

Community-Based Violence Against Women (VAW) Desks in the Philippines: A Multi-Level Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This study is a multi-level assessment of community-based Violence Against Women (VAW) desks status: (1) VAW system (policies and legislation); (2) entity (VAW desk setup), and (3) individual (VAW desk officers) levels' capacities in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines. Data were gathered through a survey of 105 VAW desk officers and key informant interviews of five local officials. In addition, document reviews of national and local policies and reports on VAW were also employed in this study. Findings suggested that policies on establishing barangay-level VAW desks were properly enforced in Calamba City. However, the research results also showed a lack of equipment and resources to address VAW cases properly. In addition, VAW desk officers' age and educational background limit their capacity to implement their responsibilities effectively, for there are no clear qualifications needed to be a desk officer. There is also no clear local system on the orientation of roles and responsibilities of the desk officers. Thus, the following recommendations: (1) national or local policy amendment to include the basic qualifications of desk officers; (2) maximize the role of the local group of desk officers in capacity-building and advocacy while partnering with civil society; (3) proper fund allocation of the city to ensure full functionality of VAW desks; and (4) strengthen feedback system and enforcement of rewards and penalties to motivate proper functioning of the desk

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offices. The paper contributes to local governance perspectives, specifically on multi-level coordination, to effectively address VAW and provide gender and development (GAD) support services.

Keywords: Gender and development (GAD), local capacities, local governance, multi-level assessment, violence against women (VAW)

INTRODUCTION

Currently, violence against women (VAW) remains a pervasive global issue. In 2015, the United Nations Statistics Division reported that worldwide, 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or by a non-partner at some point in their lives. In the Philippines, one in five women aged 15 to 49 has experienced physical violence since age 15; 14.4% of married women have experienced physical abuse from their husbands; and more than one-third (37%) of separated or widowed women have experienced physical violence, implying that domestic violence could be the reason for separation or annulment (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2014).

VAW is a serious threat that negatively affects the individuals' and communities' well-being. It undermines women's ability to enjoy fundamental freedom (Ortiz-Barreda & Vives-Cases, 2013). It represents both a serious violation of human rights and a major obstacle to overcoming inequality between women and men (Ortiz-Barreda & Vives-Cases, 2013). VAW is widespread and has serious implications for women's

health (Er Guneri et al., 2017), including psychosocial and mental health (Soomar, 2015).

The Declaration on the Elimination of VAW, adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (United Nations, 1993), defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (Article 1). In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 9262 (2004), also known as the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, defines "Violence against Women and Children (VAWC)" as any act or series of acts committed by any person against a woman who is his wife, former wife, or against a woman with whom the person has or had a sexual or dating relationship, or with whom he has a common child, or against her child whether legitimate or illegitimate, within or without the family abode, which result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering, or economic abuse including threats of such acts, battery, assault, coercion, harassment or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Section 3). Because of its growing concern about VAW, the Philippine government has passed several laws and issued policies addressing this problem. Aside from Republic Act 9262, some of the laws include Republic Act 9710 (2009, The Magna Carta of Women); Republic Act 10630 (2013, Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006); Joint

Memorandum Circular No. 2010-1 (2010, Creation of Local Committees on Anti Trafficking and Violence against Women and their Children); and Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2010-2 (2010, Guidelines in the Establishment of a Violence against Women's Desk in every Barangay).

This study explored the multi-level theory of understanding organizational capacity. Social phenomena, such as VAW, commonly occur synchronously and dynamically at multiple levels (e.g., macro-meso-micro levels) (Headley & Clark, 2020). In this study, the management processes and organizational features that may support or hinder the full functionality of VAW desk offices were analyzed. The VAW desk office can be considered a people-processing organization since its main function is to process and confer public status on the victim-survivors (Hasenfeld, 1972). Furthermore, these organizations do not need a personal bond to achieve the organization's goals (van Loon et al., 2013).

The community-based (barangay) VAW desk office, the implementing arm of the local government unit in the Philippines handling gender-sensitive issues at the grassroots, performs an important role in addressing these concerns. Thus, conducting a multi-level assessment from the system to the entity down to the individual level will provide baseline information on how a city addresses VAW. The study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the VAW policies implemented at the national and local level (system level)?; (2) What is the state of the barangay VAW desk

offices in the city in terms of functionality (entity level)?; (3) How capable are the VAW desk officers in performing their functions (individual level)?; and (4) How can the capacity development interventions for the VAW desk services of the city be further improved? To further understand the background of the study, the next section discusses the related literature on Gender and Development (GAD), focusing on VAW in the international and local context.

Review of Related Literature

In a review of the Philippines' performance in accomplishing Sustainable Development Goal 5, which focuses on gender equality, David et al. (2018) argue that 'the Philippines fares well on some of the broad indicators of well-being of females and girls.' Loh (2009) also recognizes the multi-pronged approach adopted by some ASEAN countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia to combat gender violence. These include 'crisis intervention services and empowerment of women survivors; integrated services by the hospital and police service providers; community involvement and participation; legal reform advocacy on VAW; training and public education; and establishment of national coalitions on VAW.' Nevertheless, Garcia (2020), through his interview with different sectors working on VAW programs and services in the Philippines, found that VAW issues are still prevalent in the country.

A World Bank study conducted by Tavares et al. (2019) identified critical driving factors to address VAW issues at

the local level. These include budgetary commitments for the implementation of legislation on VAW, services like 24-hour hotlines, training for health and law enforcement professionals, national protocols for health and law enforcement professionals, dedicated or specialized police units or staff, presence of a national plan on VAW, access to shelters and legal aid of victims (Tavares et al., 2019). It was reiterated in the study by Fraser and Wood (2018), particularly the need for an adequate budget, a comprehensive policy framework, including plans and data, appropriate training and capacity building of public officials, including enforcers, and cross-agency coordination. Fraser and Wood (2018) also reiterated the need for women to lead campaigns and monitor implementation by civil society and women's organizations (Fraser & Wood, 2018). The role of civil society and the complementary roles of NGOs and academics were also highlighted in the study of VAW policy implementations by Libre et al. (2017) and Garcia (2020).

