

# When Help Falls Short: Systemic Loopholes in Handling VAWC Across Community Stakeholders

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## Abstract

This research assessed the process, performance, and operational gaps in inter-agency collaboration of the Philippine National Police (PNP) through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Barangay officials in responding to Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases in Cabanatuan City. A descriptive-correlational design was applied, and data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews from 150 PNP members, 29 DSWD staff, and 89 barangay VAWC staff. The findings indicated that, despite observed inter-agency process, there remain crucial concerns in coordination, knowledge gap,

and service delivery. Particularly, barangay-level personnel were not adequately trained, whereas the coordination between the said PNP and DSWD was occasionally delayed and influenced case management. Statistical analysis reinforced significant gaps in perceived procedural effectiveness and revealed widespread structural inefficiencies. An improved inter-agency plan is suggested with particular training, improved coordination procedures, and enhanced logistical support. These findings stress the necessity for a systemic, responsive, and localized response to VAWC.

**Keywords:** *Inter-agency collaboration, Violence Against Women and Children, PNP, DSWD, Barangay, procedural gaps, community protection*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most prevalent human rights violations, both locally and globally, is violence against women and children (VAWC). It incorporates physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, frequently occurring in domestic or intimate environments. Republic Act No. 9262, also known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, in the Philippines, acknowledges the severity of this issue. This law defines Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) and prescribes protective measures for the victims, which are in the interest of women in the community. The continuation of violence in many communities despite the existence of such legislation can be explained by systemic inefficiencies, inadequate awareness, and sociocultural constraints that impede the overall enforcement of the law (Richie, 2022).

VAWC is primarily handled by the Philippine National Police (PNP), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and municipal barangays, as shown in different studies and reports global and local. The law prescribes the specific functions of each institution. The Philippine National Police (PNP) Women and Children Protection Desks (WCPDs) are responsible for accepting VAWC complaints, investigation, and protection of victims (Respicio, 2025) many years ago. In the interim, DSWD facilitates referrals to appropriate facilities, provides psychosocial services, shelter, and legal assistance (Vizconde, 2020; Polintan, 2021). The immediate response organizations within the community are anticipated to be the Barangay VAW Desks, which were established under DILG guidelines and are supported by R.A. 9262 and R.A. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women). Nevertheless, empirical observations indicate that barangay officials frequently lack the requisite training, resources, and knowledge to effectively manage intricate VAWC cases (Basaluddin, 2021).

One in four Filipino women aged 15–49 has been subjected to physical, emotional, or sexual assault by a partner, as per the Philippine Statistics Authority (2021). These alarming statistics are indicative of a pervasive gap in legal protection and service delivery, as well as a persistent culture of silence. Victims' hesitation to report abuse is exacerbated by factors such as economic dependency, family pressure, fear of retaliation, and inadequate enforcement (Aborisade, 2023). Additionally, the access of victims to timely support and justice is further complicated by geographic and logistical challenges, particularly in barangays (DSWD, 2020; Tenoria, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to examine the operational realities that the PNP, DSWD, and barangay officials in Cabanatuan City encounter when addressing VAWC cases. It investigates the institutional loopholes, performance, and procedures that influence their partnership by utilizing firsthand data from these agencies. This research endeavors to enhance the development of an interagency plan that is specifically tailored to the local requirements by identifying systemic bottlenecks and strengths. The Partnership Theory by McQuaid (2000), which emphasizes synergy and shared responsibility in public service delivery, underpins the study's analytical lens. In the process, the investigation evaluates institutional functions and contemplates the potential of effective collaboration to fortify grassroots VAWC responses.

