

## **RESPONSES OF PNP WOMEN’S DESK OFFICERS’ TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

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### **Abstract**

The study mainly assessed the responses of WCPD officers on cases of violence against women. Further, the problems encountered during their responses were also highlighted. Survey questionnaire and interview were used to gather data from twenty three WCPD officers and five abused women from each city and municipality in Cavite. Findings revealed that RA 9262 (*Anti-Violence against Women and Children*) is the most common violation committed against women. Also, majority of the perception of the WCPD officers and abused women on the responses of the WCPD officers on cases of VAW are similar. During **initial response**, in terms of **receiving complaint**, officers basically ask the full name and address of the caller/abused women to establish their identity. In contrast, they cannot respond at the scene within 5 minutes due to unavailability of marked vehicle. In terms of **after call/complaint**, WCPD officers immediately call the attention of their co-officers to assist them. However, they do not often coordinate with the involved barangay. In the **arrival at the scene**, in case the abused woman was injured, officers advise her to undergo medico-legal examination, likewise, inquire on the nature of dispute for comprehensive investigation. However, they seldom execute arrest, because sometimes, perpetrator already escaped or the dispute is already settled. Further, in the **conduct of interview**, asking question at a time and free narrative were the strategies of officers to give abused women the time to answer each question. In contrast, WCPD officers seldom use gadgets that would facilitate the interview because of its unavailability. On the other hand, in **filing the complaint**, it indicated contradicting perceptions. For WCPD officers, they acquire copies of marriage contract and birth certificate since most of the cases involved marital violence while for abused women, they highly perceived that medical records is the most requested document. The problems encountered by WCPD officers in responding to VAW cases are: uncooperativeness of the caller/complainant, unavailability of facilities and WCPD officer inadequacy of knowledge on laws result to slow police service.

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**Keywords:** Violence against women, PNP women’s desk officers’, initial response, receiving complaint, after call/complaint, arrival at the scene, conduct of interview, filing the complaint

## **Introduction**

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defined “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 in private life” (p.1 as cited in UNODC, 2010).

It may take place whenever there is an imbalance of power relationship which oftentimes, men imposed of their masculinity and now became their traditional and cultural trademark. Since, then, violence against women is now a global issue of all societies (Handbook on effective police response to violence against women, 2010).

In many societies, it is difficult for a woman to report violence and pursue legal action because of the following reasons: fear for her own safety and safety of her children; fear that her children will be apprehended or taken away by the husband; influence of her extended family, emotional attachment and loyalty to the abuser; low self-esteem and self-blame; religious values or pressure from cultural community; economic dependency on the abuser; and lack of legal information about their rights and laws. On the other hand, authorities are one of the factors why abused woman does not report the crime (Violence against women in relationships: information bulletin for police, 2006). Some people think that police’s action is always characterized by distrust and tension (Sadusky, 2001). Police officers always demand the battered women to give factual information through a thorough investigation to pursue the case. This is because once the case is filed in the court dropping off the case would no longer be possible. This put the abused women in significant dilemmas as they weigh the consequences of their actions (Sadusky, 2001). Furthermore, according to Annan (1999), as cited by Sadusky (2001), abused women only think that police protection and presence may only give negative impact on their communities since violence against women is the most shameful human rights violation.

The police officers are known as being the first respondents of the five pillars of the criminal justice system. They are often called upon to intervene when an act of violence is in progress or shortly after it has occurred. Police officers work with victims, offenders, witnesses and various forms of evidence. Their response can have a dramatic impact on ensuing developments, including the prevention of future violent acts and the protection of victims (Handbook on effective police response to violence against women, 2010). The functions of police officers are very wide in scope. It is hard for them to take all these actions to have positive outcome and giving the victim justice from such abuse.

The roles of PNP in responding to crimes have long been under criticism for not doing enough effort to protect women from violence and for an often a pathetic response towards the problem. Hence, this study found in depth investigation as to how police officers respond to the cases of violence against women so as to design a program for an effective response based on the findings of the study.

## **Objectives of the study**

This study aimed to assess the responses of PNP Women’s Desk officers to cases of violence against women in Cavite.