Local governments are critical frontliners in local women empowerment and prevention of VAW in the community. Sumbas and Koyuncu (2019) argue for the institutionalization of gender-sensitive policies and local-level initiatives for women empowerment. The role of government, particularly its leadership, in mainstreaming GAD policies and delivery of GAD services (Libre et al., 2017). In addition, the knowledge of the barangay officials is a good predictor of GAD policy implementation (Libre et al., 2017).

Despite the advancements in law and services conceptualized to address VAW issues in the Philippines, government services remain inadequate and focus more on response than prevention (Garcia, 2020). Therefore, there needs to be an amendment to government policies and proper budget allocation to ensure VAW services to women and children (Embate et al., 2019). For example, the Local GAD budget policy stipulated that a 5% gender budget be allocated to annual GAD plans in local government and government offices (Mendoza, 2020). However, this depends on the revenue and income of the government office and LGU, which might limit the implementation of meaningful gender-friendly programs and activities (Mendoza, 2020). In addition, the implementation of the GAD budget policy remains to be limited in practice (Concepcion, 2013). Also, Gudmalin (2017) argues for the need for public funds allocation for temporary shelter and immediate needs of victims, as per his study of lived experiences of victims of violence in Carmen, Bohol, Philippines.

Another limitation of local GAD programs and services in the Philippines is the lack of a 'strategic gender and development capability enhancement agenda' (Libre et al., 2017). In a study by Aquino (2017) in two barangays in Quezon City, Philippines, of the UN Women Safe Cities Initiatives Program implementation, the capacity improvement in promoting women's safety and security was also highlighted.

These studies recognize the need to investigate the factors affecting reporting behavior in VAW desks. However, this is not covered by our current study. Most of the reviews of VAW desks in the Philippines, based on a Google Scholar search (publications from 2017 to the present), focused on VAW reportorial factors. For instance, Garcia (2020) identified that some Filipino cultural factors could serve as risk and protective factors for reporting behaviors of women and children to VAW desks or other similar services or organizations. It is reinforced by Embate et al.'s (2019) findings when they called for a "rehabilitation of socio-cultural influences that marginalize women". Also, the study by Embate et al. (2019) on women's desk provision in a national public hospital in the Philippines emphasized the need to delve into the socio-cultural to organization/structural factors affecting service delivery and quality. In a study by Dimaano et al. (2018), one of the key reasons for victims reporting the abuse, particularly of a close relative or husband, is the victim's fear that the abuse is perpetrated on their children. In addition, family, economic and social factors, including Filipino culture, affect the occurrence and reports of violence against women (Bernarte et al., 2018). The common themes of VAW cases include physical abuse, mental abuse, threat, abandonment of children, child support issues, child custody, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and rape were the recorded cases among the evaluated barangays (Mohammed & Pulmano, 2017). In a case study in Tabuk City, respondents' survey found that psychological violence is the most pervasive form of VAW (Malawis-Ignacio, 2021). The role of culture and

local traditions, particularly in indigenous peoples' communities, were highlighted in the study of Najarilla (2018). Najarilla (2018) found no VAW desks in NCIP (National Commission on Indigenous People) offices in the Ifugao, Benguet, and Mountain Province, where indigenous peoples are found. She further argued that customary practices should be integrated into VAW policies and programs to ensure inclusiveness and respect for IP (Indigenous People) rights and traditions.

Given this review, we focused on assessing the service delivery of the VAW desk and identifying its capacity gaps. Specifically on how the system (policies), entity (VAW desks), and individual (VAW desks' officers) factors affect the task performance of VAW desks and their officers. Earlier studies have focused on each set of factors, and this study would contribute to how the interaction of these levels could affect the VAW desks' service delivery and capacity. The next section discusses the materials and methods used, comprising the study area, research design, and framework to realize how the study has been implemented.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

As shown in Figure 1, the study was conducted in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines, located 54 kilometers south of the country's capital, Manila. Calamba City is a haven for industries and was also considered the primary industrial hub outside of Metro Manila, resulting in the influx of migrants in the area.



Figure 1. Map of Calamba City, Laguna¹

Moreover, Calamba City is also a recipient of national awards for good governance, good financial housekeeping, disaster preparedness, business-friendliness, peace and order, environmental management, and social protection. The latter includes the establishment of barangay VAW desks. Thus, the selection of Calamba City, a highly urbanized city recognized for the delivery of its social services, particularly in addressing local VAW issues, could inform other similar cities, not only in the Philippines but also in Asia and the Pacific on the multiple and complex links of addressing VAW issues.

Research Design

A descriptive quantitative survey approach among the appointed barangay VAW desk officers in Calamba City from 2018 to

2020 was used to gather their demographic characteristics and capacities regarding their qualifications, roles, and perceived facilitating and hindering factors in performing their duties and responsibilities. The instrument was partly adapted from a local study entitled Assessment of the Capacity of Barangay Nutrition Scholars in the Municipality of Bay, Laguna (Gutierrez, 2012) from the Institute for Governance and Rural Development, College of Public Affairs and Development, University of the Philippines Los Baños; and from the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Memorandum Circular 2017-114 or the Guidelines in Monitoring the Functionality of VAW Desk in Every Barangay. Prior to the actual conduct of the survey, the questionnaire underwent a thorough review. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was also piloted for two VAW desk officers at Barangay Bagong Kalsada, Calamba City, Laguna. It was done to check the comprehensiveness and clarity of the content; assess the issues that might arise during the actual data gathering process. After pre-testing, necessary revisions were then made to the questionnaire. The study was designed to be a complete enumeration of the 139 VAW desk officers. However, only 105 (75.54%) signified to participate in the study and gave their informed consent.

