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Legal Responses to Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) Through Societal Norms: Evidence from VAWC Desk Complaint Filers in Calapan City

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how societal norms influence legal responses to Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) by examining evidence from individuals who have filed complaints at VAWC desks in Calapan City as a basis for the development of a Comprehensive Policy Framework for VAWC Legal Responses. This study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between perceived societal norms and legal responses to VAWC. Respondents were VAWC complainants from Calapan City selected through purposive sampling, and data were gathered using a validated and reliable researcher-made survey questionnaire. The data collection process involved securing approvals, administering surveys personally, and analyzing responses using weighted mean and regression analysis. Ethical procedures such as informed consent, data privacy, and confidentiality were strictly followed throughout the study. The study concludes that while anti-VAWC sentiments are strong, community actions must catch up with ideals. Legal systems are effective but need better enforcement and resource distribution. The proposed policy framework offers a practical and collaborative approach to improve protection for women and children.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) is a pervasive issue affecting women globally, with research showing that one in three women experiences some form of abuse in their relationships. This statistic shows the widespread nature of IPV, which can take the form of physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological harm inflicted by a current or former partner. According to Semahegn *et al.* (2019), multiple primary studies reveal the prevalence of this issue, highlighting the urgent need for interventions and support systems to protect women and address the root causes of violence.

Similarly, Balahadia and Astoveza (2021) stressed the prevalence of VAWC and underline that the issue has reached such a level that it has drawn global attention. The widespread nature of VAWC has led the international community to recognize it not only as a public health crisis but also as a severe violation of human rights. The extensive impact of this violence harms the physical and mental well-being of victims and perpetuates social inequalities, particularly for women and children. In addition, as emphasized by Pearson *et al.* (2021), VAWC is an issue that intersects with public health, gender equality, and human rights. The far-reaching effects of VAWC extend beyond individual harm, causing significant physical, mental, and emotional damage to victims, while straining healthcare systems and social services. It also perpetuates gender inequality, as it disproportionately affects women and children, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting opportunities for women to fully participate

in society.

Societal norms significantly impact how victims perceive their situation, their willingness to seek legal recourse, and the degree of support they receive from legal institutions. In societies such as Indonesia, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms play a significant role in the victimization of women, particularly in cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). These norms uphold male dominance and control, often perpetuating the idea that women are subordinate and should remain submissive in relationships. Many women who experience IPV feel pressured to stay silent, fearing stigmatization, judgment, or even retribution from their communities. The social expectation for women to preserve family honor and endure suffering in silence further discourages them from reporting abuse. This culture of silence not only protects abusers but also limits access to support systems and justice for victims.

In many non-Anglo-Saxon communities, cultural norms often contribute to the normalization of intimate partner violence (IPV), creating significant barriers for victims seeking help. These norms view IPV as a private family matter, with traditional gender roles reinforcing the belief that women should tolerate abuse to preserve familial harmony or avoid bringing shame upon the family. This societal acceptance of violence within relationships discourages victims from speaking out, as they may fear being judged, ostracized, or blamed for the abuse. Additionally, in these communities, the lack of legal protections, accessible resources, and social support further compounds the problem and make it difficult for

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victims to escape abusive situations. As Green *et al.* (2023) point out, the normalization of IPV in these settings perpetuates cycles of violence and dictates the need for cultural change and more supportive systems to empower victims to seek help without fear of retaliation or stigma. Evidently, rigid gender roles, deeply rooted in many societies, often dictate that women should endure violence as part of their expected behavior, particularly within relationships and family structures. These roles enforce the belief that women are responsible for maintaining harmony at all costs, even if it means tolerating abuse. Such expectations trap women in a cycle of silence and suffering, discouraging them from seeking help or pursuing justice. Fear of being blamed, judged, or even shamed for failing to meet societal ideals of obedience and submission prevents many women from reporting violence or leaving abusive situations. This harmful gender dynamic not only legitimizes violence but also hinders women's access to legal protections and support systems. Many victims remain powerless, trapped by the very norms that should protect them, making the pursuit of justice a distant and difficult goal.

Legal systems often mirror the biases and inequalities present in society and create challenges for victims of violence, especially women, as they attempt to navigate the justice process. These biases manifest in various ways, such as laws that are inadequately enforced, judicial decisions that downplay the severity of intimate partner violence, or legal practices that place undue burdens on victims to prove their cases. As noted by Hakim (2023) and Widjastuti & Kartiko (2023), such systemic flaws can discourage victims from pursuing justice, as they feel that the process is stacked against them or that their experiences will not be taken seriously. Also, societal biases, such as stereotypes about gender roles, can influence how legal professionals—judges, law enforcement, and attorneys—handle cases of abuse, often siding with abusers or minimizing the harm done to victims. These barriers lead to cycles of violence and leave victims without proper recourse and undermining trust in the legal system.

In the Philippines, the most common local problems in anti-violence against women and children includes: rape, domestic violence stalking, sexual harassment, human trafficking, forced prostitution, etc. There are many complaints of violations of violence against women and children as recorded: Physical Abused: slapping, kicking, restraining, hitting, choking; domestic violence honor killing, acid throwing, stalking, Sexual Abuse: rape, sexual harassment, human trafficking, Psychological Emotional Abused: verbal abuse, social abuse, and socioeconomic abuse. Republic Act 9262 known as Violence against Women and their Children Act of 2004 was created and it refers to any act or a 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 (Gonzalez III *et al.*, 2022). However, many are not familiar with the said law. For instance, in Digos City, Panerio and Albay (2020) determined the level of awareness of female residents towards Republic Act 9262 or legally known as “Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004.” It was revealed that female respondents were moderately aware on the existence of Violence Against Women and simply means no engagement to such related cases in terms on information awareness. Thus, it was recommended that an actional plan shall be implemented in terms of enhancement program on RA 9262.