Specifically, this study intended to:

1. identify the common types of violence committed against women in Cavite;
2. assess the responses of PNP women’s desk officers’ to cases of violence against women as perceived by PNP women’s desk officers’;
3. assess the responses of PNP women’s desk officers’ to cases of violence against women as perceived by abused victims; and

4. determine the problems encountered by the PNP Women's desk officer in responding to the cases of violence against women.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study applied descriptive – correlational method in order to analyze data. Correlational method is used to describe what exist at the moment. This includes data gathering in order to determine the extent and relationship of variables (Descriptive research, nd)

### **Participants of the Study**

The study involved abused women and PNP women's desk officers assigned in cities and municipalities in the province of Cavite. This study involved risk since the PNP women's desk officers exposed their actual services in responding to cases of violence against women and abused women assessed the actual services given to them by the PNP Women's desk officers. In the observance of confidentiality, the names of the participants were not mentioned.

### **Research Instrument**

A self-made questionnaire which is based on the Model Strategies of Effective Police Response to Violence Against Women presented by United Nations Office in Drugs and Crime (UNDOC); 2) Domestic Violence: Best Practices for Law Enforcement's Response obtained by North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission; 3) PNP in responding to a Domestic Violence Complaint cited in the Training Manual on the Investigation of Crimes Involving Women and Children, were used in order to identify the responses of the PNP Women's desk officers in terms of their initial response, conduct of interview and the filing of the case in prosecution as perceived by PNP women's desk officers and abused women. It is composed of three parts: Part 1 (Practice on Receiving Calls and Complaints/Initial Response, Part 2 (Practice on Interviewing) and Part 3 (Practice on filing the case to the prosecution). This questionnaire is a checklist wherein all possible ways of responding to an act of violence are included. Another set of questions was given in order to determine the problems encountered by PNP women's desk officers and abused women during the response on cases of violence against women. These questionnaires were pilot-tested by the researchers to gain optimum results from the subjects.

Interview was also used to supplement the data collected from survey questionnaire and to have a deeper and clearer interpretation of subjects' responses.

### **Validation of the Instrument**

The following procedures were observed to test the validity and reliability of the designed research instruments for the subjects:

- a. Content Validation

To evaluate whether the items included in the questionnaires would match the objectives of this study, three experts in the field of women's violence were asked to review and evaluate the instruments.

- b. Reliability

To test the reliability of the self-made questionnaire, three police officers and three officers from Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), were asked to participate in the dry-run of the questionnaire. After a week, the same sets of participants were asked to answer again the questionnaires (post-test). After retrieving the questionnaires, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Z-Test was used to compare the pretest and post-test results.

## Data Gathering Procedure

A letter of request was prepared by the researchers to ask permission from the Police Provincial Office of Cavite for the conduct of the study. Upon approval of the request, another letter of request was sent to the Chief of Police and the subjects. After securing permission from the subjects/respondents, the schedule of duty of each subject was taken so as to start the data gathering. The researchers explained to the subjects the nature of the study and what they will expect during the conduct of the study. Self-made questionnaire was accomplished by the participants in WCPD office.

## Results and discussion

### Common Types of Violence Committed Against Women in Cavite

RA 9262 (*Anti-Violence Against Women and Children*) obtained the highest reported cases with 201 complainants. This particular violence refers to any act or series of acts committed by any person against a woman whom he has legal, sexual and/or dating relationship. It may be in the form of physical, sexual, psychological and economical abuse (*Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children*, 2004). The violence roots from relationship of an individual to another. According to Chalabi and Holder (2013) and Heise et al (1999) “domestic violence” is the most common crime committed by an intimate partner or ex-partner to his woman.

### Initial Response of Women’s Desk Officer

The initial response of women’s desk officer comprised the following: 1) receiving calls/complaints; 2) after call; and 3) arrival at the scene. In general, it got a verbal interpretation of *Always*.

#### Receiving calls/complaints

In terms of **receiving calls/complaints**, asking basic information such as the full name of the caller/abused woman and the address where the incident happened got the highest mean score of 5.0 with verbal interpretation of *Always*.

During the initial response, it is a protocol for the WCPD officer to ask for the full name of the caller/abused woman to establish his/her identity. This may also hinder false callers. Furthermore, location where the crime happened is also asked. This will determine: whether or not the PNP station has jurisdiction over the offense committed; patrol officer/s to be contacted who can respond more immediately; and assess the safety of the WCPD officer and her team at the scene (PNP Manual, 2010).

In contrast, responding to the scene within 5 minutes from the time the call assistance was made was perceived to be the lowest, with verbal interpretation of 4.30. Based on the interviews conducted to WCPD officers, the unavailability of PNP marked vehicle is one of their major problems in promptly responding to the scene. Furthermore, the distance and traffic condition going to the location of the scene are unpreventable and cannot be predicted in most cases.

