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), and inadequate logistical resources such as child-friendly facilities, transportation, recording equipment, and funding for medico-legal examinations. These findings demonstrate that the effective implementation of child-sensitive policing depends not only on officers' competence but also on the availability of institutional support and inter-agency collaboration.

The correlation analysis further revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the demographic profile of WCPD officers and the operational challenges they encountered. This finding suggests that the challenges experienced by officers are systemic rather than individual in nature. Regardless of their length of service or specialized training, officers reported similar operational difficulties, indicating that organizational policies, resource availability, and coordination mechanisms have a greater influence on the quality of CICL case handling than personal characteristics alone.

The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on juvenile justice implementation by providing empirical evidence on the operational realities faced by WCPD officers at the local level. The findings underscore the need for institutional reforms that strengthen child-sensitive policing through improved infrastructure, sustainable resource allocation, and enhanced collaboration among agencies responsible for child protection. These results may serve as a basis for policy development within the Philippine National Police and local government units to improve the delivery of services for children in conflict with the law.

The study was limited to WCPD officers from selected cities and municipalities in Pangasinan and relied on self-reported responses collected through a structured questionnaire. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of WCPD officers in other jurisdictions or capture the perspectives of other stakeholders involved in juvenile justice, such as social workers, prosecutors, judges, or the children themselves.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. The Philippine National Police should strengthen inter-agency coordination by establishing more responsive communication protocols with the PAO and LSWDO to reduce delays during the handling of CICL cases. Police

administrators should allocate adequate resources for child-friendly investigation rooms, temporary holding facilities, transportation, recording equipment, and medico-legal examinations to ensure compliance with Republic Act No. 9344 and related child protection policies (UNICEF Vietnam, 2024). Continuous professional development should also be provided through advanced training on trauma-informed interviewing, child-sensitive communication, discernment assessment, and the practical application of juvenile justice laws. Furthermore, strategies aimed at retaining experienced WCPD personnel should be considered to strengthen institutional capacity and preserve specialized expertise in handling juvenile cases. Finally, future studies may expand the scope of the research by including a larger geographical coverage and incorporating the perspectives of other justice sector stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of child-sensitive policing in the Philippines.

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## **DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS**

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used solely to support the language refinement, organization, and formatting of the manuscript during the preparation of this article. AI tools were not used to generate, alter, fabricate, or analyze the research data, statistical results, or study findings. All research activities, including the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and conclusions, were conducted by the authors. The authors have carefully reviewed and verified the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript and accept full responsibility for its content.

This version is suitable for journal submission because it is transparent about AI use while making clear that the research itself—including the data, analyses, and conclusions—remains the authors' own work.

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