

Beyond The Badge: The Roles of Philippine National Police Women's Desk Officers to Violence Against Women

Marissa L. Ikan

Faculty

Cavite State University, Philippines

E-mail: mclontoc@cvsu.edu.ph

HOW TO CITE: ABSTRACT:

Marissa L. Ikan (2026). Beyond The Badge: The Roles of Philippine National Police Women's Desk Officers to Violence Against Women. International Journal of Special Education, 41(11s), 361-367

This study explored the roles of Philippine National Police (PNP) Women's Desk Officers to cases of violence against women (VAW), with emphasis on their initial interventions and the challenges encountered in the performance of their duties. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through interviews and observations with three Women's Desk Officers assigned in selected areas of Cavite. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities and the privacy of the cases handled. Findings revealed that the officers' initial responses commonly involved documenting complaints through police blotters, obtaining sworn statements, and providing immediate assistance to victims. The officers displayed empathy and professionalism by maintaining confidentiality and responding to victims with sensitivity and respect, though occasional lapses in privacy were observed. Each officer adopted distinct approaches in building rapport and eliciting information from victims, with collaboration from other institutions such as barangay officers and the Department of Social Welfare Development (DSWD) during rescue and referral procedures. Despite their dedication, the officers faced persistent constraints such as lack of facilities, limited personnel, inadequate financial resources, and inefficiencies in the referral system. The findings underscore the pivotal role of Women's Desk Officers as frontliners in protecting women's rights and ensuring justice, while highlighting the need for strengthened institutional support to enhance their effectiveness.

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Keywords: PNP Women's Desk Officers, Violence Against Women, Gender-Based Violence, Law Enforcement, Response Strategies

Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) remains a serious global and national concern that threatens women's safety, dignity, and participation in society. In the Philippines, despite the protection

offered by Republic Act No. 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, cases of abuse continue to rise, calling attention to the critical role of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Women and Children

Protection Desk (WCPD). PNP Women's Desk Officers serve as first responders to violence against women incidents, providing immediate assistance, documentation, and emotional support to victims. Their role extends beyond enforcing law. They act as advocates for justice and empathy in often distressing circumstances. As noted by Torres et al. (2024), the effectiveness of law enforcement depends not only on procedural accuracy but also on sensitivity and understanding toward survivors. However, Valdez et al. (2022) observed that Women's Desk Officers often challenges such as limited resources, heavy caseloads, and emotional strain, which can affect their service delivery. This study explores the Roles of PNP Women's Desk Officers to cases of violence against women in Cavite. Specifically, it aims to describe how they manage initial roles, navigate constraints, and uphold empathy amid professional demands. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to provide insights that may strengthen gender-responsive policing and enhance the quality of support provided to survivors of violence.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and response strategies of Philippine National Police (PNP) Women's Desk Officers in handling cases of violence against women (VAW) in Cavite. Three Women's Desk Officers were purposively selected based on their assignment in areas with a high incidence of VAW cases, accessibility of location, and willingness to participate. Permission was secured from the Cavite PNP Command Office to identify relevant police stations, and pseudonyms—Officer Apple, Officer Barbie, and Officer Candy—were used to ensure confidentiality. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations using researcher-made guides that focused on the officers' practices during initial response, including blotter filing, victim interviews, and emergency assistance. Prior data collection, the researcher obtained formal approval from the Chief of Police and oriented participants about the study's purpose, ensuring voluntary participation and strict

confidentiality. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and field observations were conducted between November 2024 and March 2025. Thematic analysis, following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to identify recurring themes and patterns from the transcribed data. Findings were validated through peer review among academic colleagues to maintain credibility and minimize bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study, safeguarding participants' right, anonymity, and the sensitive of the information shared.

Results and Discussion

The Initial Role of the PNP Women's Desk Officers

This theme focused on the first actions taken by Women's Desk Officers when handling cases of violence against women. All three officers—Apple, Barbie, and Candy—demonstrated prompt and structured roles, including documenting the incident through a police blotter, interviewing the victim, and coordinating for immediate assistance when necessary. Their approach reflected both adherence to procedure and empathy toward the victims' emotional state.