#### After call/complaint

In terms of **after call/complaint**, WCPD officers *always* call the attention of all responsible people to conduct the operation. It actually got the highest mean score of 4.83. This shows that WCPD officers give their full attention to every complaint especially when it is considered as an emergency or requires immediate response.

On the other hand, coordination with the barangay got the lowest mean score of 4.65 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. This is due to the fact that most of the complaints reported to them do not require an emergency response but fall under the jurisdiction of respective barangay. Thus, WCPD officers opted not to personally coordinate the complaint with the barangay but rather advise the abused women to settle the dispute in their barangays.

### Arrival at the scene

In the **arrival at the scene**, in case the abused woman and perpetrator are in physical contact, the advice of WCPD officers to the abused women to undergo medico-legal examination got the highest mean score of 5.00. The fact that most of the cases handled by WCPD officers are forms of abuse such as physical abuse, these should be properly assessed by medico-legal physician to give weight to the injuries inflicted as evidence in the court. In a research titled “Medical Examinations on the Cases of Child Abuse” (1996), undergoing of abused women to medico-legal examination helps in the prosecution of the case by providing evidence of abuse as determined by the doctor.

However, in case of major injury, notification of emergency medical service by the WCPD officers got the lowest mean score of 4.70 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. This is because most of the injuries inflicted to the abused women are minor such as bruises and wounds which do not pose greater injury if not given first aid. That is why, WCPD officers tend not to notify medical service and just proceed with their investigation, giving only emphasis on the wounds in their reports.

In case the perpetrator is not present when the team arrived at the scene, WCPD officers *always* inquire on the nature of dispute. It got the highest mean score of 4.91. Due to the absence of threat to the safety of the abused women, inquiry to the nature of dispute can be done immediately. This gives light in the conduct of investigation

In contrast, arrest of the perpetrator got the lowest mean score of 4.48 but still with verbal interpretation *Always*. The delayed response at the scene prevents the arrest of the perpetrator. Another fact is that, majority of the complaints received by WCPD officers does not necessitate an arrest.

### Conduct of Interview of Women’s Desk Officer

The conduct of interview as perceived by WCPD officers got a total mean score of 4.73 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. Giving opening statements such as “Tell me about...” and asking question at a time got the highest mean score of the highest mean score of 4.91 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. As suggested by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010), interviewing the abused woman follows a specific plan. In most of the cases, free narrative is used so that the abused woman can openly give detailed information without much questions from the interviewer. Hence, the nature of the interview is to make the abused woman talk without interruptions. It is important to note that this idea is practiced and given emphasis by WCPD officers to gather material and accurate statements, thus, lead to the success of the investigation.

On the other hand, the use gadgets in recording the interview such as recorder got the lowest mean score of 3.57 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. Insufficiency of technological equipment could be the reason why it appeared to be the lowest. Also, WCPD officers could have overlooked the importance of the use of recorder during the interview. According to the National Institute of Justice (2014), new technologies make police services delivered easily and effectively.

### Filing the Complaint

On filing of complaint, it got a total mean score of 4.90 with verbal interpretation of *Always*, as perceived by WCPD officers. Since, most of the complaints involved marital abuse and violence against children, acquisition of copies of marriage contract of the abused woman and birth certificate of the children involved got the highest mean score of 4.96. According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2014), birth certificate is an official recording of a child’s existence and by his/her existence, the child is entitled to have his/his/her civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights protected by the government.

However, taking photograph of injuries inflicted to the abused woman got the lowest mean score of 4.83 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. This is due to the insufficiency of technical equipment such as camera. Moreover, since medico-legal examination will be done, the WCPD officers can use the result of such examination as evidence in court which is stronger than mere photographs.

### **Initial Response of Women's Desk Officer as Perceived by Abused Women**

With reference to initial response of WCPD officers on the cases of VAW as perceived by abused women, it has a total mean score of 4.49 with verbal interpretation of *Always*.

In terms of **receiving call/complaint**, basic inquiries on the name of the caller/abused woman and the full address where the incident happened got the highest mean score of 4.75 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. It shows that WCPD officers give more importance in getting the full name of the caller/abused woman. This information is basic and necessary to initially start their actions.