Hence, the current study will assess how societal norms and legal responses intersect in addressing Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), highlighting the influence of beliefs, values, social expectations, and practices. To begin with, beliefs and values, deeply rooted in culture and tradition, often shape societal attitudes towards gender roles and relationships. For instance, patriarchal views may normalize abusive behaviors, while the pressure to maintain family unity may discourage victims from seeking help. Similarly, social expectations further reinforce these norms by dictating acceptable behaviors and stigmatizing victims who report abuse. Consequently, victims often face societal backlash, including ostracism or victim-blaming, which hinders their willingness to engage with legal systems. These beliefs and expectations manifest in social practices, such as informal mediations or community silence, which perpetuate cycles of violence instead of supporting legal interventions.

In addition, the effectiveness of legal responses to VAWC, such as legislation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal aid services, is significantly influenced by these societal norms. For example, while laws like Republic Act 9262 provide a robust framework, their implementation is often challenged by gaps in enforcement and the lack of alignment with victims' lived realities. Furthermore, societal resistance to enforcing protection orders or victims' reluctance to seek them due to fear of retaliation or stigma undermines their effectiveness. Equally important, the availability and quality of legal aid and support services play a crucial role in empowering victims, yet these services may remain inaccessible to those constrained by social and economic barriers.

Further, despite extensive research on legal frameworks and responses to VAWC, there is a notable gap in comprehending how societal norms influence these legal processes, particularly from the perspective of those directly involved in the complaint process. Existing studies often focus on the effectiveness of legal measures or the prevalence of VAWC but do not adequately address how cultural attitudes and societal expectations impact the reporting, processing, and resolution of such cases. This

study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on how societal norms affect the interaction between complainants and legal systems at VAWC desks. It will explore how cultural perceptions of VAWC and related societal expectations shape the experiences of victims, the handling of their complaints, and the overall efficacy of legal responses.

Likewise, currently, there is no existing Comprehensive Policy Framework for Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) Legal Responses in Calapan City, leaving a gap in addressing the societal and legal challenges faced by victims. While Republic Act 9262 provides a national legal framework, its implementation varies across localities due to differences in resources, societal norms, and enforcement practices. In Calapan City, the absence of a policy framework limits the consistency and effectiveness of VAWC responses, particularly in bridging the gaps between legal measures and the cultural realities victims face. This lack of a unified and localized approach results in fragmented efforts, creating challenges in coordination among barangay VAWC personnel, Women and Children's Protection Desks (WCPD), and other stakeholders. A comprehensive framework is important to integrate legal mechanisms with culturally sensitive strategies, ensuring that the specific needs of victims in Calapan City are adequately addressed while promoting a more systematic and effective response to VAWC cases.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This was a quantitative study that employed a descriptive-correlational research design. A sample population was a specific group of people studied using quantitative methods. Quantitative research used scientific inquiry to answer questions about the sample population through observed or measured data. The results of the study were converted into quantitative and logical data (Allen, 2017). Descriptive research, on the other hand, aimed to explain the possible causes of a problem identified in a descriptive study. It was a scientific method of observing and describing a subject's behavior in its natural setting (Calderon and Gonzales, 2018). It was used to describe the extent of the perceived societal norms towards VAWC in relation to beliefs and values, social expectations, and social practices, and the extent of legal responses to VAWC in terms of legislation and policy formation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal aid and support services.

The descriptive-correlational method was used to give a numerical explanation of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Studies that described variables and the natural correlations among them were considered descriptive correlational studies. This approach described current events or situations and examined how the study's variables were related (Hopkins, 2018). This method was used to determine the significant relationship between the extent of the perceived societal norms and the extent of legal responses to VAWC.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro. Records of VAWC complainants were obtained from official documents and complaint files submitted to VAWC desks in the city. These records gave detailed information about individuals who filed complaints under the VAWC Act. They helped ensure the study was based on real cases. Complainants were selected from these records based on the type of complaint and the date it was filed.

Respondents of the Study and Sampling Technique

Respondents of the study were VAWC complainants in Calapan City's VAWC desk. These were individuals who sought legal help under the VAWC Act because of abuse or violence. They had firsthand experience with the legal process, which helped provide insight into societal norms and legal responses. They were those who filed complaints within a certain timeframe, so the data reflected current conditions. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. This technique was widely used in research because it helped in choosing quality samples with less bias, improving the reliability and credibility of results. Some scholars also gave their views on sampling methods (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

Research Instrument

Instrumentation referred to building tools used for collecting data. Data collection was a key step in the analysis. This study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire as the main tool to gather information about societal norms on VAWC and legal responses in terms of beliefs, values, social expectations, social practices, legislation and policy formation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal aid services.

The researcher created the questionnaire to gather the needed data from the participants. It had two parts.

Part I focused on perceived societal norms on VAWC, including beliefs and values, social expectations, and practices.

Part II covered the extent of legal responses to VAWC, including law and policy formation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal support services.

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument's validity was checked to ensure high quality. It was important to test the accuracy and consistency of the research tools. The researcher created a draft questionnaire and asked three experts with a Master of Arts in Public Administration to review it for clarity, readability, and completeness. Their feedback helped decide what items to keep in the final questionnaire. The researcher revised the survey based on their suggestions to improve its content and usefulness.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability was checked using internal consistency. The tool was tested with 10 non-respondents. Cronbach's

Table 1: The Alpha Cronbach's Value (Konting *et al.*, 2009)

Cronbach's Alpha Value	Interpretation
0.91 and above	Excellent
0.81 to 0.90	Good
0.71 to 0.80	Good and Acceptable
0.61 to 0.70	Acceptable
0.01 to 0.60	Non Acceptable

alpha was used to measure how well the parts of the questionnaire were related. It showed whether the instrument was reliable. Even if alpha showed a high value, it did not always mean the questionnaire measured only one concept.