Meanwhile, key informant interviews of five selected city officials were also conducted to assess the capacities of the VAW set up in terms of the laws and policies implemented in the national and local context. The primary criteria in choosing

¹ Map is based on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calamba,_Laguna.

the key informant for the study are (1) designated in service for 2018–2020 in the city office, which is the same as the survey respondents' contract, and (2) involvement in the implementation of VAW laws and services such as the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), City Social Services and Youth Development Office (CSSYDO)/Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Philippine National Police (PNP). In addition, pertinent secondary documents were also collected and reviewed to draw out research conclusions and recommendations.

Study Framework

The multi-level theory informed this study of understanding organizational capacity. Multi-level research is beneficial in bridging the macro-micro gap in management and the science-practice gap (Molina-Azorin et al., 2020). Molina-Azorin et al. (2020) further argue that a multi-level assessment informs the joint analysis of various variables and interactions. In this study, the process links that may support or hinder the full functionality of VAW will be analyzed. Process links are management processes and organizational features that affect a level or another level.

In addition, capacity development concepts informed this study. Here, we focused on the specific technical, processual, and contextual capacities of the VAW desks that affect their full functionality. Technical capacity is the capacity to accomplish and perform technical tasks (Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative [CaDRI],

2011). For example, the technical capacity could be the technical role of the VAW desks or the qualification and tasks specified by the law of VAW desk officers. Processual capacity refers to the social, relational, and intangible functional capacities (Pearson, 2011). Some examples are leadership, negotiation, conflict resolution skills, and problem-solving skills (Acquaye-Baddoo, 2010), all critical in hearing VAW cases. Lastly, contextual capacities refer to local contexts and existing conditions affecting the organizational capacity (Pearson, 2011). These may include policies, values on specific concepts or issues, and systems observed in each organization.

This study will identify the capacity gaps of the VAW desk and how the different level variables affect these gaps. It could also inform recommendations to improve the functionalities of the VAW desk in the study area. We argue that using the multi-level approach and capacity development concepts would strengthen the study by generating insights into how one level of inputs could affect its outputs and that of another level (Paruchuri et al., 2018). The conceptual framework looked first at the broader context of VAW. This level discussed the national laws and policies, the VAW situation in Calamba City, and the policies they implement in the local context. After laying down the national and local VAW context, the next level focused on the status of the community-based (barangay) VAW desk offices which is the entity level. This level discussed the main facility, the VAW desk office, which is the implementing

arm of the LGU in promoting the laws and policies. Lastly, the individual level focused on personnel—VAW desk officers. This level discussed the qualifications and roles and discussed the perceived hindering and facilitating factors of the VAW desk officers in performing their duties and

responsibilities. The conceptual framework then exposes the gaps that need to be addressed by capacity development and organizational development interventions. Below is the Conceptual Framework used in this study (Figure 2).

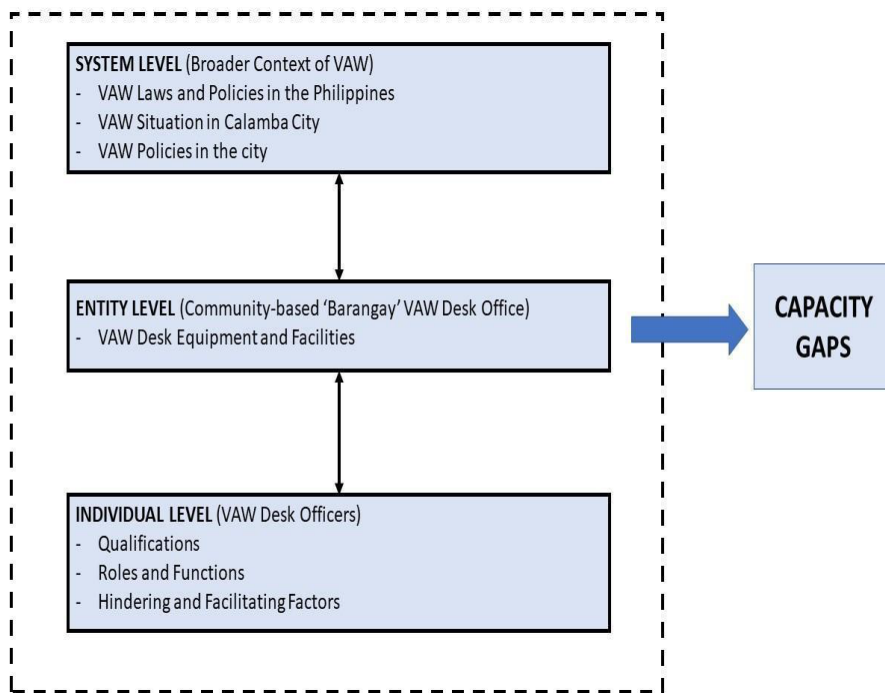


Figure 2. The multi-level assessment framework of the study

The collected data from the survey questionnaires were interpreted and analyzed using a multi-level approach looking at the system level (VAW laws and policies), entity level (VAW desk office), and individual level (VAW desk officers). Frequency distribution and other measures of central tendency were utilized for quantitative analysis of the primary data. Meanwhile,

thematic analysis was used to identify the key themes emerging from the survey and interviews. The next section focuses on the study results, including the demographic characteristics of the respondents and discussions on the system, entity, and individual levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 indicated that the barangay VAW desk officers were all women. It is an advantage because, in most cases, the perpetrators are male, and VAW victim-survivors may be more comfortable relating their experiences to fellow women (Philippine Commission on Women, 2012). Most VAW desk officers were between 50 and 59 years old (39%). The majority were also married (60%), Catholic (81.9%), and graduated high school (57.1%).

