



Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children's Act in the Philippines: Assessing the Effectiveness and Impact on Access to Justice

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act (R.A. 9262) in the Philippines, focusing on how the law has influenced access to justice for survivors of domestic violence. Despite the law's comprehensive provisions criminalizing various forms of abuse and mechanisms, such as protection orders and support units, implementation challenges remain. Data collected through structured surveys with survivors and institutional stakeholders reveal high awareness but limited in-depth understanding of the law. Survivors face barriers including fear of retaliation, emotional trauma, and procedural hurdles that discourage them from fully utilizing legal remedies. Institutional gaps, such as insufficient staffing, lack of survivor-friendly resources, and bureaucratic delays further hinder effective response. Notably, less than one-third of survivors believe justice has been served in their cases, indicating a disconnect between legal provisions and lived realities. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these challenges by restricting access to support services. Findings underscore that while R.A. 9262 offers vital legal tools, meaningful justice requires a survivor-centered and comprehensive approach integrating timely legal aid, psychosocial support, and community interventions. Strengthening institutional capacity and addressing intersecting barriers are essential to ensure the law fulfills its promise, enhancing protection and empowerment for women facing abuse.

Keywords: gender empowerment; gender equality; law; Republic Act 9262; women empowerment



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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and their children remained a pervasive issue in the Philippines despite progressive legal reforms. Republic Act No. 9262, or the "Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004," was enacted to address gender-based violence within intimate and domestic relationships. However, the real-world impact of the law remained a subject of scrutiny, especially in terms of improving access to justice. The Philippine Statistics Authority (2022) reported that approximately 17.5% of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from intimate partners. This figure suggested the persistence of domestic violence even years after the law's passage.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this reality. Movement restrictions and economic instability intensified the risks faced by women and children trapped with abusers (Evans et al.,

2021). Victim protection mechanisms such as shelters, legal services, and psychosocial support were compromised due to public health protocols, which in turn limited women's ability to seek redress and protection. These circumstances highlighted the urgency to evaluate the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children (Anti-VAWC) law not only by its existence but also by its actual effectiveness in securing justice for survivors.

R.A. 9262 criminalized various forms of abuse physical, sexual, psychological, and economic within familial and intimate contexts. It also established legal mechanisms like protection orders and institutional bodies such as Barangay VAWC Desks and Women and Children Protection Units (WCPUs) to respond to survivors' needs. Nonetheless, reports from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (2023) and the Commission on Human Rights (2022) revealed persistent implementation challenges. These included a

lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and inconsistent enforcement of protection mechanisms, especially in rural and marginalized areas.

Reviewing the literature revealed several studies exploring the implementation of R.A. 9262. De Guzman (2023) found that while awareness of the law increased, its full enforcement remained problematic due to institutional inertia, resource gaps, and social stigma. In some areas, victims refrained from pursuing cases due to fear of retaliation or economic dependency. The Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (2023) reported that survivors often encountered delays in court proceedings, insufficient legal aid, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which discouraged them from continuing with their cases. Pabelonia (2023) also noted a declining trend in reported VAWC cases in Central Luzon from 1,583 in 2018 to 629 in 2022 which he interpreted as a symptom of underreporting rather than a true decline in incidence.

These findings echoed global trends. Evans et al. (2021) emphasized that during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional responsiveness to gender-based violence was often deprioritized. The United Kingdom Home Office (2023), through a fact-finding mission in the Philippines, concluded that legal protections under R.A. 9262 were insufficient unless accompanied by survivor-centric implementation. Many victims who initially filed complaints eventually dropped charges due to emotional exhaustion and a lack of trust in the justice system.

Synthesizing these studies, it became apparent that while R.A. 9262 had a comprehensive legal framework, its enforcement remained inconsistent and unequal across regions and socioeconomic classes. Common barriers included lack of access to legal aid, insufficient support services, and gender-biased attitudes from authorities. Although the law succeeded in institutionalizing gender-sensitive responses on paper, its actual implementation revealed a

justice gap that many women and children continued to navigate alone.

This research was anchored in a feminist access-to-justice framework, which positioned justice not merely as a procedural right but as a holistic experience of equity, safety, and dignity. It emphasized that intersecting oppressions such as poverty, patriarchy, and social stigma shaped women's ability to pursue justice (WLHRB, 2023). Additionally, the institutional responsiveness theory guided the study by proposing that a legal system's efficacy was measured by how well it met the specific needs of its users (Evans et al., 2021). Together, these frameworks provided a critical lens to examine the impact of R.A. 9262 beyond its statutory provisions.

