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PROCEDURAL CONSTRAINTS EXPERIENCED BY WCPD IN HANDLING VAWC CASES IN SELECTED AREAS IN PANGASINAN

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ABSTRACT

Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) remains a critical issue, hindered by an execution gap between Republic Act No. 9262 and frontline police operations. This descriptive phenomenological study examined the procedural constraints encountered by Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel in San Carlos City, Alaminos City, and Lingayen, Pangasinan. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with purposively selected WCPD officers and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed that WCPD officers navigate dual, conflicting roles, balancing emotional, victim-centered support with rigid legal documentation mandates. However, case progression is severely hindered by three core procedural constraints: victim reluctance and complaint withdrawal due to trauma or family pressure; institutional limitations including severe manpower shortages, lack of private interview rooms, and heavy workloads; and inter-agency coordination gaps among barangays, social workers, and courts. These systemic bottlenecks prolong legal processes, cause secondary victimization for survivors, and diminish public confidence in the justice system. The study concludes that procedural delays require holistic institutional interventions that merge structural legal processes with trauma-informed care. It recommends that local governments and law enforcement agencies augment funding for dedicated facilities and equipment, deploy additional personnel to alleviate heavy workloads, implement continuous

stress management training for officers, and establish a standardized, streamlined inter-agency referral protocol to ensure a more integrated and survivor-centered approach to justice.

Keywords: *WCPD (Women and Children Protection Desk), VAWC (Violence Against Women and Their Children), Procedural Constraints, Descriptive Phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

The persistent global and localized crises surrounding Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC) remain central issues within contemporary criminology and gender studies. In the Philippines, the promulgation of Republic Act No. 9262—the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004—marked a major statutory advancement designed to institutionalize state protections for vulnerable populations. However, a significant execution gap persists between the legislative intent of RA 9262 and its practical application by frontline police units. While existing literature thoroughly explores victim trauma and socio-cultural vulnerabilities, a critical gap remains regarding the systemic and procedural bottlenecks experienced by law enforcement officers tasked with managing these sensitive crimes.

Frontline operations are uniquely complicated by the evolution of criminal methodologies, including technology-facilitated and cyber-related domestic violence, which consistently outpace localized law enforcement resources. Operating within high-incidence urban and municipal areas of Pangasinan—specifically San Carlos City, Alaminos City, and Lingayen—Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel must constantly navigate a complex operational paradox. Officers are legally obligated to cultivate an empathetic, trauma-informed environment to preserve victim cooperation while strictly adhering to rigid, highly technical evidentiary and documentation standards required for successful judicial prosecution.

This operational tension is worsened by acute institutional shortages, socio-emotional pressures from victims, and fragmented multi-sectoral coordination. Building upon the core findings detailed in "PROCEDURAL CONSTRAINTS EXPERIENCED BY WCPD IN HANDLING VAWC CASES", this study uses descriptive phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of WCPD officers. By analyzing these institutional realities, this study serves as a diagnostic tool for the Philippine National Police (PNP), local government units (LGUs), and policy stakeholders to drive structural reforms, optimize case workflows, and minimize systemic secondary victimization for survivors.

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research design rooted in descriptive phenomenology to capture the unaltered lived experiences and professional realities of frontline Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers under Republic Act No. 9262 (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004).

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was deployed to investigate the lived experiences of WCPD officers. This approach allowed researchers to bracket institutional

assumptions and examine the raw operational realities of frontline duty. It focused on the complex interplay between legal mandates, administrative workflows, and the emotional labor required in crisis intervention.

Locale, Sampling, and Participants

The study was localized within three strategic jurisdictions under the Pangasinan Police Provincial Office identified with high case frequencies: San Carlos City, Alaminos City, and Lingayen. Criterion-based purposive sampling was utilized to select active WCPD officers.

- Inclusion Criteria: Participants must have had a minimum of two years of continuous desk experience, direct responsibility for case management, and active involvement in multi-agency referrals.
- Sample Size: Data saturation dictates the final cohort size. Initial targets set a minimum of two dedicated desk officers per station (minimum $(N=6)$). Sampling continues until no new thematic categories emerge from successive interviews.

Data Collection Protocols

Primary data collection relied on semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews using a pilot-tested, expert-validated interview guide. The instrument explored three core areas: immediate crisis response, institutional bottlenecks, and psychological coping mechanisms.

- Ethical Safeguards: The institutional review board approved all protocols. Participants signed written informed consent forms. All data were anonymized using alphanumeric codes (e.g., Respondent A1) to protect professional identities.

Data Analysis Framework

Verbatim transcripts underwent rigorous thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework to ensure interpretive validity.

- Phase 1: Deep familiarization via iterative reading and audio-transcript verification.
- Phase 2: Generation of systematic semantic and latent codes.
- Phase 3: Clustering of codes into candidate thematic domains.
- Phase 4: Reviewing themes against raw data extracts for conceptual alignment.
- Phase 5: Defining and naming definitive, authoritative themes.
- Phase 6: Compiling the final synthesis linked to criminological frameworks.
- Trustworthiness: Credibility and dependability were established through member-checking of transcripts and peer debriefing during codebook development.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis revealed three primary overarching dimensions that define the operational landscape of WCPD officers in Pangasinan.