Aside from being a barangay VAW desk officer, 11 (10.5%) of them are also store owners, while the majority (46 or 43.8%) stated that they have no other job and 31 (29.5%) stated they are housewives. Moreover, most respondents (39%) have recently been appointed with one year or less in service. Moreover, key informants include five elected officials of the city. They are employed in offices that implement VAW laws and policies like the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Philippine National Police (PNP), and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
20–29	2	1.9
30–39	9	8.6
40–49	29	27.6
50–59	41	39.0
60–69	17	16.2
70–79	3	2.9
No answer	4	3.8
Civil Status		
Single	12	11.4
Married	63	60.0
Divorced	8	7.6
Widowed	17	16.2
Live-in	3	2.9
No answer	2	1.9

Table 1 (Continue)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Religion		
Roman Catholic	86	81.9
Iglesia ni Cristo	2	1.9
Islam/Muslim	3	2.9
Born Again	9	8.6
Baptist	2	1.9
Jesus Is Lord	1	1.0
KIDKH	1	1.0
Mistica	1	1.0
Education		
College graduate	14	13.3
College undergraduate	15	14.3
High school graduate	60	57.1
High school undergraduate	3	2.9
Elementary graduate	2	1.9
Vocational/technical courses	9	8.6
No answer	2	1.9
Occupation (other than being a VAW Desk Officer)		
Housewife	31	29.5
Store owner	11	10.5
Food/meat vendor	4	3.8
Online seller	3	2.9
Sangguniang barangay staff	2	1.9
Caretaker	1	1.0
Chairwoman (Cooperative)	1	1.0
Sewer	1	1.0
Photographer	1	1.0
Dog breeder	1	1.0
Employee	1	1.0
Farmer	1	1.0
Masseuse/manicurist	1	1.0
None	46	43.8
Years of service as VAW Desk Officer		
1 and below	41	39.0
1–3	21	20.0
4–6	16	15.2
6 & above	24	22.9
No answer	3	2.9

System Level

The Philippines recognizes the rights and privileges of women and their freedom against violence. Republic Act No. 9710 (2009), more commonly known as the Magna Carta of Women, enacted in 2009, states that the State condemns all discrimination against women. The state pursues by all appropriate means and without delay the policy of eliminating discrimination against women. Section 12 D, Rule IV of the Rules and Regulation Implementing the Magna Carta of Women, provides for VAW desks in every barangay to ensure VAW cases are fully addressed in a gender-responsive manner.

Results showed several national VAW laws at the system level, which are also adopted and implemented at the city level. These include:

- Republic Act 9710 (2009, Magna Carta of Women)
- Republic Act 9262 (2004, Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act)
- Joint Memorandum Circular 2010-1 (2010, Creation of Local Committees on Anti-trafficking and Violence Against Women and Children)
- Joint Memorandum Circular 2010-2 (2010, Guidelines in the Establishment of Violence Against Women Desk in Every Barangay); and
- Memorandum Circular 2017-114 (2017, Guidelines in Monitoring the Functionality of VAW Desk in Every Barangay)

Meanwhile, local VAW laws and policies were also implemented at the municipal level. Calamba City, for instance, passed City Ordinance No. 605 (2017, an ordinance institutionalizing the establishment of barangay VAW desks in the 54 barangays of Calamba City) in 2017, which was adopted by its barangays based on the DILG guidance. However, aside from this, there were no other local ordinances concerning VAW that the city passed. As the ABC (Association of Barangay Captain) chairman of the city noted, *“All the laws are already existing at the national level, so we just adopt it.”*

The Barangay VAW Desk Handbook was published in December 2012 by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) to serve as a guide for handling VAW cases at the community level. The handbook contains seven sections, which are as follows: (1) Setting up the VAW Desk; (2) Designating a VAW Desk Officer; (3) Guiding Service Delivery; (4) Financing VAW Desk Operations; (5) Recording and Reporting Clients Served; (6) Spreading the Word; and (7) Monitoring and Evaluating the Service of VAW Desk.

In 2012, the CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon) Region, where Calamba City belongs, had 2,281 (8.92%) cases of VAW in the total reported crimes (Philippine National Police, Women and Children Protection Center, 2012). In the past five years (2013–2017), the city had 446 reported cases.²

² According to the local Philippine National Police – Women and Children Protection Center of Calamba City.

Figure 3 shows the number of VAW cases reported to Philippine National Police (PNP) Calamba from January 2013 to November 2017. Over that period, 2014 had the highest number of reported VAW cases at 131, while 2017 had the lowest at 59 reported VAW cases. According to the City Local Government Operations Officer

(CLGOO) of Calamba: “It just came down to us (policy) here in 2016 that it will be necessary for the barangay captain to designate VAW/women’s desk in cases of VAW.” Nonetheless, it should be noted that VAW cases declined after 2014, even as the law on the creation of VAW desk offices was only forwarded to the city in 2016.

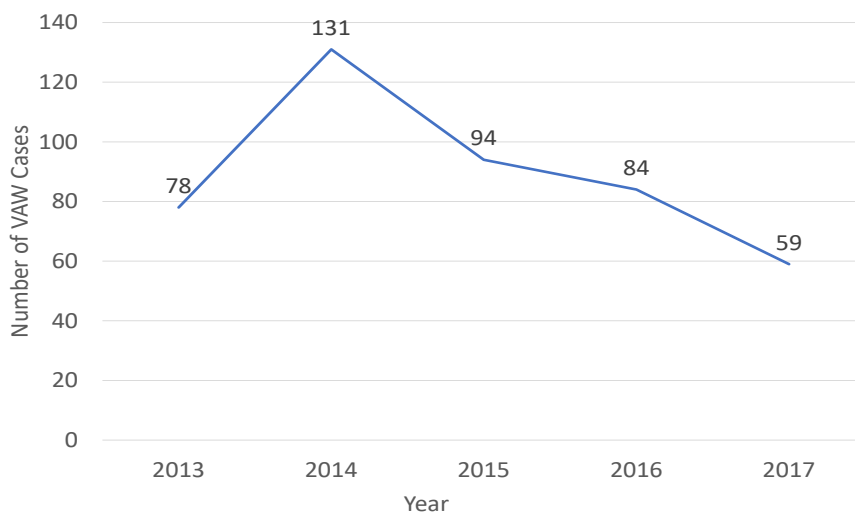


Figure 3. Number of VAW cases in Calamba City from 2013 to 2017

Entity Level

In a Joint Memorandum Circular 2010–2012, the guidelines for setting up a barangay-level VAW Desk were articulated as follows:

2.1. Setting up the VAW Desk—the barangay captain shall designate an area within the barangay hall for the VAW desk. S/he shall provide for the necessary furniture and fixtures such as, but not limited to, table, chairs, separate filing cabinet, and logbook for record-keeping of cases. Likewise, the barangay captain shall ensure the

confidentiality of the case and the privacy and safety of the victim-survivor.

