

PH implementation of UNGA Resolution 73/148 “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment” covering 01 August 2018 to date:

1. Current trends and concerns and discuss target measures taken for groups of women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination

The Philippines prioritised the strengthening of laws on violence against women and girls, online and offline. The global spotlight on sexual violence in 2016 created a ripple effect in the country, which saw the rise of national and local initiatives to respond to the call to protect women and girls.

The passage of local ordinance such as the anti-catcalling ordinance in the country’s major cities is a big boost to the campaign to protect women from daily street harassment, and a clear policy shift on the part of the local government. In May 2016, the Quezon City local legislative council passed the ordinance penalizing sexual harassment of women in public spaces. This made the Quezon City as the first local government unit in the country to penalize street-level harassment of women. On June 28, 2018, the City Council of Manila also passed an ordinance penalizing catcalling in the city. Ordinance No. 7857 or “An Ordinance Penalizing Catcalling and Other Forms of Public Sexual Harassment”, penalizes all forms of sexual harassment in public spaces such as catcalling, wolf-whistling, leering, groping, and many others.

In 2019, the Safe Spaces Act or Republic Act No. 11313, a national policy on anti-sexual harassment in public and online spaces, expands the definition of sexual harassment and its concomitant sanctions and amends the 1995 anti-sexual harassment law to include peer sexual harassment at work, education, training institutions and in public spaces.

The law defines gender as a set of socially ascribed characteristics, norms, roles, attitudes, values and expectations identifying the social behavior of men and women, and the relations between them. This definition expands the coverage of the law.

2. Impact of measures taken and results achieved

Discussion on the law and its implementing rules and regulations increased the awareness of the public. Infographic and other collateral materials further helped educate the public that catcalling, wolf-whistling, misogynistic and homophobic slurs, unwanted sexual advances, and other forms of sexual harassment in public places, workplaces, schools, as well as in online spaces are now prohibited under the law.

Gender-based and public spaces sexual harassments includes Catcalling, wolf-whistling, unwanted invitations, misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and sexist slurs; persistent uninvited comments or gestures on a person's appearance; relentless requests for personal details; statement of sexual comments and suggestions; public masturbation or flashing of private parts, groping, or any advances, whether verbal or physical, that is unwanted and has threatened one's sense of personal space and physical safety.

While online, gender-based harassments includes acts that use information communication technology in terrorizing and intimidating victims through Physical, psychological, and

emotional threats, unwanted sexual misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and sexist remarks and comments online whether publicly or through direct and private messages; Invasion of the victim's privacy through cyberstalking and incessant messaging; Uploading and sharing without the consent of the victim any form of media that contains photos, voice, or video with sexual content, among others.

The Philippine Commission on Women also produced and published “VAW: The Unspoken Words”, a project aimed to make the public understand the difficult experiences of VAW victim-survivors. The project is a collection of short films featuring free-verse poetry and images expounding various forms of VAW presented in five videos which include VAW in the Home, VAW in the Workplace, VAW in the School, VAW in Public Spaces and Online Harassment. The videos can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfZ0pf6gP873xGN-smUFAIndaU7b-HFRI>. In 2018, three new set of videos on Date Rape, Revenge Porn, and Trafficking were produced.

3. Monitoring and evaluation

Section 13 of the Safe Spaces Act identifies the implementing bodies for gender-based online sexual harassment - the PNP Anti-Cybercrime Group (PNPACG) as the National Operational Support Unit of the PNP and the Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center (CICC) of the DICT. The PNPACG is primarily responsible for the implementation of pertinent Philippine laws on cybercrime, shall receive complaints of gender-based online sexual harassment and develop an online mechanism for reporting real-time gender-based online sexual harassment acts and apprehend perpetrators. The CICC of the DICT shall coordinate with the PNPACG to prepare appropriate and effective measures to monitor and penalize gender-based online sexual harassment.