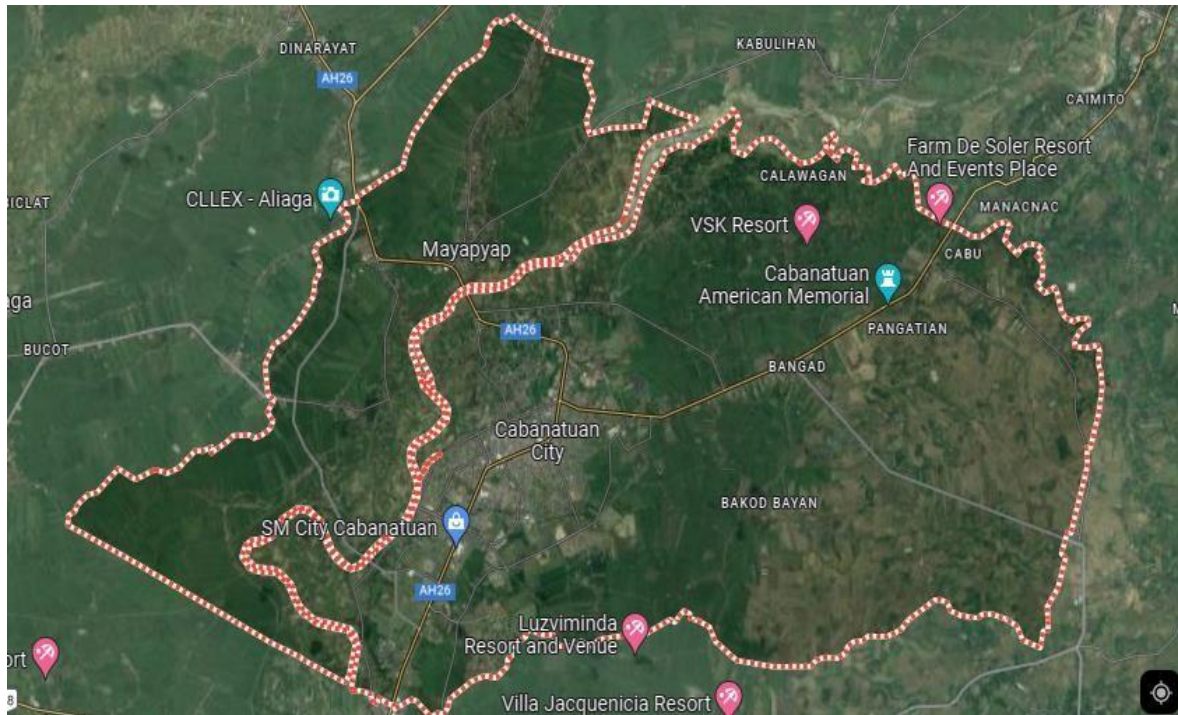
## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The descriptive-correlational quantitative research design was used in this study, which allowed the researcher to study current practices in a systematic manner, determine the frequency and efficacy of procedures, and examine the correlation between institutional roles and established gaps. The correlational aspect aimed to determine whether there are significant relationships between agency procedures (PNP, DSWD, Barangay) and perceived efficacy in the resolution of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases. This kind of design is appropriate in actual-life, practice-based research that has several stakeholders playing interdependent roles within the limits of the public service delivery.

### **Locale and Respondents**

The study was conducted in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, Philippines (Figure 1) covering all 89 barangays with a total 268 respondents which were selected because of their direct involvement in handling and responding to VAWC cases in the city (Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Geographical Area of the Study

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents by agency

Agency	Description of Role	No. of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Philippine National Police (PNP)	Assigned at the Women and Children Protection Desk; handles investigation and protection of VAWC cases	150	55.97%
Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)	Social workers handling psychosocial services, shelter, case management, and referral for VAWC survivors	29	10.82%
Barangay Officials	Designated VAWC Desk Officers in each barangay responsible for initial response, referral, and BPO issuance	89	33.21%
<b>Total</b>		<b>268</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Sampling Technique

Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling. This approach was deemed suitable because it enabled the researcher to identify individuals who possessed particular expertise that was

pertinent to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria for the Philippine National Police (PNP) mandated that respondents be uniformed personnel assigned to the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD), where they actively manage cases of violence against women and children. For the barangay sector, respondents were councilors or authorities who were officially designated as VAWC focal persons within their respective barangays. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) only included social workers who had at least one year of experience in managing VAWC-related cases. These criteria guaranteed that participants had the requisite experience and background to offer informed perspectives on the performance, interagency procedures, and vulnerabilities in VAWC case handling.