To further monitor the VAW desk offices, Memorandum Circular No. 2017-114 [Guidelines in Monitoring the Functionality of VAW Desk in Every Barangay] (2017) was issued by the DILG in August 2017. It was intended to provide LGUs and other concerned entities with guidelines and a monitoring tool for assessing the functionality of barangay VAW desks. The said policy document was used to assess the entity level of the said VAW desk (Table 2).

Table 2

Summary of the VAW desk functions and findings of the study

Functionalities of the VAW desk (Based on DILG MC No. 2017-114)	Findings of the study
<p>The VAW desk must be established, and the VAW desk officer must be designated through a barangay ordinance or an Executive Order (EO). The VAW desk officer designated must be trained in gender-sensitive handling of VAW cases. The VAW desk officer shall have a separate room for the intake interview.</p>	<p>The barangay designated all 105 VAW desk officers through the barangay ordinance. They also attended gender-sensitive handling of VAW cases courses offered by the city government through the CSSYDO, PNP, and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). Not all VAW desks are in a separate room for intake interviews, given the limited space of the barangay hall and the limited budget for the VAW desk office.</p>
<p>A functional barangay VAW desk shall have the basic equipment, furniture, vehicle, monitoring tools, and reference materials.</p>	<p>There are basic equipment and tools present but are incomplete in some barangays. Refer to Table 3 for specific equipment inventory.</p>
<p>The VAW desk shall have its budget for operation and services integrated into the approved Barangay Gender and Development (GAD) Plan and Budget, which shall be at least five percent (5%) of their budgetary allocation.</p>	<p>A portion of the five percent barangay GAD budget is allocated to the VAW desk offices' program, activities, or training. According to the CLGOO: "In other words, it is okay to get the budget there which can then be allocated for the functionality of their office." No policies discuss the distribution of the GAD Fund for the operation of the VAW desk office. The budget merely depends on the prioritization of the barangay, which is also based on the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) and the income of the barangay.</p>
<p>The barangay shall prepare and submit quarterly accomplishment reports to the City/Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer (C/MSWDO) and City/Municipal Local Government Operations Officer (C/MLGOO) within ten working days of the ensuing month.</p>	<p>As for the reporting of cases, the respondents were asked how often they submitted their reports and the results showed that most (61.9%) of them submitted monthly (Table 4).</p>

Table 3 below lists the summary of the VAW desk office items based on DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2017-114 (Guidelines in Monitoring the Functionality of VAW Desk in Every Barangay) present in 46 out of 54 barangays of the city included in the study. Results showed that the top five items that are present in the VAW desk offices are the monitoring logbook (95.65%), office tables (93.48%), VAW Desk Handbook (91.3%), and chairs (89.13%) and VAW forms (86.96%). On the other hand, the least common items that their VAW desks have are sofa bed/folding bed/mat (21.74%), camera (19.57%), and voice recorder (2.17%). These items are important to be present in the VAW desk offices for a comfortable place for the victim-survivor to discuss concerns and properly document the VAW cases reported.

Table 3
VAW desk office items present in the barangays³

VAW Desk Office Items	No. of Barangays	Percentage
Monitoring logbook	44	95.6
Office table	43	93.4
VAW desk handbook	42	91.3
Chair	41	89.1
VAW forms	40	86.9
Landline/mobile phone	36	78.2
Availability of vehicle	35	76.0
Filing cabinet/storage area	30	65.2
Separate room for intake interview	29	63.0
First aid kit	26	56.5
List of service providers	20	43.4
Computer/typewriter	16	34.7
Sofa bed/folding bed/mat	10	21.7
Camera	9	19.5
Voice recorder	1	2.1

³ Only 46 out of 54 barangays answered this survey

Although all the 54 barangays in Calamba city have established their VAW desk offices, the CLGOO, Ms. Lenie Baustista, acknowledged that some offices lack equipment. She said: “Not all barangay VAW desk offices have all the equipment required for a VAW desk like having a sofa/mat/bed.” It is due to budget limitations and prioritization of the barangays in the GAD budget allocation. Some of the respondents stated they still lack equipment because they have no budget for it, or the items are

still under approval or still being proposed in their plans.

In terms of report submissions, VAW desk offices must submit monthly reports to DILG, PNP, and CSSYDO/DSWD. The DILG then submits the report quarterly to the provincial office. Ms. Bautista says, “Our role is only to monitor those reports submitted by PNP and the barangay. Then we report this to the provincial office quarterly”.

Table 4
Frequency of the report submission of the respondents

Submission Dates	Frequency	Percentage
Monthly	65	61.9
Quarterly	4	3.8
Monthly and quarterly	33	31.4
No answer	3	2.9
Total	105	10

It follows the process mentioned in the handbook. It is stated in three steps: 1) combine and organize the details from the VAW Docs Form, (2) prepare a written report using the monthly reporting form, and (3) submit it to the C/MSWDO and City/Municipal Local Government Office. According to the handbook, the written reports should be submitted quarterly.

Individual Level

Qualifications of VAW Desk Officers. Applicants should be qualified for their

position in any organization. According to Alaqueel (2016), it is the duty of the human resource department (HRD) to hire the right candidates for specific jobs with the most efficient use of an organization’s resources. In a study by Ekwoaba et al. (2015), finding competent workers is an important organizational challenge; the most challenging is recruiting and selecting employees with the correct qualifications to help achieve organizational goals. In the case of the recruitment of VAW desk officers, the barangay captain acts as the human resource

personnel. Therefore, the barangay captain has the power to appoint the officers as stated in Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) 2010-2 (Section 2.2. Designation of VAW Desk Officer). However, the JMC did not provide specific rules about the qualifications of VAW desk officers. For example, age and education were not mentioned among the requirements.