Scaling and Quantification

The researcher used the 4-point Likert Scale, wherein, it requires the respondents to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with each of a series of statements about the stimulus objects. Table 2-4 presents the scale and its interpretation for the assessment on the extent of the current perceived societal norms and legal responses to VAWC.

Table 2: Perceived Societal Norms

Option	Score Range	Description
4	3.50 – 4.00	Great Extent
3	2.50 – 3.49	Moderate Extent
2	1.50 – 2.49	Slight Extent
1	1.00 – 1.49	Least Extent

Table 3: Legal Responses to VAWC

Option	Score Range	Description
4	3.50 – 4.00	Great Extent
3	2.50 – 3.49	Moderate Extent
2	1.50 – 2.49	Slight Extent
1	1.00 – 1.49	Least Extent

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix for the relationship between the extent of the current perceived societal norms towards VAWC and extent of practice of the

Table 4: Correlational Matrix

Scale	Interpretation
1	Perfect Correlation
.81-.99	Very High Correlation
.61-.80	High Correlation
.41-.60	Moderate Correlation
.21-.40	Low Correlation
.01-.20	Very Low Correlation
0	No Correlation

Source: Sedgwick, P. (2012). *Pearson's correlation coefficient. Bmj*, 345.

legal responses to VAWC.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were acquired in a methodical and structured manner. The steps performed by the researcher to obtain the essential data were outlined in the following statement: The first step was to secure the required permissions from the authorized authorities to conduct the research in the school setting. The researcher sought the Dean of Graduate Studies' approval, followed by that of the Chief of Police of Calapan City's VAWC desk. The researcher conducted the study after obtaining the appropriate approvals.

The assessment of the extent of the current perceived societal norms towards VAWC in relation to beliefs and values, social expectations, and social practices, and the extent of practice of the legal responses to VAWC in terms of legislation and policy formation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal aid and support services was part of the data collection process. To ensure prompt data collection, the researcher personally collected the questionnaires or assessments from the respondents as soon as they finished answering. This enabled efficient data retrieval and eliminated the possibility of missing or incomplete data.

Following the collection of data, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the information gathered. Examining the responses, recognizing patterns or trends, and drawing meaningful conclusions from the data were all part of the process. The findings and discussions served as the foundation for the development of conclusions and recommendations.

The required approvals were secured, and the study was personally administered to VAWC complainants by the researcher. The VAWC complainants' evaluations were gathered. Afterward, the data were evaluated, interpreted, and used to draw findings and make suggestions.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data gathered in this study were subjected to the following statistical treatment.

Weighted Mean and ranking were utilized to summarize the perceived societal norms towards VAWC in relation to beliefs and values, social expectations, and social practices, and the extent of practice of the legal responses to VAWC in terms of legislation and policy formation, enforcement of protection orders, and legal aid and support services. The mean was calculated by multiplying the total amount of observations by the average of the individual values of each observed value, the frequency with which it happened, and other relevant factors.

Regression was used to determine the relationship between the current perceived societal norms towards VAWC and the extent of practice of the legal responses to VAWC. One variable (referred to as the independent or predictor variable) was used to predict or explain the variation in the other variable in the statistical analysis technique known as linear regression (called the

dependent or response variable).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this study prioritized the principles of confidentiality and adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173). Before the collection of primary data, the researcher conducted a thorough briefing to explain the study’s objectives, ensuring that it aligned with academic and ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, who were also informed of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. This included their freedom to withdraw from the study or retract any data they had provided without fear of retaliation or adverse consequences.

To maintain a high level of confidentiality, the researcher implemented strict data protection measures, ensuring that all personal information and responses were securely stored and accessible only to authorized individuals directly involved in the study. Respondents’ identities were anonymized in any reporting or publication of the

findings to safeguard their privacy. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the researcher ensured that data collection, processing, and storage followed lawful and ethical standards, with participants’ welfare and trust as the primary considerations. These measures collectively underscored the researcher’s commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Societal Norms toward VAWC

This section presents the extent of perceived societal norms toward violence against women and children (VAWC) as assessed by community members and stakeholders. It examines how cultural, social, and behavioral dimensions inform these norms.

Beliefs and Values

Table 5 presents the underlying cultural and personal beliefs and values that shape perceptions and attitudes toward VAWC, highlighting the core ideological factors that influence societal viewpoints.

Table 5: Beliefs and Values

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Believes that violence against women and children is unacceptable in any form.	3.97	0.18	Great Extent
2. Thinks that society holds men responsible for their actions in cases of VAWC.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
3. Feels that traditional gender roles contribute to the prevalence of VAWC.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
4. Believes that victims of VAWC should be supported rather than blamed for their situation.	3.87	0.35	Great Extent
5. Thinks that community awareness campaigns can change attitudes toward VAWC.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
6. Believes that cultural practices should not justify violence against women and children.	3.63	0.49	Great Extent
7. Feels that the legal system adequately reflects society's values regarding VAWC.	3.40	0.50	Moderate Extent
8. Thinks that addressing VAWC is a collective responsibility of the community.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.73	0.41	Great Extent

Table 5 indicates a strong ideological stance against VAWC. The findings show that the community strongly rejects violence against women and children. The highest mean score of 3.97 indicates that people view violence as completely unacceptable. This strong rejection aligns with McCloy (2024), who noted that violence against women is a severe violation of human rights. The low standard deviation shows that opinions are very similar among respondents. This means that almost everyone agrees on this point.

Other items also received high scores. Both holding men accountable and the belief that traditional gender roles contribute to violence received a mean of 3.77. This supports what Lee *et al.* (2024) found about societal attitudes that push for gender equality and accountability.