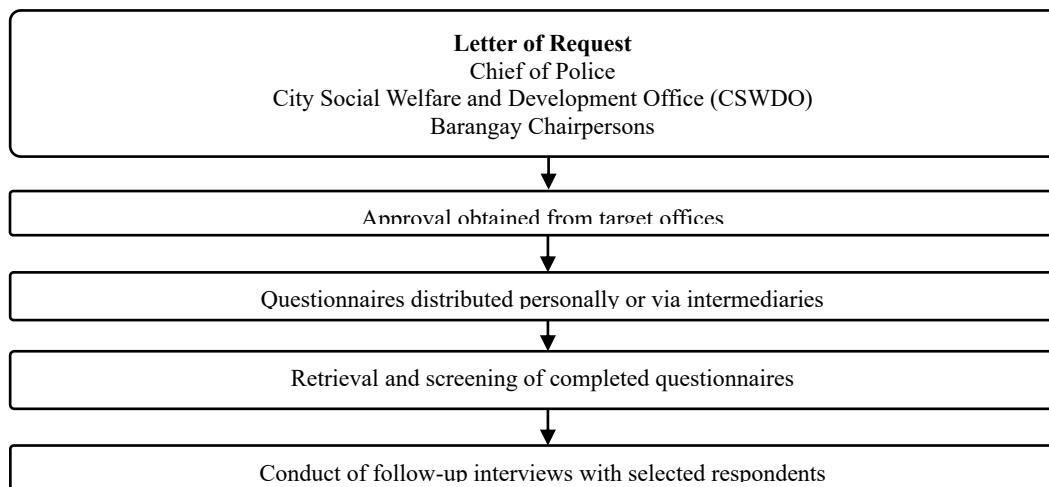
### Research Instrument

The research instrument used for data gathering was the questionnaire form developed by adapting the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children (IACVAWC) Joint Memorandum Circular with appropriate VAWC handling guidelines. The instrument was composed of three parts: Part I solicited the demographic profiles of the respondents such as age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and years in service; Part II inquired on the evaluation of the procedure and performance of the authorities -- Philippine National Police (PNP), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Barangay officials of the PNP, DSWD and Barangay officials in the management of VAWC cases; and Part III determined the loopholes of the partnership among the three agencies. Responses were on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 4 ("Strongly Agree") to 1 ("Strongly Disagree"). To enrich the quantitative data and provide contextual depth, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with selected participants from each group. These interviews supported data triangulation and enhanced the interpretive validity of the findings.

### Instrument Validity and Reliability

The measure was content validated with a group of experts from the fields of social work, criminal justice, and academia. A pilot testing was conducted in a nearby town to 30 participants (10-PNP, 10-DSWD, and 10-Barangay officials). Internal consistency reliability was measured by Cronbach's Alpha, and produced a 0.952 coefficient, suggesting excellent consistency within the scale.