The only competencies and attributes that the Barangay VAW desk handbook

(Philippine Commission on Women, 2012) explained are for officers to be properly and be thoroughly educated on gender-based violence. In addition, the Women’s Crisis Center developed the following Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Habits, and Ethics of Work (KASHEW) that could be used as guidelines for choosing VAW Desk Officers, some of which are listed below (Table 5).

Table 5
Suggested characteristics of VAW desk officers

Aspect	Characteristics
Knowledge	Nature and dynamics of gender Crisis intervention Victim mindset
Attitude	Unconditional acceptance Empathy Nonjudgmental
Skills	Assessment Interviewing and recording Communication
Habits and Ethics of Work	Genuine concern for the client Firm commitment to end VAW and family violence Observes confidentiality

Source: Philippine Commission on Women (2012)

Even though there are suggested characteristics included in the VAW desk handbook, the CLGOO acknowledged that political reasons and the barangay captain’s background sometimes play a big part in the

selection of VAW desk officers. Ms. Bautista further explained: “*Sometimes because of political background, the politicians play a big role in the appointment (of VAW desk officer). They choose someone from their*

party even if they are already old.” It might have implications in future cases where the barangay captain or the party members are possible suspects or perpetrators of the VAW cases.

Survey results revealed that some of the VAW desk officers were already oriented on how to perform their job through previous training and seminars. For example, one respondent (Respondent 57) shared that from proper training and seminars: *“We are enlightened and become more knowledgeable about the role to perform on the VAW desk.”* On the other hand, another respondent (Respondent 41) said that the barangay captain oriented her on the responsibilities, *“even before I became a VAW desk officer, the barangay captain already oriented me about the task.”*

Nevertheless, when Ms. Bautista was asked about the orientation of the newly hired VAW desk officer, she said:

“Usually, it is the city government that calls for the training and orientation. The barangay will not initiate their own training since there is only one VAW desk officer. The VAW desk officer still must wait for the PNP or DSWD training. An innovation in the city is they formed a League of VAW Desk (officers) which conducts quarterly meetings. The information, education, and communication (IEC) materials also add to their knowledge during their meetings.”

Roles and Functions of VAW Desk Officers. Figure 4 shows the responses of the VAW officers to an open-ended question about their awareness of their roles as VAW desk officers. Most of their responses fall under four categories which are to respond to violence cases (45), assist victims of VAW (35), record number of cases (19), and coordinate and refer cases (4). Some of the statements of the respondents supporting this are listed below:

“We hear and respond to cases regarding women and children being abused.”
(Respondent 22)

“As VAW desk officers, we assist children and women being abused.”
(Respondent 18)

Noticeably, out of the seven tasks of VAW desk officers stated in Section 12 D, Rule IV of the Implementing Rules and Regulation (IRR) of the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), no response answered three categories which are ‘to develop a plan;’ ‘address other forms of abuse;’ and ‘lead advocacies.’ The VAW desk officers are more reactive and responsive to VAW cases than proactive in advocating, developing, and leading VAW prevention activities. The latter behavior of being proactive involves creating change, not merely anticipating it, and taking the initiative to improve the organization’s performance (Bateman & Crant, 1999). Thus, it is better to be proactive since, aside from responding to VAW cases which is the main role of the

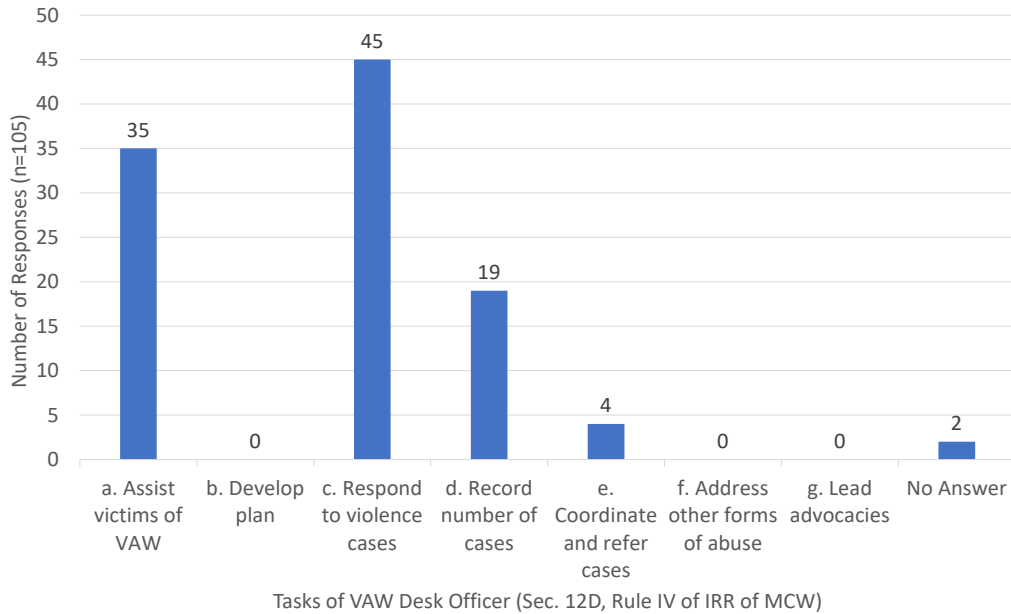


Figure 4. Awareness of respondents on their roles as VAW desk officers

VAW desk officers, they would be able to focus more on prevention and addressing the root cause of the problem. To further reiterate, Ms. Emma Balmes, the president of the group of barangays VAW desk officers of the city shared:

“If the victim-survivor goes to the barangay hall, the women’s desk assists as to what kind of cases could be filed to the abusive spouse, live-in partner, or relationship partner.”