The idea that victims should be aided instead of blamed received an even higher score of 3.87. This reflects the strong support for helping victims rather than giving them the blame, a point also highlighted by De Guzman (2023).

The community also believes that awareness campaigns can change attitudes, with a mean of 3.77, and that violence justified by cultural practices is unacceptable, which received a mean of 3.63. This shows a strong belief in the need for education and community-led efforts to transform harmful cultural norms. Garcia (2020) emphasizes that cultural factors play a key role in the reporting and addressing of violence. The importance given to collective responsibility, with a mean of 3.70, further supports the need for community involvement in

prevention efforts.

However, there is a slight gap when it comes to the legal system. The mean score of 3.40 suggests that people feel the legal system does not fully reflect their values. This lower score highlights a concern that, despite strong community beliefs, the laws and their enforcement may not completely align with these ideals. Islam (2024) points out similar challenges where cultural norms and legal practices do not always match.

Overall, the mean score of 3.73 shows a robust and clear opposition to violence against women and children. The high scores on key items indicate a very strong community stance. At the same time, the somewhat lower score for the legal system suggests there is room for improvement. This overall picture supports calls for stronger and more culturally sensitive legal responses, as emphasized in several of the related studies.

Respondents overwhelmingly agree that violence in any form is unacceptable, that traditional gender roles

contribute to its prevalence, and that victims should be supported rather than blamed. This strong ideological stance echoes McCloy (2024), who emphasizes that violence against women not only violates human rights but also detrimentally impacts the social and economic fabric of communities. However, a slightly lower score on the extent to which the legal system reflects these values suggests that while cultural and personal convictions are robust, there is room for improvement in aligning legal frameworks with these societal ideals, a concern similarly raised by De Guzman (2023) in the context of legislative responses in the Philippines.

Social Expectations

Table 6 presents the societal expectations regarding appropriate behavior and gender roles, detailing how these norms establish the standards for acceptable conduct in relation to VAWC.

Table 6: Social Expectations

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Expects that individuals will report incidents of VAWC to the authorities.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
2. Believes that the community should actively intervene in situations of VAWC.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
3. Thinks it is socially acceptable to speak out against VAWC in public forums.	3.73	0.45	Great Extent
4. Expects that victims of VAWC will receive support from friends and family.	3.80	0.41	Great Extent
5. Believes that society should hold perpetrators of VAWC accountable for their actions.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
6. Thinks there should be community programs that educate about VAWC prevention.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
7. Expects that local leaders will prioritize addressing VAWC in their initiatives.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
8. Believes that silence around VAWC is no longer acceptable in our community.	3.80	0.41	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.76	0.43	Great Extent

Table 6 shows that societal expectations related to VAWC are uniformly high. The findings show that respondents have very high expectations of how society should respond to violence against women and children. Respondents strongly expect individuals to report incidents to the authorities and believe that the community should actively intervene in such situations, both scoring 3.77. They also feel that speaking out in public forums against violence is important, receiving a mean score of 3.73. These scores indicate that people are very clear about wanting transparency and action when violence occurs.

Among the items, the highest mean scores are for providing victims with support from friends and family and for the belief that silence around VAWC is unacceptable, both scoring 3.80. These values show that respondents believe it is critical for society to support victims directly and to

break the culture of silence. On the other hand, holding perpetrators accountable received a mean score of 3.70, which is the lowest of the items measured. Even though this value is still high, it suggests a slightly lower level of expectation compared to other aspects of community response.

Overall, the mean score for societal expectations is 3.76. This overall score indicates that the community strongly expects active and clear action against VAWC. These findings support what Garcia (2020) argued about the importance of cultural change in improving reporting behavior and intervention. They also align with the conclusions of Ailwood *et al.* (2023) and De Guzman (2023), who highlighted the critical role that community support and proactive engagement play in addressing violence against women and children. Together, the results confirm that societal expectations for addressing

violence are firmly established to a “Great Extent.” Societal expectations regarding VAWC are also set very high, with all items rated at a “Great Extent”. Community members expect proactive behaviors, such as reporting incidents, holding perpetrators accountable, and engaging local leaders in addressing VAWC. These findings are in line with Lee *et al.* (2024), who document a shift towards more comprehensive programming in anti-violence organizations, and with Chinkin and Gormley (2023), who stress the importance of community engagement in

international efforts to eliminate gender-based violence. The uniformly high ratings underscore the community’s demand for decisive and coordinated actions against VAWC.

Social Practices

Table 7 presents the everyday social practices and interactions that reflect and reinforce the prevailing norms related to VAWC, providing insight into how these practices are manifested in the community.

Table 7: Social Practices

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Observes that community members often discuss VAWC openly.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
2. Sees individuals actively supporting victims of VAWC in the community.	3.33	0.48	Moderate Extent
3. Notices that local events frequently address VAWC awareness and prevention.	3.27	0.45	Moderate Extent
4. Believes that it is common for friends and family to encourage victims to seek help.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
5. Perceives that there are resources available in the community for victims of VAWC.	3.37	0.56	Moderate Extent
6. Sees that community leaders engage in efforts to combat VAWC.	3.40	0.50	Moderate Extent
7. Notices that educational programs about VAWC are regularly conducted in schools.	3.57	0.57	Great Extent
8. Believes that people are generally willing to participate in initiatives against VAWC.	3.73	0.52	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.51	0.50	Great Extent

Table 7 reflects everyday social practices in the community related to VAWC. The results show that community members openly discuss violence against women and children and that friends and family encourage victims to seek help. Both these practices received a high mean score of 3.70. This suggests that people are comfortable talking about VAWC and offering support. Studies such as Garcia (2020) support the idea that open conversations can help overcome cultural barriers in reporting violence. In contrast, some practices received much lower scores. Active support for victims, local events for VAWC awareness, the availability of community resources, and the engagement of community leaders received moderate scores of 3.33, 3.27, 3.37, and 3.40 respectively. These lower scores indicate that while the ideas are well accepted, the implementation of supportive actions is weaker. De Guzman (2023) and Islam (2024) have noted that there is often a gap between strong societal beliefs and the actual follow-through in community practices. Educational programs in schools received a higher mean of 3.57, and there is a general willingness to participate in initiatives against VAWC with a mean of 3.73. This shows that initiatives involving schools and community participation are more robust. The overall mean score for social practices is 3.51. This overall score shows that, although there is strong support for addressing VAWC, the everyday practices are not as consistent as the beliefs

and expectations. The findings call for a greater focus on transforming strong attitudes into regular, effective actions in the community.