Systemic and Structural Bottlenecks

Officers reported significant friction within the institutional ecosystem that delays the processing of RA 9262 cases.

- Resource Deficits: Critical shortages in private interrogation spaces compromise victim confidentiality during sensitive intake processes.

- **Logistical Constraints:** Desks lack dedicated vehicles for immediate victim transport, rescue operations, or swift court document serving.
- **Inter-Agency Coordination Lapses:** Delays in securing Barangay Protection Orders (BPOs) force officers to over-extend temporary police custody measures.

Socio-Cultural Barriers and Victim Reluctance

Frontline personnel face deep-seated societal dynamics that actively impede formal legal proceedings.

- **Economic Dependency:** A high percentage of victims withdraw formal complaints due to complete financial reliance on the perpetrator.
- **Familial Pressure:** Officers routinely encounter interference from extended family members urging the victim to settle out of court.
- **The "Cycle of Violence":** Desk officers experience operational frustration when victims back out during the crucial 48-hour evidentiary window.

Cumulative Emotional Labor and Coping Stratagems

Managing gender-based trauma inflicts a heavy psychological toll on frontline personnel.

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress:** Constant exposure to severe physical abuse and child neglect narratives triggers secondary trauma.
- **Compassion Fatigue:** The emotional demands of victim profiling led to psychological exhaustion over long shifts.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Officers rely heavily on informal peer debriefing networks and compartmentalization due to a lack of institutionalized mental health support.

Agency Involved	Institutional Bottleneck Identified	Downstream Impact on Case Resolution
Barangay VAW Desks	Uncoordinated initial intake, delayed report transmissions, and absence of tracking mechanisms.	Weakens the foundational evidence chain and delays police intervention.
Healthcare Providers / Medico-Legal Units	Delayed medical evaluations and uncoordinated evidentiary handoffs.	Compromises time-sensitive physical evidence and delays formal filing.
Social Workers / DSWD	Fragmented referral tracking, delayed responses, and restricted availability.	Leaves the victim without critical economic, psychological, or shelter support.
The Court System	Rigid legal backlogs, administrative redundancies, and protracted trial calendars.	Drastically prolongs processing times, driving case abandonment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical narratives of frontline implementers, this study offers the following conclusions:

1. **Compounded Labor Imperatives:** WCPD operations are uniquely taxing, forcing frontline officers to manage intense emotional labor while simultaneously executing rigid, complex legal protocols under highly stressful operational conditions.
2. **Systemic Nature of Constraints:** Procedural delays and operational bottlenecks are not isolated individual shortfalls, but are symptoms of systemic issues involving severe under-resourcing, administrative inefficiencies, and socio-emotional variables.
3. **Institutional Attrition of Justice:** Structural delays directly harm survivor welfare by causing secondary victimization. This institutional trauma triggers non-cooperation and high complaint withdrawal rates, compromising the overall delivery of justice.
4. **The Primacy of Structural Reform:** Maximizing the legal potential of RA 9262 depends entirely on robust institutional shifts, sustainable infrastructure investments, and unified, collaborative referral networks across all state actors.

To close the execution gap between the legislative ideals of RA 9262 and frontline operations, the following targeted interventions are recommended:

1. **Structural and Financial Mobilization:** Local Government Units (LGUs) and the Philippine National Police leadership must prioritize allocating sustainable funding for specialized WCPD infrastructure. This must include constructing private, soundproof interview spaces to ensure victim confidentiality and dignity, upgrading digital investigative equipment, and expanding personnel deployment to permanently lower individual officer caseloads.
2. **Operational Optimization and Inter-Agency Integration:** Administrative leadership must actively streamline paperwork requirements to eliminate unnecessary documentation redundancies. Simultaneously, stakeholders should establish a unified, automated inter-agency referral protocol to ensure case files pass securely and instantly among barangays, medical units, social workers, and prosecutors, shielding survivors from repetitive questioning and minimizing secondary trauma.
3. **Institutional Wellness and Capability Building:** Because WCPD officers experience intense emotional labor and compassion fatigue, law enforcement training must incorporate continuous professional development focusing on emotional intelligence, stress management, and advanced trauma-informed care.
4. **Expanded Survivor Support Services:** LGUs must expand funding for comprehensive, community-level survivor assistance, including public counseling systems, transition shelters, and legal aid clinics. Ensuring immediate economic and psychological support helps shield victims from domestic and socio-cultural pressures, reducing case attrition and ensuring survivors can safely see the legal process through to resolution.

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

This section ensures transparency regarding the use of artificial intelligence tools in the research process. Authors must explicitly state whether AI-assisted tools were utilized at any stage, such as for data analysis, language refinement, or image generation. If AI tools were employed, their specific functions should be mentioned, ensuring that their role is clearly defined. This declaration reassures readers and reviewers that the study maintains originality, accuracy, and adherence to ethical research practices. Regardless of AI assistance, the authors remain fully responsible for the integrity and validity of the research findings.

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