One of the roles of VAW desk officers is to respond to gender-based violence cases brought to the barangay. When respondents were asked about their role in resolving such cases, some stated they served as mediators and counselors, orienting the victim-survivor on their rights; and assisting

them with other government agencies like PNP and DSWD. It is supported by some responses from the VAW desk officers interviewed in this study.

“As VAW desk officers, we are the ones mediating on the complainant and the accused. When the two sides already agreed, we prepare a document on their agreement which they will also sign.” (Respondent 48)

“We record and discuss the case to the complainant and the accused for it to be resolved.” (Respondent 87)

“We discuss the case with the complainant and the accused if it is not severe but if it is severe, we assist them to the policewomen’s desk.” (Respondent 27)

“We discuss the case with both parties and their rights.” (Respondent 1)

“If there are cases that the man often battered his partner, we ask them to separate all the more if they are not married.” (Respondent 98)

However, as discussed in the VAW desk handbook (2012), Rule VIII of the IRR of RA 9262 explicitly prohibits mediation of VAW cases. It is based on the premise that VAW happens because of unequal power relations between men and women. Mediation between unequal parties may result in men imposing their will and control over women. Moreover, barangay officials who initiate mediation or reconciliation will be administratively liable. The CLGOO stated that there should be no mediation of VAW cases, and if the client wants it mediated, they can do this through the *Katarungang Pambarangay* (Barangay Courts). Ms. Bautista emphasized that “There should be no settlement. If the victim-survivor is not suing for the spouse, that means it should not enter the VAW record. They can be referred to =the Lupon ng Katarungang Pambarangay)”. The *Katarungang Pambarangay* is a body that allows the mediation of complaints at the barangay level. However, the older mediation and counseling protocols at the barangay level are still predominant, as found in this study, as most VAW desk officers are guided by the barangay officials who try to reconcile the two parties and commonly view VAW issues as personal and marital challenges (David et al., 2018).

The respondents mentioned that they coordinate and refer cases. VAW desk officers also monitor the implementation of curfew hours and referral of violators to community service. It focuses on children and youth as the VAW desk officers also look after violence against children and youth.

Facilitating Factors

Respondents mentioned the critical role of their skill and attitude in proper case handling. As one respondent (Respondent 48) noted, the job requires much patience in attending to their clients— “It requires a lot of patience. Be calm when talking to people approaching our office.” The completeness of VAW desk facilities also motivates the VAW desk officers in doing their duties. As a respondent (Respondent 105) noted, “Having a proper office and complete equipment helps us in doing our tasks.” Lastly, the seminars and training provide a platform for them to be more knowledgeable in their decision-making. As one of the respondents (Respondent 2) shared: “The seminars help us learn best practices in handling cases. We could ask or call the president of the group of VAW desk officers of the city when we have clarifications about our tasks.” A few respondents also stated that the support of the barangay officials is a crucial factor that motivates them to do their job.

Hindering Factors

The most common response given on factors that hinder the VAW desk officers in performing their job was the presence

of meddlers. A respondent noted that these meddlers interfere with the proper handling of cases brought to the VAW desk (Respondent 75). Another respondent (Respondent 105) mentioned that these meddlers are mostly not fully aware of the event's details yet try to influence the process or the people affected by the case. As Step 4 in the protocols and procedures of the VAW desk handbook (2012) states, it should only be the barangay captain or councilor assisted by the VAW desk officers who should interview the victim-survivor. It further emphasizes the need for a private space or a separate intake room.

Another factor that hinders the VAW desk officer's proper performance is the complainant's demeanor, who is either uncooperative or impatient ('hot-headed'). It impedes the smooth and immediate resolution of the case. Lastly, the lack of funds and facilities were also mentioned as hindrances to the task performance of VAW desk officers. As one respondent emphasized, "*If only I have my own office, other people would not interfere and meddle in the process of hearing the cases*" (Respondent 74). Since VAW desks handle gender-sensitive issues, the officers must ensure that the victim-survivor is comfortable in a safe and private room or area to protect their confidentiality.⁴ To summarize, the last section discusses the conclusion and recommendations, including an illustration of the revised multi-level assessment framework of the study.

4 Based on Step 1 of the protocols and procedures of the VAW Desk Handbook (2012).

CONCLUSION

This study reviewed the performance of VAW desks in the Philippines using a multi-level framework that looked at the systems, entity, and individual levels. Results indicated that this approach provides a more holistic assessment of the dynamics of task performance of VAW desk officers and compliance of VAW desks to ensure the protection of women and children against various forms of abuse and violence at the community level. All the national VAW laws and policies are currently adopted and implemented by Calamba City. These are supported by a local city ordinance focusing on establishing VAW desk offices in all their barangays. All 54 barangays of the city have already established their VAW desk offices. They are also compliant in appointing VAW desk officers in all the city's barangays. Figure 5 shows the revised multi-level framework highlighting the various facilitating variables that shape the environment at each level to capture the complex network of factors and forces that lead to current practices and problems.

The study's contribution was mainly identifying the facilitating variables that promote effective multi-level management of VAW in an area. Figure 5 indicates the specific facilitating variables between each level. It also indicated the per-level critical success indicators in the case of Calamba City, Laguna. It could also inform other local government units (LGUs) working on addressing VAW. The study also identified capacity gaps concerning implementing VAW policies at the local level. First, at