Some everyday social practices align well with these high expectations such as openly discussing VAWC and encouraging victims to seek help, however, other practices are only moderately evident. For instance, active support for victims, the frequency of local events addressing VAWC, and the consistent availability of community resources are rated at a “Moderate Extent”. This variability indicates that despite strong beliefs and expectations, the translation into consistent day-to-day actions is not as robust. Such a gap in practice is supported by Pearson *et al.* (2023), who note that while awareness of intimate partner violence and violence against children is high, actual intervention practices can be inconsistent. Additionally, Adams-Prassl *et al.* (2024) highlight similar discrepancies in workplace environments, suggesting that structural and cultural barriers may limit the full realization of community-driven support mechanisms.

Legal Responses to VAWC

This section presents the extent of practice of legal responses to VAWC as assessed by legal practitioners, law enforcement, and support service providers. It focuses on how laws and policies are formed, implemented, and enforced to protect victims.

Legislation and Policy Formation

Table 8 presents the development and implementation of laws, policies, and legal frameworks designed to address

VAWC, evaluating their scope, comprehensiveness, and responsiveness to emerging challenges.

Table 8: Legislation and Policy Formation

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Believes that current laws effectively protect the rights of women and children against violence.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
2. Sees that policies related to VAWC are regularly updated to address emerging issues.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
3. Observes that government agencies actively promote awareness of VAWC laws.	3.83	0.38	Great Extent
4. Thinks that there are clear guidelines for reporting and responding to VAWC incidents.	3.73	0.45	Great Extent
5. Believes that the legal framework supports comprehensive training for law enforcement on VAWC issues.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
6. Sees evidence of collaboration between various agencies in developing VAWC-related policies.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
7. Believes that funding is allocated for the implementation of VAWC legislation.	3.60	0.50	Great Extent
8. Thinks that community input is considered in the formulation of VAWC policies.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.72	0.45	Great Extent

The highest-rated item in this area is active government promotion of awareness, which received a score of 3.83. This high score shows that respondents believe government efforts to spread information about VAWC are very effective. Active awareness campaigns help ensure that communities know their rights and understand the laws. This finding is supported by studies such as Andrusiak *et al.* (2024), which emphasize that clear, active government communication is critical in strengthening domestic abuse prevention efforts.

The lowest-rated item was adequate funding, with a score of 3.60. Although this is still a high rating, it is lower compared to the other items. This suggests that while most aspects of the legal framework work well, funding may be a concern. Adequate funding is essential for implementing programs and providing support services. This concern is echoed by De Guzman (2023) and Islam (2024), who point out that without proper resources, even strong legal frameworks may face challenges in fully protecting victims of violence.

Overall, the mean score of 3.72 reflects a robust and positive perception of the legislative and policy framework addressing VAWC. Respondents believe that laws, policies, guidelines, and inter-agency collaborations are in place and working to protect women and children. Such a high overall rating indicates that legal practitioners, law enforcement, and support service providers feel confident in the system's ability to respond to emerging challenges. This overall strong performance aligns with findings by De Guzman (2023) and Usta *et al.* (2021), who stress the importance of continuous review and coordination in maintaining effective legal responses.

These high ratings indicate that legal practitioners, law enforcement, and support service providers perceive the legislative framework for VAWC as robust and responsive. This strong perception aligns with Vyas *et al.* (2023), who emphasize the critical need for comprehensive legal measures that address the wide-ranging socio-economic impacts of VAWC, and with Febriansyah *et al.* (2024), who argue that the effectiveness of legal provisions largely depends on their consistent implementation.

Enforcement of Protection Orders

Table 9 presents the effectiveness and consistency of enforcing protection orders aimed at safeguarding victims of VAWC, considering the operational aspects and challenges within the legal system.

The overall assessment of the legal responses to VAWC is high, with an overall mean of 3.63. This shows that, in general, the systems for handling protection orders and victim support are viewed positively by respondents. High ratings for community support, law enforcement training, consequences for violators, and awareness campaigns—each scoring between 3.73 and 3.77—suggest that these areas are well-developed. Research by De Guzman (2023) supports this finding by showing that strong legal frameworks and community-based initiatives can reduce violence and improve victim protection.