Officer Apple shared that she prioritized calming the victim before proceeding with formal steps, ensuring that each woman felt secure during the reporting process. Officer Barbie emphasized listening with compassion and guiding the victim through her options. Meanwhile, Officer Candy described situations where she personally accompanied victims during rescue operations or medical referrals.

These findings underscored that the Women's Desk Officers' initial roles extended beyond administrative duties; they reflected a humanitarian approach rooted in empathy, trust, and survivor empowerment. This aligns with the Institute of Industry and Academic Research Incorporated (2025), which emphasized that trauma-informed and gender-sensitive policing fosters greater cooperation and reduces the stigma associated with reporting violence against women. The Police Blotter as the First Step of Response

The police blotter marked the formal beginning of case documentation and intervention, serving as the first and most critical step in responding to cases of violence against women. This process allowed the Women's Desk Officers to gather essential information such as the names of the parties involved, the time and place of the incident, and the nature of the abuse. Consistent with the 2023 PNP Women and Children Protection Desk Manual, this stage is not merely clerical but foundational for ensuring survivor-centered, trauma-informed response.

In most observed cases, victims arrived at the Women and Children Protection Desk accompanied by a confidant, hesitant to disclose their experiences due to fear, shame, or emotional distress. One instance involved Officer Apple, who noticed the victim lingering at the doorway, too embarrassed to enter. She immediately stood up, opened the door, and offered her seat, signaling empathy and respect. Such gestures established psychological safety—a prerequisite for truthful disclosure. Officer Barbie, meanwhile, was equally accommodating, addressing victims even during personal time, though at times forgetting to maintain full confidentiality. In contrast, Officer Candy displayed protective awareness by ensuring privacy before beginning any inquiry, asking her male colleagues to leave the room before the interview started.

These observations illustrate that empathy, professionalism, and confidentiality define effective initial response. As emphasized by Inzunza (2021), early-stage interactions between officers and victims shape the latter's trust in the justice system and influence their decision to pursue legal action. Although minor lapses in confidentiality were noted, all three officers demonstrated awareness of their duty to provide a secure and dignified environment for victims.

The practice of obtaining basic information also reflected the officers' attentiveness and procedural discipline. Officer Apple immediately took notes, asking relevant and concise questions to determine the nature of the abuse and to ensure the woman's safety. Similarly, Officer

Barbie demonstrated sensitivity by advising victims to undergo medical examination and secure referrals for legal or psychosocial assistance. Their actions were consistent with Republic Act No. 9262, which mandates prompt protection, privacy, and assistance to victims of violence against women and their children.

Despite slight variations in approach, all three officers viewed the police blotter not merely as a record but as a tool for empowerment—transforming victims' silence into action. Their initial response affirmed the importance of compassion within procedural accuracy. As highlighted by Ramos and De Vera (2024), documentation that balances empathy and legality is key to effective gender-responsive policing.

The Forensic Interview

The forensic interview served as a crucial stage in handling cases of violence against women, allowing Women's Desk Officers to obtain accurate, detailed, and sworn statements essential for legal proceedings. Unlike the initial interview, which only gathered basic facts, the forensic interview sought to elicit comprehensive information in a survivor-sensitive and trauma-informed manner. Guided by the DILG-DSWD-DOJ Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2021-01, the process emphasized confidentiality, empathy, and professionalism throughout. All three Officers—Apple, Barbie, and Candy—conducted their interviews in their respective Women's Desk offices, ensuring a more comfortable environment for victims. Officer Apple displayed professionalism and calmness, carefully reminding the victim of her rights while maintaining a respectful tone. Officer Barbie showed strong empathy by offering emotional support, listening attentively, and using gentle encouragements like "It's okay, let your tears fall." Her compassionate gestures, such as offering tissues and giving victims time to pause, demonstrated her trauma-informed approach. Officer Candy, meanwhile, showed confidence and focus but at times lacked the patience needed in sensitive conversations, underscoring the importance of continuous training in

communication and emotional awareness.