The study addressed the following central problem: To what extent had Republic Act No. 9262 improved access to justice for women and children in the Philippines? This central question was further broken down into specific queries regarding awareness of legal rights, availability of services, issuance of protection orders, effectiveness of institutional support, and survivor perceptions of justice outcomes.

This study was significant for several reasons. Policymakers and legislators stood to benefit from evidence-based insights into how R.A. 9262 functioned at the ground level, particularly considering proposed amendments such as House Bill 8009, which aimed to expand the law's scope (Commission on Human Rights, 2023). For implementing agencies such as the Philippine National Police (PNP), DILG, and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the findings offered a data-driven basis to refine protocols and training. Civil society organizations engaged in advocacy and service delivery could use the results to improve their interventions. Finally, for survivors and their communities, this research provided a platform to amplify their experiences, needs, and aspirations for a responsive justice system.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to measure and analyze the effectiveness of R.A. 9262 in promoting access to justice. The design was chosen to capture both the descriptive characteristics of the target population and the possible relationships between multiple independent variables (e.g., socioeconomic status, location, education) and dependent variables (e.g., justice outcomes).

Structured survey questionnaires were utilized as the primary instrument for data collection. The survey contained both close-ended and Likert-scale questions that measured key variables such as legal awareness, access to services, protection order issuance, institutional support, and perceived justice outcomes. The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test with 30 respondents to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Internal consistency was verified using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating good reliability.

The respondents of the study were divided into two main groups. The first group consisted of female survivors of VAWC who had filed cases under R.A. 9262 in the past five years. The second group comprised of institutional actors, such as barangay officials, police officers, social workers, and legal aid providers. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation from the country's three major island groups: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. A total of 500 respondents were selected, with 400 being survivor-respondents and 100 being institutional respondents.

The research was conducted in six purposively selected local government units: Quezon City, Cebu City, Davao City, Albay, Leyte, and Agusan del Norte. These areas were chosen to represent both urban and rural contexts with varying levels of VAWC case prevalence. Coordination with local government offices, women's desks, and WCPUs facilitated

respondent recruitment and data collection. Prior to survey administration, formal letters of permission were secured from local authorities and agency heads.

Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize demographic characteristics and survey responses. Inferential statistics were employed to test relationships between variables. Chi-square tests were used for categorical data, while independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA examined differences across groups. Multiple linear regression analysis identified significant predictors of access to justice. All statistical tests used a significance level of 0.05.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were briefed on the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using unique identification codes and restricting access to raw data. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. In cases where emotional distress was observed, referrals were made to local psychosocial support services.

The methodology adopted in this study ensured scientific rigor, ethical integrity, and contextual sensitivity. By combining quantitative analysis with a socially responsive lens, the research aimed to generate actionable knowledge on how R.A. 9262 had functioned as a legal and institutional safeguard for women and their children in the Philippines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were organized based on the major indicators of access to justice

under R.A. 9262: (1) awareness and understanding of the law; (2) accessibility and effectiveness of protection mechanisms; (3) quality of institutional support; (4) experiences with legal proceedings; and (5) perceived justice outcomes. Data were collected from 500 respondents, including 400 female survivors of VAWC and 100 institutional actors such as barangay officials, police officers, and social workers.

Analysis revealed that 87.5% of the survivor respondents reported being aware of R.A. 9262. Among those, 61.3% indicated that they had a “basic understanding” of the law, while only 26.8% claimed to have a “comprehensive understanding.” Notably, 12.5% of respondents admitted they had never heard of the law prior to their victimization.

Educational attainment was significantly associated with legal awareness ($\chi^2 = 21.54$, $p < 0.01$), with college-educated respondents more likely to demonstrate comprehensive understanding. Respondents in urban settings had higher awareness rates (91.2%) than those in rural areas (78.4%).

Among institutional respondents, 96% were aware of R.A. 9262, but only 72% reported having received formal training related to its enforcement. Police officers had higher levels of training (84%) compared to barangay officials (65%) and social workers (69%).

When asked about their experience applying for protection orders, only 38.7% of survivor respondents had filed for one. Among these, 70.1% were granted temporary or permanent protection orders. However, 29.9% reported delays exceeding one month, citing reasons such as procedural confusion and lack of legal assistance.