In contrast, responding to the scene within 5 minutes from the time the call/complaint assistance was made got the lowest mean score of 3.79 with verbal interpretation of *Often*. It could be noted that their perception is similar with that of the WCPD officers. This is because they already experienced the unavailability of marked vehicle. Also, the distance and traffic condition from the station to the location of the scene add to their struggle of arriving at the scene on time.

In terms of **after the complaint**, it is significant to remember that abused women who personally proceed to the police station to report their complaint and ask for assistance are the only ones knowledgeable and could perceive what will happen after they complained. Calling the attention of PNP officers before getting at the scene got the highest mean score of 4.75 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. It only implies that WCPD officers are eager to ask the assistance of their co-officers to attend the complaint.

On the **arrival at the scene**, in cases where the abused woman and the perpetrator are in physical contact, assessment of minor injuries inflicted to the abused woman, advice the abused woman to undergo medico-legal examination and notification of emergency medical services in case of major injuries got the highest mean score of 4.58 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. After the inquiries and interviews related to the case and recording of the necessary information, the WCPD officer often advise the abused woman to go to the nearest PNP-Scene of the Crime Operatives (PNP-SOCO) laboratory or government accredited hospital to undergo medical examination. But, in cases where major injury is inflicted, the WCPD officer calls for emergency medical services and bring the abused women to the hospital.

In cases where the abused woman and the perpetrator are not in physical contact, inquiry on the nature of dispute got the highest mean score of 4.61 with the verbal interpretation of *Always*. Inquiring on the nature of dispute is very important for it makes the WCPD officer determines who has the legal authority to handle and settle the case.

Similar with the perception of WCPD officers, abused woman perceived the arrest of the perpetrator to be the lowest mean score of 4.27 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. This is due to the fact that not all complaints necessitate arrest, especially when the dispute can be best handled and settled in the barangay level.

### **Conduct of Interview of Women's Desk Officer as Perceived by Abused Women**

In the conduct of interview of WCPD officer on cases of VAW as perceived by the abused women, it has a total mean score of 4.29 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. WCPD officers' practice of asking question at a time got the highest mean score of 4.55 with verbal

interpretation of *Always*. According to the research titled, “Conducting Effective Interview”, one should possess an active skill on both talking and listening to be an effective interviewer (AICPA, nd). WCPD officer does not just ask series of question but also give the abused woman her moment to answer each question, thus, facilitates the flow of information.

Meanwhile, use of gadgets in recording the interview such as recorder got the lowest mean score of 2.98 with verbal interpretation of *Undecided*. This finding coincides with the perception of the WCPD officers. This could also be attributed to the inability of the abused women to observe the use of these gadgets.

### **Filing the Complaint of Women’s Desk Officer as Perceived by Abused Women**

In the filing of complaint as perceived by abused women, it has a total mean score of 4.45 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. It is interesting to note that acquisition of medical records of the abused woman got the highest mean score of 4.58 with verbal interpretation of *Always*. This is because WCPD officers know that on cases of violence, medical record is material evidence.

On the other hand, acquiring of the copies of marriage contract of the abused woman got the lowest mean score of 4.35 but still with verbal interpretation of *Always*.

### **Common Problems Encountered by WCPD Officers**

During initial response, in terms of **receiving complaint** one of the major concerns of WCPD officers is the uncooperativeness of the caller/abused woman. WCPD officers revealed that some of the abused women are hesitant to open the full details of information. This is because most of the abused women were still in the state of shock after they experienced violence. They also consider this event as a humiliating part of their lives, thus, they find it difficult to reveal the private issue (UNODC, 2010).

With regard to **after call/complaint**, when emergency response is needed, both WCPD officers and abused women stated that unavailability of marked mobile hinders speedy response and arrest of the perpetrator. They have to wait for the marked vehicle to come before they could conduct the emergency response. According to Hess and Wroblewski (2006) marked vehicle do add speed to the response because it can be easily identified in the road when used.

During the **conduct of interview**, WCPD officers find it a challenge to gather factual information from the abused women because of the physical settings of the WCPD office. They admit that their office lacks the atmosphere of privacy, for it does not conform with standards set by the law. Further, some officers answered that patience of the officer is indeed a requirement that contributes to the success of the interview.

With respect to the **filing of the complaint**, WCPD officers stressed that the lack of financial resources of the abused woman hinders them from filing the complaint. This is because all the required documents to initiate the filing of the case needs to be requested, paid and photocopied.