### Data Gathering Procedure



**Figure 2.** Data gathering flowchart of the study



## Data Analysis

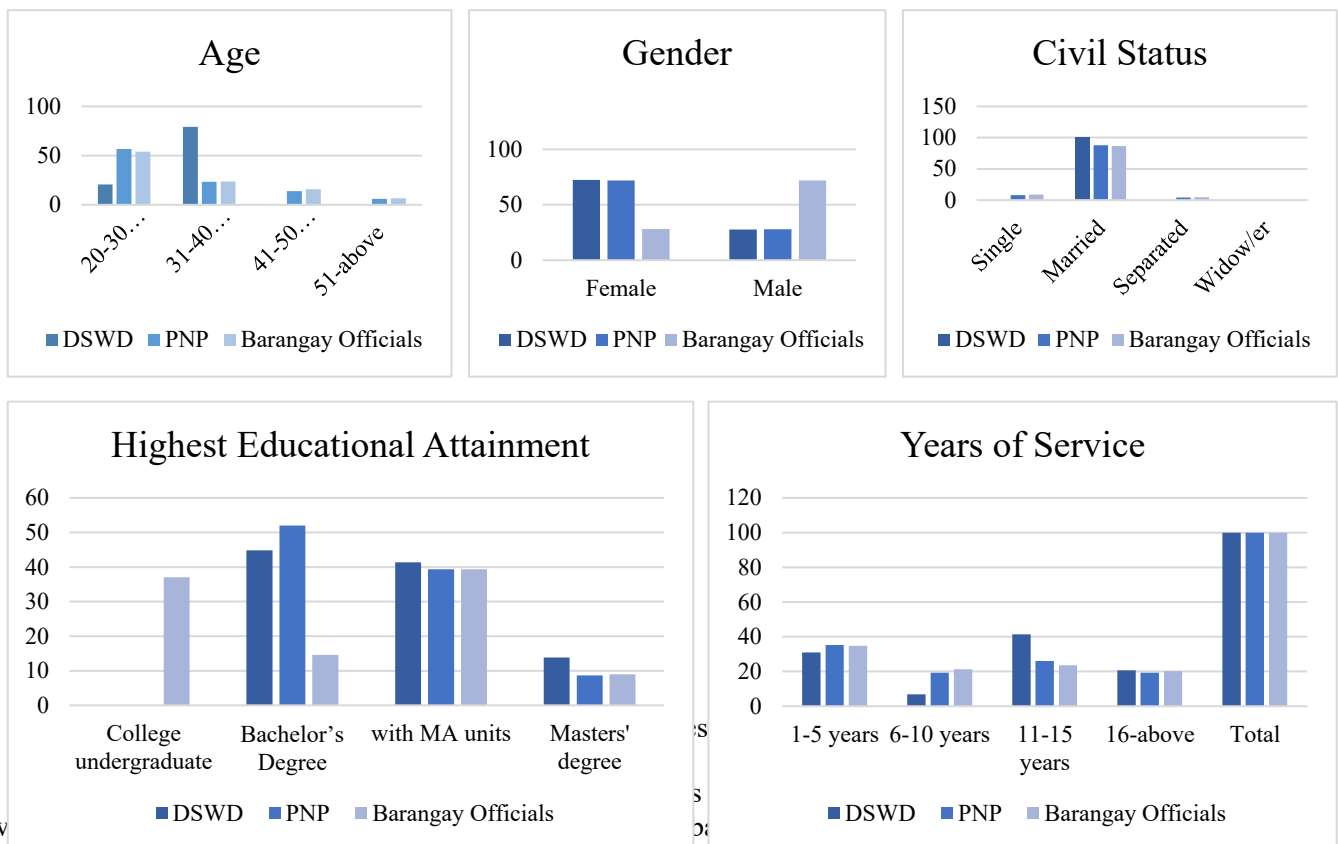
Statistical analyses Data were quantitatively processed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics methods. Demographic profiles of the respondents were summarized using frequency and percentage distributions, while weighted mean scores were computed to assess the perceptions of the respondents on procedures, performance and loopholes of the partnership among PNP, DSWD and Barangay officials in VAWC case handling. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the identified differences among the three groups of participants. P-values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant in all statistical tests of significance.

## Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to rigid set ethical standards to promote participants' rights and protection. Consent was obtained before data collection, with clear explanation of purpose, procedures, and voluntarism. The participants were assured freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To maintain privacy, all responses were anonymized using coded identifiers to ensure no individual participant's personal or sensitive information was traceable. Additionally, the research was carried out in complete accordance with institutional research ethics policy and guidelines.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of the Respondents



bracket, and DSWD respondents most likely falling in the 31-40 years bracket (79.31%). Female

representation was most likely high in both DSWD (72.41%) and PNP (72.00%), but barangay officials were most likely male (71.91%). Most were married and held a bachelor's degree, but a significant percentage of barangay officials were college undergraduates. Service years were varied, but more individuals indicated 1–5 years of experience, which is an indicator of relatively young but formally trained personnel in the agencies. These findings from the demographics provide important background against which to understand the capability of local inter-agency partners in managing VAWC cases.