However, some specific aspects received lower ratings. Protection orders are effectively issued with a score of 3.53 and victims are well informed about their rights with a score of 3.63. Yet, the promptness of law enforcement responses scores only 3.40, and the availability of

Table 9: Enforcement of Protection Orders

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Believes that protection orders are effectively issued in VAWC cases.	3.53	0.57	Great Extent
2. Sees law enforcement agencies taking prompt action to enforce protection orders.	3.40	0.56	Moderate Extent
3. Observes that victims are informed about their rights to obtain protection orders.	3.63	0.49	Great Extent
4. Thinks that there are adequate resources for victims to report violations of protection orders.	3.43	0.50	Moderate Extent
5. Believes that the community supports the enforcement of protection orders.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
6. Notices that training is provided to law enforcement on handling protection order cases.	3.77	0.43	Great Extent
7. Perceives that there are consequences for individuals who violate protection orders.	3.73	0.45	Great Extent
8. Thinks that awareness campaigns on protection orders are prevalent in the community.	3.73	0.45	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.63	0.49	Great Extent

resources for reporting violations scores 3.43. These lower scores indicate that there are operational challenges that need attention. Studies like those of Pfitzner *et al.* (2020) and Islam (2024) highlight similar challenges where law enforcement action is delayed and resources are limited, affecting the overall efficacy of legal interventions. The high overall mean of 3.63 reflects a robust system, but the lower scores in specific operational areas point to the need for targeted efforts to address these gaps. These findings echo the concerns raised by Pfitzner *et al.* (2020), who noted that crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic

can disrupt the timely enforcement of protection orders, thereby highlighting the need for more flexible and responsive legal mechanisms such as virtual court proceedings and emergency protective orders.

Legal Aid and Support Services

Table 10 presents the availability, accessibility, and quality of legal aid and support services provided to victims of VAWC, emphasizing the role of these services in ensuring justice and rehabilitation.

Table 10: Legal Aid and Support Services

Items	WM	SD	VI
1. Believes that accessible legal aid services are available for VAWC victims in the community.	3.57	0.50	Great Extent
2. Sees that support services provide adequate counseling for victims of VAWC.	3.57	0.50	Great Extent
3. Observes that victims are informed about their options for legal assistance.	3.80	0.41	Great Extent
4. Thinks that legal aid organizations are actively involved in raising awareness about VAWC.	3.70	0.47	Great Extent
5. Notices that support services are culturally sensitive and address the specific needs of victims.	3.50	0.51	Great Extent
6. Perceives that there are sufficient resources allocated for legal aid and support services.	3.50	0.51	Great Extent
7. Believes that coordination exists between legal aid providers and law enforcement agencies.	3.80	0.41	Great Extent
8. Thinks that follow-up support is regularly provided to victims after they receive legal assistance.	3.80	0.41	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.65	0.46	Great Extent

The overall mean score of 3.65 shows that respondents view legal aid and support services for VAWC as strong

This means that, in general, the legal aid system is seen as effective in meeting the needs of victims. Research by

De Guzman (2023) supports this view by showing that robust legal frameworks can help reduce violence and assist victims when well implemented.

The highest ratings were given to items such as victims being well informed about their legal options, effective coordination with law enforcement, and regular follow-up support, all with a mean of 3.80. These high scores suggest that victims receive clear guidance and that agencies work well together. This aligns with findings from De Guzman (2023) and other studies that emphasize the importance of strong inter-agency collaboration and clear communication in helping victims access support and achieve justice.

The lowest scores, which were 3.50, were found in items related to culturally sensitive support services and the allocation of sufficient resources. Although these scores are still positive, they indicate that there is room for improvement in ensuring the services are fully aligned with local cultural needs and that they are adequately funded. These observations are supported by Garcia (2020) and

Islam (2024), who point out that cultural sensitivity and resource challenges often affect the effectiveness of legal aid systems.

This performance is consistent with Usta *et al.* (2021) and Sardinha *et al.* (2022), who underscore the importance of aligning legal responses with both victims' needs and international commitments such as SDG Target 5.2. Moreover, Febriansyah *et al.* (2024) highlight that comprehensive legal aid services are vital for empowering victims and ensuring that legal protections translate into tangible support.

Relationship Between Societal Norms and Legal Responses

Table 11 presents the correlation between the extent of perceived societal norms toward VAWC and the practice of legal responses. It explores how deeply ingrained cultural and social beliefs may influence the formulation, implementation, and effectiveness of legal measures.

The analysis of the relationship between perceived

Table 11: Relationship Between Societal Norms and Legal Responses

Extent of the current perceived societal norms towards VAWC	Extent of practice of the following legal responses to VAWC	p-value	Interpretation	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
beliefs and values	Legislation and Policy Formation	0.670	Not Significant	0.08	Not Significant
	Enforcement of Protection Orders	0.527	Not Significant	0.12	Not Significant
	Legal Aid and Support Services	0.224	Not Significant	0.02	Not Significant
social expectations	Legislation and Policy Formation	0.032	Significant	0.39	Significant
	Enforcement of Protection Orders	0.890	Not Significant	0.03	Not Significant
	Legal Aid and Support Services	0.262	Not Significant	0.02	Not Significant
social practices	Legislation and Policy Formation	0.443	Not Significant	0.15	Not Significant
	Enforcement of Protection Orders	0.049	Significant	0.36	Significant
	Legal Aid and Support Services	0.001	Significant	0.56	Significant

societal norms and legal responses to VAWC reveals that when examining the beliefs and values dimension, none of the legal response variables show a significant relationship. With high p-values (0.670 for legislation and policy formation, 0.527 for enforcement of protection orders, and 0.224 for legal aid and support services) and negligible correlation coefficients (0.08, 0.12, and 0.02 respectively), these findings suggest that underlying cultural beliefs and personal values do not directly translate into effective legal interventions. This observation resonates with Islam (2024), who noted that

despite legislative progress in Bangladesh, deep-seated cultural norms often hinder the practical effectiveness of these laws. Similarly, Garcia (2020) highlighted how reactive approaches in the Philippines, influenced by entrenched cultural factors, impede the development of robust legal responses.

In contrast, the social expectations dimension exhibits a statistically significant relationship with the formation of legislation and policies addressing VAWC, evidenced by a p-value of 0.032 and a moderate correlation coefficient of 0.39. This suggests that prevailing societal

expectations and norms—such as community standards regarding gender roles—play a pivotal role in shaping legal frameworks. This finding aligns with Ailwood *et al.* (2023), who emphasize the importance of incorporating women's voices and societal expectations into law reform processes to ensure that legal measures adequately address the realities of victim-survivors. However, it is noteworthy that social expectations do not significantly influence the enforcement of protection orders or the delivery of legal aid and support services, indicating that while these expectations are influential in policy formation, other factors may govern the operationalization of legal responses.