Across cases, officers used open-ended questions, allowing victims to narrate their stories freely, while silence was effectively employed as a tool for reflection and composure. These approaches align with UNODC (2021) guidelines and recent study by Diab & Al-Azzeh (2024), which highlight that empathetic and non-intrusive interviewing enhances the accuracy of testimonies while minimizing retraumatization.

Each interview concluded with terminating questions such as, “Do you have anything more to add?” followed by allowing the victims to review and sign their statements. Officers also provided referrals for medical examinations, counseling, and legal support, reflecting adherence to the IACVAWC Integrated Referral System (2021).

Overall, the forensic interviews demonstrated that effective communication, empathy, and adherence to protocol are central to a survivor-centered approach. Officer Apple’s professionalism, Officer Barbie’s empathy, and Officer Candy’s assertiveness each reflected distinct yet valuable approaches to ensuring victims felt heard, respected, and supported. Collectively, their practices emphasized that forensic interviewing is not merely investigative—it is a compassionate bridge between law enforcement and healing.

The Emergency Response

Emergency response was a vital component of the Women’s Desk Officers’ duties, ensuring the immediate safety of women and children in cases of violence. Each officer assessed the urgency of a situation based on visible harm, the victim’s willingness to pursue legal action, and the potential risk to children. These quick assessments guided their decision to conduct an on-site operation or call for assistance.

Officer Candy, for instance, responded swiftly when a woman arrived at the station with visible head injuries caused by her husband. Upon learning that the assault had escalated to the stabbing of another individual, she immediately coordinated an emergency operation, recognizing

the suspect as a continuing threat to both family and community. Similarly, Officer Barbie emphasized confirming the victim’s determination to pursue the case before initiating an arrest, noting that many victims tend to withdraw complaints after seeing their partners detained. Officer Apple, on the other hand, prioritized cases involving children, ensuring that appropriate interventions were initiated within the legal time frame required by the PNP Operation Procedures Manual (2023).

Before responding to incidents, all three officers coordinated with barangay officials to ensure safety and procedural compliance. However, only Officer Apple partially met the full inter-agency standard by seeking barangay assistance, while coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was less consistent. This reflected a recurring gap in cross-agency collaboration—an issue echoed in recent research by De Guzman et al. (2023), which highlights the need for strengthened multi-sectoral coordination in responding to gender-based violence.

Upon arriving at the scene, officers followed standard operating procedures that prioritized safety, legality, and professionalism. Officer Candy demonstrated this effectively by introducing herself, explaining the Miranda Doctrine, and clearly stating the reason for arrest, which led to a calm and cooperative apprehension of the suspect. Such adherence to procedural integrity mirrors recommendations by Torres and Rivera (2024), who assert that trauma-informed policing requires balancing empathy for victims with respect for suspects’ rights.

Overall, the emergency Roles demonstrated by Officer Apple, Barbie, and Candy reflected both commitment and compassion. While there were inconsistencies in coordination with support agencies, their practices underscored the evolving role of PNP Women’s Desk Officers—not merely as law enforcers but as protectors ensuring the dignity, safety, and empowerment of women in crisis. Problems Encountered by Women’s Desk Officers

Despite their commitment to protect and assist

victims, the PNP Women's Desk Officers encountered several institutional and operational challenges that hindered the quality and timeliness of their response to violence against women (VAW) cases. These challenges primarily involved inadequate facilities, personnel shortages, limited financial resources, and weak inter-agency coordination.

1. Facilities and Privacy Concerns

All three officers expressed that limited office space and poor privacy conditions affected their ability to conduct sensitive interviews effectively. Officer Apple shared that her office could not accommodate multiple people at once, making it difficult to ensure a comfortable and confidential environment for both victim and family members. Officer Barbie reported that other police personnel would sometimes enter the office interviews, compromising confidentiality. Similarly, Officer Candy noted that glass windows and thin doors allowed conversations to be overheard.

These conditions contradicted the standards outlined by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG, 2022), which mandate that Women's Desks maintain a private, soundproof, and well-equipped area with secure storage, adequate ventilation, and facilities conducive to trauma-sensitive interviews. In line with the findings of Risan et al. (2020), such infrastructural gaps not only affect the officers' efficiency but may also retraumatize victims by denying them a sense of safety and trust.