### Partnership Practices in Handling VAWC Cases

**Table 2.** Procedures for partnership of PNP, DSWD, and Barangay in Handling VAWC

Procedures	DSWD (WM)	PNP (WM)	Barangay Officials (WM)
Perform duties under RA 9262 and RA 9710	3.38	3.59	3.54
Receive referrals from National Call Center	3.72	3.51	3.60
Record and keep database of VAWC cases	3.55	3.57	3.72
Provide police assistance for emergency calls	3.55	3.49	3.52
Direct referrals and coordinate with agencies	3.55	3.51	3.70
Assist in search and rescue operations	3.55	3.53	3.54
Assist in investigation and provide police security	3.03	3.43	3.62
Provide hotline and emergency communication	3.79	3.25	3.42
Treat victims with dignity and inform them	3.59	3.23	3.26
Ensure updated emergency contact numbers	3.07	3.20	3.18
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>3.51</b>

\*WM – Weighted Mean

Table 2 reveals that all three agencies received good overall ratings for compliance with the protocols as set forth in Republic Act 9262 and RA 9710. DSWD received the highest mean rating ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=0.40$ ), followed closely by Barangay Officials ( $M=3.51$ ,  $SD=0.34$ ) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ), and all of these fell under the "Strongly Agree" category. A fascinating finding is that the DSWD scored highest on the provision of gender-sensitive and child-friendly hotlines ( $M=3.79$ ), which speaks to their central role in response mechanisms. They scored lowest, however, on the provision of support to investigations and provision of police security ( $M=3.03$ ), which suggests that the potential for improvement exists in inter-agency cooperation in terms of legal processes. The Philippine National Police demonstrated high procedural compliance, particularly in compliance with laws to protect women and children ( $M=3.59$ ). Their score on routine updating of emergency contact numbers, however, was lower by comparison ( $M=3.20$ ). In terms of inter-agency referrals and coordination, barangay officials demonstrated a high level of engagement ( $M=3.70$ ). However, they also scored poorly on the update of emergency numbers ( $M=3.18$ ).

These conclusions were corroborated by qualitative data. The primary responsibility of DSWD respondents was to ensure that rescue operations and referrals are well-coordinated and expeditious, as they are the first line of support for victim-survivors. According to one respondent in this study, *"We ensure that each victim is accommodated and that we promptly respond to their calls in order to conduct rescue operations and guarantee their safety."* The Women and Children Protection Desks (WCPDs) are operative 24 hours a day, and PNP personnel have emphasized their responsibility. These units are responsible for validation and immediate protection; however, they frequently depend on DSWD for long-term welfare interventions, such as *"Our Women's Desk is open 24 hours."* We evaluate cases and determine whether to transfer them to DSWD for the appropriate program implementation. Barangay officials prefer to project themselves as the first point of contact and highlight their reliance on the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for legal procedures and expert support. *"We immediately call on the PNP for assistance and refer the case to ensure that the victim gets the proper legal and welfare assistance."* The research is in harmony with the Partnership Theory (McQuaid, 2000), which highlights the combined inputs of stakeholders in an interdisciplinary setup irrespective of the degree of participation by all stakeholders.