The social practices dimension further enriches our understanding of the interplay between societal behavior and legal responses. Although social practices do not significantly affect the formation of legislation and policies (p-value 0.443, correlation coefficient 0.15), they are significantly related to both the enforcement of protection orders (p-value 0.049, moderate correlation of 0.36) and, more notably, to the provision of legal aid and support services (p-value 0.001, strong correlation of 0.56). This suggests that everyday behaviors and interactions within the community considerably influence how protection orders are enforced and how legal support is provided. Van Hout *et al.* (2023) support this observation by documenting that entrenched cultural practices and structural failures—evident in the global challenges of upholding the Bangkok Rules—impede effective enforcement in custodial settings. Moreover, the strong link between social practices and legal aid services is echoed in De Guzman (2023) evaluation of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act in the Philippines, which underscores the critical role of community dynamics in the successful implementation of legal protections, as well as in Chikwe *et al.*'s (2024) call for multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing modern, technology-enabled violence. Fundamental beliefs and values seem to exert little direct impact on legal responses to VAWC, the more dynamic aspects of societal norms—namely, social expectations and social practices—demonstrate significant influences in specific legal domains.

Comprehensive Policy Framework for VAWC Legal Responses

Based on the findings of the study, this section proposes an integrated policy framework for addressing VAWC. It outlines strategic recommendations for aligning societal attitudes with robust legal responses to enhance the protection and support mechanisms for victims.

The Comprehensive Policy Framework for VAWC Legal Responses is built on strong legal foundations. The study shows that people strongly reject any form of violence against women and children. Community members hold high expectations for safe and supportive practices. However, everyday community actions sometimes fall short of these expectations.

The framework focuses on strengthening laws and policies. It calls for regular reviews and updates of existing legal provisions. Government agencies, lawmakers, and legal experts will work together to make these changes. Sufficient funding and community input are needed for this process.

The framework also focuses on enforcing protection orders. Law enforcement agencies must respond quickly when violations are reported. They need better training and more resources to act effectively. The goal is to make sure that protection orders are not only issued but also enforced consistently.

Another important part of the framework is improving legal aid and support services. These services should be easy to access and sensitive to different cultural needs. Legal aid providers and law enforcement agencies should coordinate their efforts. There should also be continuous support for victims throughout their legal journey.

The framework promotes active community involvement. Community groups and local leaders should take part in public awareness campaigns and educational programs. These efforts will help translate strong beliefs and high expectations into everyday actions. A joint effort from government agencies, legal institutions, NGOs, and community groups will build a responsive and integrated system. This system will effectively protect women and children from violence.

Rationale

Respondents perceived the development and implementation of laws and policies addressing VAWC as strong, indicating a solid legal foundation. However, while the legal frameworks are well established, some operational gaps exist in the enforcement of protection orders, particularly concerning the promptness of law enforcement actions and the availability of resources. Moreover, although legal aid and support services are generally regarded positively, the influence of community practices on the effective delivery of these services explains the need for a community-driven approach. Thus, the framework will build on existing strengths in legislation, addressing identified deficiencies in enforcement and support through improvements that show community expectations and behaviors.

Objectives

The Comprehensive Policy Framework aims to:

1. Enhance and continuously update legal frameworks to ensure they remain responsive, comprehensive, and adequately funded.
2. Address operational gaps by ensuring prompt, resource-backed enforcement of protection orders.
3. Expand and refine legal aid and support services to be more accessible, culturally sensitive, and effectively coordinated with enforcement agencies.
4. Leverage high societal expectations and supportive practices to drive active community engagement in addressing VAWC.

5. Implement strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, identify gaps, and adjust policies responding to evolving community needs and challenges.

1. Flexible Laws and Policies. The legal system must keep

up with changing needs and new challenges. To do this, laws and policies must be reviewed and updated regularly. Government agencies, legal experts, and community members will work together to check if current laws are still helpful. If not, they will suggest changes. This



Figure 1: Comprehensive Policy Framework for VAWC Legal Responses

review process will include public consultations and expert discussions. LGUs will also be encouraged to pass ordinances that support national laws. Funds will be allocated under the Gender and Development (GAD) budget to support these activities. Community input will ensure the laws match what people really need.

2. Quick and Effective Protection Enforcement. Protection orders should be enforced right away and followed strictly. Police officers and barangay officials must be trained on how to handle these orders. Trainings will teach them how to respond quickly and respectfully to victims. LGUs will provide the needed tools and resources like transportation, emergency hotlines, and shelter links. A clear process will be set, so officers know what to do when violations are reported. Regular monitoring will be done to check if the orders are being enforced properly. These steps will help victims feel safe and supported.

3. Better Legal Aid and Support Services. Victims must have access to free and easy-to-reach legal help and counseling. Legal aid centers will be strengthened through partnerships with the Public Attorney's Office (PAO)

and trained paralegals. Services will be available in local languages and will respect the cultural background of each victim. Legal aid offices and police will coordinate better so that victims are guided at every step. There will also be regular legal clinics and information drives in barangays. This ensures that victims are not left alone and are supported from the beginning to the end of their legal journey.

4. Active Community Involvement. The community already believes that violence against women and children is wrong. But these beliefs must lead to real action. Community leaders, teachers, parents, and youth groups will be involved in regular activities like school programs, seminars, and public campaigns. Barangays will hold forums where people can learn how to report VAWC cases and support victims. Community-based VAWC committees will be formed to lead these programs. Through events, posters, and even social media, people will be reminded that stopping VAWC is everyone's job.