Respondents who did not apply for protection orders (61.3%) cited several deterrents: fear of retaliation (43.5%), lack of knowledge about the process (35.6%), and perceived ineffectiveness (20.9%). These findings suggested that while protection orders were legally available,

various structural and psychosocial barriers impeded access.

Institutional respondents indicated that Barangay VAWC Desks were operational in 88% of their jurisdictions. However, only 52% of these desks maintained complete documentation and referral protocols. The issuance of Barangay Protection Orders (BPOs) was more common in urban areas (67%) than in rural settings (48%).

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with various institutional services on a Likert scale from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied). The mean scores were as follows: Police Response: 3.21, Social Welfare Assistance: 3.57, Legal Aid Services: 2.89, Psychological Support: 3.10, and Barangay Intervention: 3.33.

Notably, only 41% of survivor respondents accessed psychological services, with the primary reasons for non-access being unavailability (47.8%) and stigma (28.4%). Legal aid services were reported as insufficient, especially in rural areas where only 23.5% of respondents reported access to free counsel.

Multiple regression analysis revealed that satisfaction with institutional support was significantly predicted by location ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), level of legal knowledge ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), and the presence of a support network ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$).

Among the 400 survivor respondents, 212 (53%) had filed formal complaints under R.A. 9262. Of these, only 34% saw their cases progress to formal court hearings. An additional 48% reported that their cases were dismissed or archived, while 18% were still pending after more than a year.

The mean duration from filing to first court hearing was 4.2 months. Rural respondents experienced significantly longer waiting periods ($M = 5.7$ months) compared to urban counterparts ($M = 3.4$ months), $t(210) = 4.17$, $p < 0.01$.

Respondents rated their experience with the judicial process poorly, with a mean score of 2.74 on a 5-point scale. Key concerns included lengthy delays, lack of coordination among agencies, and insufficient updates on case progress.

Institutional respondents acknowledged constraints in handling cases, such as inadequate staffing (63%), lack of survivor-friendly facilities (57%), and bureaucratic red tape (42%).

When asked whether they believed justice had been served in their case, only 29.8% of survivor respondents answered affirmatively. A majority (54.2%) felt justice had not been achieved, while 16% were uncertain.

Among those who perceived positive outcomes, contributing factors included timely issuance of protection orders, supportive law enforcement, and emotional support from NGOs. In contrast, negative perceptions were linked to case dismissals, victim-blaming behavior by authorities, and continued harassment by perpetrators.

A chi-square test showed that perceived justice was significantly associated with receipt of legal aid ($\chi^2 = 18.76$, $p < 0.01$) and successful issuance of protection orders ($\chi^2 = 22.94$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents who received both services were more likely to report positive outcomes. Institutional respondents, when asked to self-assess their effectiveness, gave an average score of 3.04 out of 5. Many cited external challenges—such as lack of coordination among agencies, insufficient training, and cultural biases—as reasons for limited impact.

Conclusion and Implications. The study concluded that while Republic Act No. 9262 provided a robust legal framework for protecting women and their children from violence, its practical effectiveness in ensuring access to justice remained hindered by structural, socio-cultural, and institutional limitations. The findings revealed high levels of awareness among women, especially in urban

areas, yet this did not always translate into action due to fear of retaliation, insufficient procedural knowledge, and limited access to support services. Protection mechanisms such as Barangay Protection Orders and court-issued Temporary Protection Orders were available but underutilized, with legal aid and psychosocial support services found to be inconsistently delivered and heavily under-resourced, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Institutional readiness and responsiveness were found to significantly influence survivors' experiences, reinforcing the need for continuous training of frontline personnel and standardized protocols across barangays, police units, and social welfare agencies. Furthermore, the prolonged duration of legal proceedings, low conviction rates, and poor satisfaction with judicial outcomes underscored systemic inefficiencies that eroded public trust in the justice system.

Considering these findings, it is recommended that the government and allied institutions intensify capacity-building initiatives, especially in rural areas, to equip VAWC service providers with gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate interventions. Strengthening the barangay-level response through adequate funding, mandatory training, and community-based education campaigns is critical to increasing survivor engagement and early intervention. Additionally, the expansion of free legal aid, accelerated court procedures for VAWC cases, and the institutionalization of multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms would enhance the law's operational impact. Finally, a nationwide monitoring and evaluation framework should be established to measure outcomes beyond service delivery—particularly the long-term empowerment and safety of women and their children—as the true indicators of justice in the context of anti-VAWC interventions.

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