### Performance of Partner Agencies

**Table 3.** Performance of PNP, DSWD, and Barangay in Handling VAWC Cases

Performance	DSWD (WM)	PNP (WM)	Barangay Officials (WM)
Ensure implementation of response system	3.55	3.35	3.51
GAD programs and hotline access	3.34	3.36	3.42
Provide medical & psychosocial services	3.21	3.39	3.54
Coordinate with health offices	3.55	3.22	3.48
Operate women centers and shelters	3.48	3.06	3.70
Monitor active cases	3.14	3.06	3.35
Assist in referrals and coordination	3.21	3.19	3.49
Advocacy for hotline usage	2.86	3.17	3.33
Comprehensive recovery services	3.69	3.35	3.45
Assist in rescue and psychosocial services	3.14	3.43	3.52
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>3.48</b>

\*WM – Weighted Mean

In Table 3, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) revealed as the highest recovery and reintegration services rating (M=3.69) in the result, which aligns with its core function of giving shelter and psychosocial support. Monitoring active patients, however, had the lowest rating (M=3.14), which can be a sign of the lack of resources or inefficiency in the system. The Philippine National Police (PNP) had the highest rating in rescue operations and assistance (M=3.43), reflecting their core function in responding to emergencies. They, however, had the lowest rating in monitoring (M=3.06). Barangay officials were good at reintegration services (M=3.70); however, they were less effective in convincing people to use the hotline (M=3.33).

DSWD personnel expresses the different services that they offer by saying in their statements, *"We provide them with shelter and assist them in processing cases so they can receive justice."* PNP officers highlighted protection and case assistance, declaring, *"I safeguard them and assist them in processing"*

*cases.*" Still, some information suggests a bigger problem. People may not trust what the police do (Smith, 2019), which sometimes puts abused women in difficult situations because of the long legal processes that are required. Despite these problems, the fact that WCPDs exist shows that institutions are committed. Barangay leaders said they didn't have a lot of freedom to make decisions, but they worked well with higher-level agencies. Their function mostly involves recording and initial response, stating, *"We report cases to enable the PNP and DSWD to take appropriate actions for the victims."* These performance characteristics validate the significance of coordinated governance in addressing VAWC situations, particularly within a gender-responsive framework as advocated by Villar (2019) and Dela Rosa (2018).

### Identified Loopholes in the Partnership

**Table 4.** Loopholes in the Partnership of PNP, DSWD, and Barangay in Handling VAWC

Performance	DSWD (WM)	PNP (WM)	Barangay Officials (WM)
Loopholes	DSWD (WM)	PNP (WM)	Barangay Officials (WM)
Victims avoid legal/social remedies	3.21	3.28	3.42
Poor implementation due to manpower	3.34	3.35	3.47
Intimidation by influential people	3.62	3.15	3.35
Public unaware VAWC is HR violation	3.59	3.25	3.39
Barangay failed to mediate cases	3.69	3.29	3.43
Fear reporting will break family	3.24	3.15	3.33
Lack of training for social workers	3.21	3.28	3.40
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>3.40</b>

\*WM – Weighted Mean

Table 4 shows that DSWD staff thought the most important issue was that barangay units didn't mediate early enough, which made victims suffer for a long time (M=3.69). The lowest scores were for victims' unwillingness to talk about abuse and social workers' lack of training (M=3.21). Someone from the DSWD responded, *"We don't know where to begin because the barangay didn't write down all the facts of the case."* A lot of people (M=3.28) say that the PNP is worried that social workers aren't getting enough training. An officer said, *"We can't file strong cases because the DSWD doesn't have enough experience with VAWC cases."* The UNODC (2010) and Cultura et al. (2021) also found the same thing. This shows how hard it is for detectives when victims don't want to or can't give full disclosures because of trauma or shame. Officials from the barangay said that their biggest problem was that they didn't have enough workers in the field, so legal and social interventions weren't being done well (M=3.47). It was even worse that they didn't get enough chances to practice responding. *"We rarely get the seminars, training, or meetings we need to handle VAWC cases properly."* Because of all of these issues, it is clear that all frontline organizations need to keep getting better. In order for a partnership to work, everyone who provides services must be skilled and responsible at all levels.