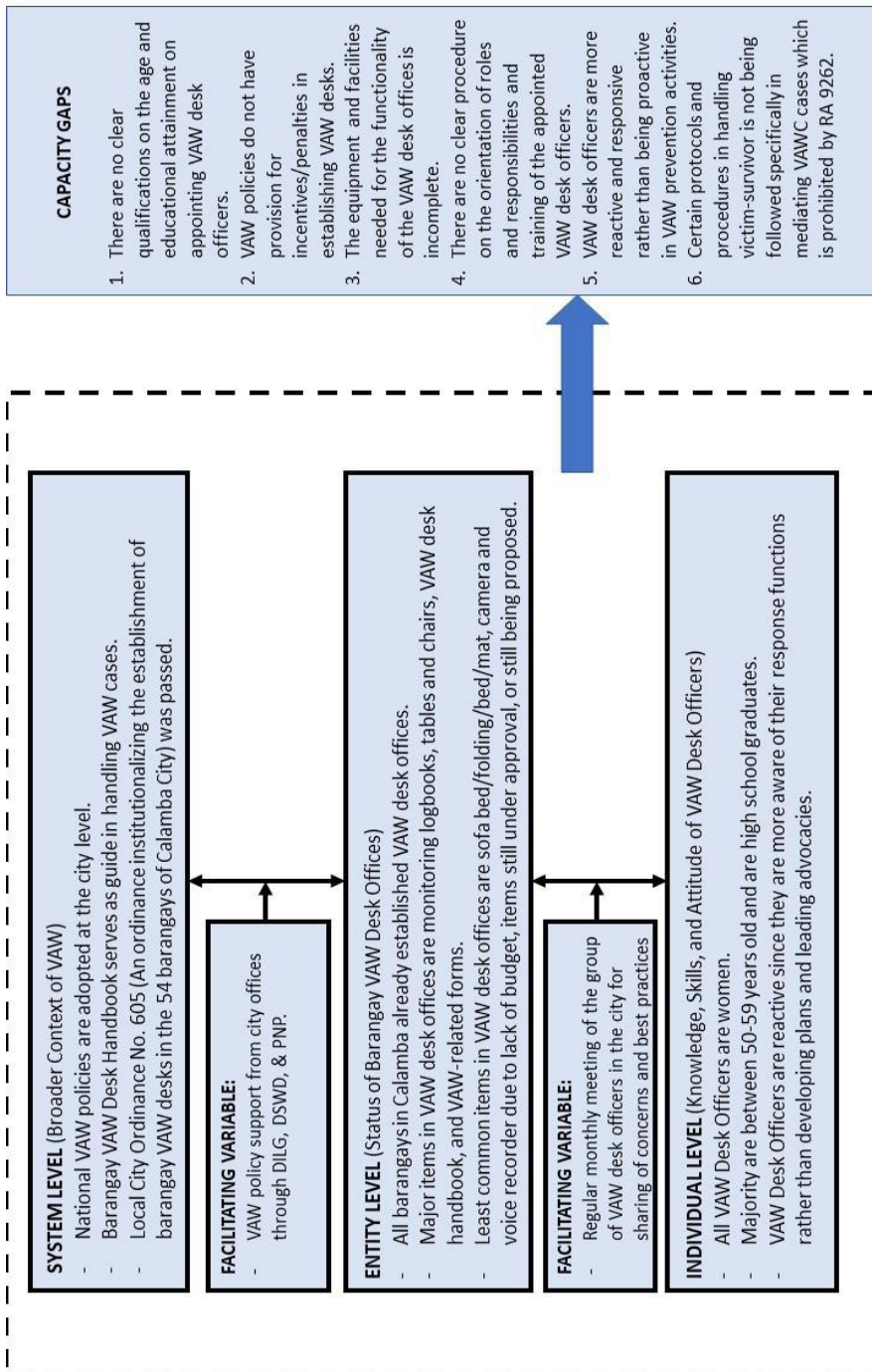


Figure 5. Revised multi-level assessment framework of the study

the system level, the national and local policies do not explicitly state the specific qualifications of a VAW desk officer, which will help identify qualified and competent VAW desk officers in the barangay. For example, there are no exact age and educational attainment qualifications for appointing VAW desk officers. Next, the VAW policies do not have provisions for incentives in establishing a local VAW desk or penalties for non-compliance. Thus, it relies on the priorities and support of local officials. Finally, at the entity level, the equipment and facilities needed for the functionality of the VAW desk offices remain to be incomplete, particularly equipment that would support better documentation (i.e., camera, voice recorder) and ensure the privacy of women and children's complainants (i.e., private room; sofa/chair for interviews). It is primarily due to a lack of funds at the barangay level. There is also no clear local system and schedules for orienting the appointed VAW desk officers' roles, responsibilities, and training. Local training relies on what the national or city government offers.

Lastly, at the individual level, the VAW desk officers are more reactive and responsive to VAW cases than proactive in advocating, developing, and leading VAW prevention activities. The latter behavior of being proactive is better since they would be able to focus more on prevention and addressing the root cause of the problem. However, some respondents admitted that certain protocols and procedures in handling victim-survivor are not being followed

specifically in mediating VAW cases which is prohibited by RA 9262. In addition, there is a need to improve the task performance of VAW desk officers in their GAD and VAW advocacy roles. However, the study also identified an innovative strategy of the City of Calamba in organizing an informal group of VAW desk officers of the city that serve as a network for the officers for co-learning and local consultation.

This study identified several recommendations based on the research findings, which surfaced by understanding the multi-level dynamics of VAW desk services implementation. The findings showed that adoption, monitoring, and enforcement of policies and programs are critical emergent properties that affect the local VAW desk officers' tasks, performance, and services offered to victims who come forward for assistance against an abuser or perpetrator. As the city government adopted the national policy to establish VAW Desks in all barangays, there is also a need to integrate local context, such as the inclusion of specific qualifications and maximize the role of the informal group of VAW desk officers in capacity building and advocacy for VAW. This network could also be institutionalized and be replicated in other areas to promote co-learning and sharing of best practices among VAW desk officers. In addition, the partnership with other women empowerment groups or civil society working on similar advocacies should be explored to help local areas in their advocacy roles. Also, the city government could devise financing schemes

to support barangays with low incomes. In terms of monitoring, most VAW desks and local government officers are compliant with submitting reports to higher-level offices. However, feedback should be strengthened by using this data to improve policy and support programs like capacity building or provision of equipment to the barangay VAW desks. Lastly, enforcement of the policy and program provisions should be improved. Rewards and penalties should be designed and implemented to motivate the proper functioning of all barangay VAW desks in a local area.

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