On the part of the abused women, their lack of interest to pursue the case also hinders the prosecution of crime. Filing of cases has prescribed period of time and this should be followed; otherwise, the arrested person will be freed or the case will be dismissed because of technicalities.

Meanwhile, ability of the WCPD officer to assess the acts committed and to identify the appropriate case to be filed is also an issue. According to an interview with a WCPD officer, there are those officers that have limited knowledge of the law. Thus, results to filing of less serious cases or to the extent that the case will be dismissed. This maybe because some of the WCPD officers were recently assigned to WCPD office, thus, they are not that familiar on how to look at every case.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: Domestic violence is the most common type of crime committed against women by their partner either sexual or not sexual relation. Women were usually abused because of their desire to hold on to their relation.

During the **initial response**, in terms of *receiving call/complaint*, WCPD officers do recognize the importance of asking basic information such as getting the full name and address of the caller/abused woman. However, they failed to respond at the scene within 5 five minutes due to the unavailability of marked vehicle. Added to this is the distance and traffic condition.

In terms of *after call/complaint*, it could be concluded that they are eager to call the attention of their co-officers who will assist them in the conduct of emergency response. But due to the fact that majority of the complaint does not necessitate an emergency response, they opted not to coordinate it with the concerned barangay but rather advise the abused woman to settle the dispute in their barangay.

In the *arrival at the scene*, WCPD officers never forget to advise the abused woman to undergo medico-legal examination because they do know that the result of this examination is material to the case. On the other hand, arrest of perpetrator is not always done. This is because not all cases of violence require an arrest or in some cases, the issue is already settled or the perpetrator has escaped before the team arrived at the scene.

During the **conduct of interview**, WCPD officers do have their own interview strategy used to make the interview successful. On the other hand, there is a need for gadgets to facilitate the recording of interviews.

On **filing of the complaint**, because majority of the complaints involves marital abuse, WCPD officers recognize the importance of obtaining evidence material to the crime such as marriage contract and birth certificate of their child/children. However, lack of necessary equipment prevents them from taking photos of the injuries inflicted to the abused woman.

Abused women have similar perception with that of WCPD officers in all stages of the investigation. On **initial response**, in terms of *receiving call/complaint*, inquiries on the full name of the caller and the address of the incident were highly perceived by them. On the other hand, they identify the incapability of WCPD officers' to respond to the scene within 5 minutes from the time the call was made to be the lowest. This is justified since they also experienced the unavailability of marked vehicle to be used in such emergency response.

Moreover, in terms of *after complaint*, it is perceived that WCPD officer immediately call the attention of their co-officers who will accompany her in the conduct of emergency response.

In the *arrival at the scene*, according to them, WCPD officers first assess the injuries inflicted to them whether it is minor or major to advise them to undergo medico-legal examination or to call for the assistance of other medical services. In case the perpetrator and the abused women are not in physical contact, the eagerness of the WCPD officers to inquire on the nature of dispute was also perceived by the abused women. This is because these facts will help the WCPD officer determine whether the dispute can be settled in their level as a mediator or formally elevate the case on the pillars of criminal justice.

During the **conduct of interview**, they mostly perceived that WCPD officers ask question at a time, to give them enough time to answer the question.

In **filing the complaint**, they highly perceived that WCPD officers obtain medical records from them. This is because WCPD officers know that these documents are material to the case. On the other hand, acquisition of copies of marriage contract and birth certificate perceived to be the lowest.



The problems encountered by the WCPD officers in responding to the VAW cases results to slow response and process of investigation.

### **Recommendations**

If possible, marked vehicle should be provided exclusively in responding to cases of violence against women and children. Assignment of additional co-officers who will accompany the WCPD officer during the emergency response and other operation related to the investigation and arrest is highly recommended.

For PNP-WCPD and barangays, a seminar to be attended by both agencies is recommended to deepen understanding on their scope and limitation as an implementer of justice. Also, establishing an excellent communication system between the two agencies is highly recommended to establish better coordination.

For WCPD officers, to widen their knowledge and provide expertise to successfully perform their function, intensive training on legal aspects related to violence against women is suggested to be undertaken. In addition, first aid training should also be undertaken to provide immediate relief and prevent more serious injury to injured victims.

Availability of technological equipment such as digital single lens reflex cameras to record the physical injuries incurred, recorder to facilitate documentation of the interviews, computer and printer to ease loads of the WCPD officer's work are highly recommended. Improvement of WCPD office physical facility is highly recommended so as to provide atmosphere of privacy and comfort.

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