**Table 5.** Difference between the assessment of groups of respondents to Partnership of PNP, DSWD and Barangay in Handling Violence against Women and Children

<b>Partnership of PNP, DSWD and Barangay in Handling Violence against Women and Children.</b>		
Respondents	Procedures	Performance
DSWD	3.46	3.32
PNP	3.43	3.26
Barangay Officials	3.51	3.48
<b>F value</b>	<b>F = 1.114; p&gt;0.05</b>	<b>F = 6.397; p&lt;0.05</b>
*Significant at 0.05 level		

Table 5 shows that there was no statistically significant difference between DSWD respondents ( $M = 3.46$ ), PNP respondents ( $M = 3.43$ ), and Barangay Officials ( $M = 3.51$ ) in their perception of the use of procedures to prevent violence against women and children (VAWC) ( $F = 1.114$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). However, there was a significant difference in their perception of performance ( $F = 6.397$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that the three agencies use the same set of protocols in procedures. The plausible explanation for this is that they all must work under the same legal system offered by institutions, like Republic Act 9262. The high level of variance in ratings for success, however, implies that people perceive differently what is effective in the delivery of services, and this can be the consequence of variations in role implementation, operating capacity, and outreach to the community. The higher rating by Barangay Officials could be due to direct contact with the victims at the community level, while the lower rating by PNP respondents could be an indication of system problems, such as insufficient personnel or a backlog of cases. These findings point to the need for the agencies to come to an accord on performance expectations and for coordination mechanisms to be strengthened so that the VAWC response is harmonized and effective.

**Table 6.** Difference between the loopholes experienced of PNP, DSWD and Barangay in Handling Violence against Women and Child

Respondents	Loopholes Experienced
DSWD	3.41
PNP	3.25
Barangay Officials	3.40
<b>F value</b>	<b>F = 2.003; p&gt;0.05</b>
*.Significant at 0.05 level	
Interpretation	

Table 6 is a comparison of perceived gaps in procedures and systems among the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Philippine National Police (PNP), and Barangay Officials in addressing violence against women and children (VAWC). Using the average scores, it was established that the DSWD ( $M=3.41$ ) and Barangay Officials ( $M=3.40$ ) saw slightly more gaps in procedures and systems than the PNP ( $M=3.25$ ). Using ANOVA, however, there are no significant differences among the three groups in the sense that their average perceptions are equal ( $F = 2.003$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The implication of this finding is that all the agencies are cognizant and have an equal understanding of the challenges they are encountering. Although various institutions may have slight differences in types and levels, the lack of

significant differences implies that challenges such as poor training, poor community-level implementation, and gaps in coordination are understood across agencies. In view of allowing more coordinated and effective response to cases of VAWC, these findings imply that institutional reform should focus more on the building of skills than the implementation of a series of uncoordinated interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that while the PNP, DSWD, and Barangay officials in Cabanatuan City Philippines follow the necessary processes when dealing with Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases in the said origin, there are still big problems with how they do their jobs and how well they work together as a system. All agencies knew and followed the same procedures that were based on laws like RA 9262 and RA 9710. However, performance ratings were not all the same. Barangay officials got better scores probably because they were closer to the community, while PNP staff got lower scores maybe because they were working harder. All agencies agreed that there were problems, like not enough staff, bad training, and weak community-level resolution. However, there was no statistically significant difference in how these problems were seen. These results show that there is a shared battle going on, not just a few institutional failures. They also show that the interagency VAWC response framework needs to be better at integrating, holding people accountable, and building up people's skills.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, it is suggested that there be a multi-level and collaborative intervention. Uniformed training programs on VAWC procedures at all levels, particularly for Barangay VAWC Desks, are needed to ensure uniform case handling and victim-sensitive practice. In addition, inter-agency coordination mechanisms need to be strengthened through the implementation of regular joint case conferences, referral audits, and evaluation encouraging mutual responsibility and procedure synergy. The local government unit of municipalities must also invest in terms of sufficient logistical and human resources, including legal and psychosocial support staff, to relieve the operational burden on frontline workers. A community education campaign must be implemented to overcome stigma, raise legal awareness, and empower victims to report abuse without fear. Local institutions can improve their response to violence against women and children by adopting a single, evidence-based approach emphasizing victim-centered and sustainable solutions.

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