Protection Measures

To strengthen protection measures, barangays and

courts must consistently issue and enforce protection orders. The Philippine National Police – Women and Children Protection Desk (PNP-WCPD) and barangay officials will be trained to immediately act on these orders. Enforcement protocols will be standardized so that officers know exactly what steps to follow when a protection order is violated. In addition, a referral system will be created to help victims quickly access safe shelters. This includes mapping available shelters, setting up hotlines, and assigning personnel to respond to emergency referrals. All these measures aim to keep victims safe and protected at every step.

Inter-Agency Coordination

Coordination among agencies will be formalized through the appointment of VAWC Desk Coordinators in every barangay. These coordinators will ensure that services are not duplicated and that victims receive continuous support across different agencies. A VAWC Council or Committee will be established in every municipality to oversee policy implementation and troubleshoot local issues. Regular meetings will be held to improve collaboration among the barangay, PNP, DSWD, PAO, and other relevant offices. A communication protocol will be developed to ensure smooth sharing of case updates and service referrals.

Capacity-Building and Training

Mandatory training will be rolled out for law enforcers and legal professionals to improve their understanding of VAWC laws and how to assist victims properly. These trainings will focus on gender sensitivity, trauma-informed responses, and legal procedures. Local Government Units (LGUs) will also conduct orientation and seminars for barangay officials to clarify their roles in preventing and responding to VAWC. These sessions will be part of the regular capacity-building programs under the GAD budget, ensuring that everyone from the barangay captain to social workers are equipped to handle VAWC cases properly.

Data Systems and Monitoring

A VAWC Case Registry System will be created at the barangay and municipal levels. This system will record all VAWC-related cases from report to resolution. Each case will be assigned a tracking number to monitor progress and avoid duplication. Regular audits will be conducted by the municipal VAWC council to evaluate how cases are being handled. Reports will be submitted quarterly to higher authorities for review. A feedback mechanism will be installed, allowing victims and the public to share their experiences or concerns regarding services received. This feedback will be used to improve services and close gaps in implementation.

Institutional Role Clarification

Each institution involved in VAWC response will be given clearly defined roles. For instance, the PNP-WCPD will handle immediate protection and investigation. Barangay

VAWC Desks will receive initial reports and coordinate with shelters and social workers. DSWD and MSWDO will provide psychosocial support and temporary shelters. PAO and prosecutors will provide legal representation and pursue cases in court. LGU Women and Family Offices will coordinate community programs and awareness campaigns. A manual of operations will be developed, outlining each office's roles and duties in a simple and accessible format.

Budget and Resource Allocation

All LGUs will be required to allocate funds for VAWC programs under the Gender and Development (GAD) budget. Annual planning sessions will include specific budget lines for legal aid, training, emergency response, and shelter assistance. The LGU's GAD Focal Person will coordinate with finance officers to ensure that these funds are released and used properly. Monitoring mechanisms will be introduced to track fund usage and evaluate whether the programs funded are delivering intended results.

Policy Enforcement

To improve policy enforcement, law enforcement officers will be equipped with clearer guidelines and practical checklists for responding to VAWC cases. Patrol teams and desk officers will receive pocket manuals detailing how to respond to VAWC calls. Protocols for immediate response, documentation, and referral will be strictly followed. Supervisors will be tasked to monitor compliance, and any failure to respond to VAWC-related cases will be subject to disciplinary actions. LGUs and regional offices will also perform regular assessments to ensure that protection policies are not only present but are being followed effectively.

Guiding Principles

The framework will adopt principles that are human rights-based, survivor-centered, gender-sensitive, and inclusive. All responders, including law enforcers, social workers, and legal aid providers, will be oriented on these principles through mandatory ethics training. Protocols will require that victims are treated with respect, privacy is protected, and their choices are respected at every stage. Guidelines will be developed to remind all workers of the importance of non-discrimination, confidentiality, and ensuring that due process is observed throughout the legal process.

Legal Bases and Policy Support

Existing laws such as CEDAW, RA 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), RA 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), and local ordinances will be fully integrated into policy enforcement. All barangay VAWC desks and legal responders will be given access to copies of these laws and simple guides on how to apply them. Regular seminars will be conducted to review updates and changes in these laws. Municipal councils will be encouraged to pass local ordinances

aligned with national policies, ensuring that legal support is available and adapted to local needs.

Legal Access and Case Management

Legal aid services will be expanded by strengthening the partnership with the Public Attorney's Office (PAO). Paralegal training will be offered to LGU staff and community volunteers to assist in areas where lawyers are not always available. Legal clinics will be held in barangays to give free consultations to victims. Case management and investigation will follow a streamlined process—victims will be assigned case officers to help navigate through police procedures, legal documentation, court appearances, and follow-ups. This way, support continues from the time of report until the case is resolved.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that the community strongly opposes Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) in principle and expects proactive legal action, but there is a noticeable gap in how these beliefs are reflected in everyday practices. While the legal framework addressing VAWC—covering legislation, enforcement, and support services—is well-established, there are operational issues in terms of how promptly law enforcement responds and how resources are made available for implementing protection orders. Notably, the findings showed that social expectations significantly influence how laws are formed and how protection and legal aid are delivered, whereas beliefs and values alone do not directly shape legal responses.

To address these gaps, the study recommends targeted community efforts to transform values into consistent practices through education, awareness campaigns, and community engagement. It also suggests that laws be reviewed regularly with community participation to ensure they stay aligned with public expectations. Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened by improving training, establishing specialized response teams, and ensuring resource availability. These efforts are reflected in the proposed Comprehensive Policy Framework for VAWC Legal Responses, which emphasizes collaboration among government agencies, legal institutions, and community groups.

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