2. Personnel and Workload Constraints

All three officers also emphasized the lack of sufficient personnel in handling VAW cases. Officer Barbie mentioned that her workload often affected her family life, while Officers Apple and Candy highlighted the difficulty of responding to multiple cases without adequate rest or support. These findings mirror those of Ribeiro (2024), who reported that understaffing among gender-focused police units leads to burnout, reduced responsiveness, and diminished emotional capacity to engage empathetically with victims. Continuous professional development was seen as essential. All officers

had attended gender-sensitivity and crisis-intervention trainings, yet they noted that the content was often repetitive. Nonetheless, such training contributed to their capacity to remain patient, empathetic, and professional—qualities crucial for trauma-informed policing (Torres & Rivera, 2024).

3. Financial and Logistical Limitations

Another major issue identified was the lack of financial and logistical resources. Officers frequently encountered delays in emergency response due to the unavailability of service vehicles or fuel. Victims' own financial constraints—such as their inability to pay for medical examinations or obtain necessary documents—further complicated case processing. Officer Candy shared that in some instances, officers used personal funds to help victims pursue legal action. This aligns with findings by De Guzman et al. (2023), who observed that the absence of dedicated VAW response funds in local police stations forces frontline officers to compensate through personal initiative.

4. Referral System and Inter-Agency Coordination

While the law mandates collaboration with local government units and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), implementation was inconsistent. Officer Apple and Barbie struggled to coordinate with barangay officials in issuing Barangay Protection Orders (BPOs), citing weak communication channels and limited awareness among local leaders. Conversely, Officer Candy maintained effective partnerships with barangay officials through regular coordination and public education initiatives.

These findings confirm that successful VAW intervention requires more than police efficiency—it demands institutional linkage. As emphasized by Sharifi et al. (2024), sustainable anti-VAW efforts rely on a well-integrated referral system that connects police, health, and social services in a survivor-centered framework.

Overall, these challenges underscore the

structural limitations faced by Women's Desk Officers in fulfilling their mandate under Republic Act 9262 (Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act). While officers displayed personal dedication and compassion, their effectiveness was constrained by systemic gaps in resources, manpower, and inter-agency collaboration. Strengthening logistical support and institutional networks remains critical to improving the quality of protection and justice delivery for women in crisis.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the PNP Women's Desk Officers play a vital and compassionate roles as first responders in addressing cases of violence against women. Their initial response, ranging from filing the police blotter, conducting forensic interviews, to implementing emergency Roles, reflect both dedication and sensitivity in handling victims' needs. Despite their commitment, several gaps were observed, such as occasional lapses in maintaining confidentiality during interviews and limitation in facilities and coordination with other agencies. Nevertheless, the Woman's Desk Officers' sincerity, empathy, and professionalism remain central to establishing trust and gathering truthful accounts from victims. Their actions highlight the significance of interpersonal and investigate skills in the pursuit of justice and victim protection. However, the challenges faced by these officers such as inadequate facilities, limited personnel, insufficient financial resources, and weak inter-

agency linkages, hinder the full effectiveness of their response. Addressing these barriers is crucial to strengthening the country's framework for combating gender-based violence. Continuous gender-sensitivity and trauma-informed training should be institutionalized to enhance officers' capacity to respond with empathy and professionalism. Police stations must also be equipped with private, well-furnished, and safe spaces that ensure victims' comfort and confidentiality during interviews and investigations.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of stronger coordination among the PNP, DSWD, and barangay officials to ensure comprehensive protection, proper referral, and support services for victims. Providing sufficient funding and logistical support—such as dedicated vehicles, office equipment, and victim assistance resources—will not only improve response efficiency but also affirm the government's commitment to upholding women's rights and safety.

In conclusion, while the Women's Desk Officers serve as the cornerstone of justice and protection for women in crisis, their effectiveness depends on the institutional support and collaborative networks surrounding them. Empowering these officers through resources, training, and inter-agency partnerships is essential to ensure that every woman who seeks help is met with competence, compassion, and a path toward safety and justice.

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