The law also created a Joint Congressional Oversight Committee to monitor the implementation of this Act and to review the implementing rules and regulations promulgated. The Committee shall be composed of five (5) Senators and five Representatives to be appointed by the Senate President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, respectively. The Oversight Committee shall be co-chaired by the Chairpersons of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality and the House Committee on Women and Gender Equality.

4. Budgets allocated for implementation

National and local government agencies are authorized to utilize their mandatory Gender and Development (GAD) budget, at least 5% of their annual budget, as provided under Republic Act No. 9710, otherwise known as “The Magna Carta of Women” for this purpose. In addition, LGUs may also use their mandatory twenty percent (20%) allocation of their annual internal revenue allotments for local development projects as provided under Section 287 of Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the “Local Government Code of 1991”.

5. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders

The local ordinances protecting women from daily street harassment in major cities which helped drumbeat the national policy are part of the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Initiative of UN Women in partnership with the local government units and civil society organizations.

In 2019, the Commission on Higher Education partnered with the Institute for Women's Studies of the St. Scholastica's College in conducting a 'Gender Sensitive Counselling for Students' who may or are becoming vulnerable and most susceptible to becoming victims of abuse. This equips the schools in the higher education sector with knowledge and proper procedure in addressing cases of VAW.

6. Impact of and responses to COVID-19

The Philippine government released multiple statements to reiterate the call that gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual harassment has no place in the country even in a pandemic. The government recognises that movement restriction policies, implemented in mid-March 2020, while preventing the spread of COVID-19, complicates the help/reporting-seeking behaviour of the victims, thereby increasing the risk for gender-based violence.

Women face fear, uncertainty, heavier domestic care, limited movements, and economic constraints during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but instead of easing their burden, perpetrators of sexual harassment double their suffering.

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) warned women and girls against the Invisible or Nude Challenge in the mobile application TikTok, which gained more popularity during the lockdown with more people spending time online. The Philippine National Police was tasked to prevent the circulating of such videos online.

In another statement, national agencies composed of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), Department of Health (DOH), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and the Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM) strongly condemned all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 crisis, called for strict compliance to the Enhanced Community Quarantine, and enjoined all local government GBV response units, Barangay (village) VAW desks, Philippine National Police Women's and LGBTQ+ help desks, and Women and Child Protection Units, to respond quickly and effectively to all reports of GBV, using a survivor-centered approach.

The Philippine Commission on Women, through the Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and their Children (IACVAWC) Secretariat, continues to perform referral services for VAWC-related concerns received through email, social media, and mobile calls/messages. Referral services contribute to the Council's efficient coordination and delivery of necessary interventions for GBV/VAW victim-survivors.

The IACVAWC continues its referral services through its VAW Referral Service wherein the victim-survivors are given the needed assistance in close coordination with concerned service providers which include PNP-WCPC/AVAWCD/WCPD, DSWD, local Social Welfare and Development Offices (SWDO) and barangay (village) officials even during the community quarantine. The Referral Service contributes to the Council's efficient coordination and delivery of necessary interventions for GBV/VAW victim-survivors.

The IACVAWC Secretariat is in close contact with PNP-WCPC/AVAWCD in monitoring the incidence of VAW cases reported at the Police Stations and Community Precincts all over the country. VAW statistics are also being collected to determine if there is any significant rise of GBV/VAW cases during the ECQ.

From 15 March to 26 May 2020, the IACVAWC Secretariat received a total of one hundred thirty-four (134) inquiries from individual clients and referrals through the PCW Facebook page and Information Service Email. Social media sites and police or barangay hotlines addressed the constraints of the social distancing measures to ensure that victims will be able to get the life-saving response needed.

According to the national police, under the ECQ there were 804 reported cases of GBV from all over the country. The 8 laws on GBV monitored by the police are anti-violence against women and children law, anti-rape law, revised penal code provisions against acts of lasciviousness and concubinage, anti-photo and video voyeurism law, anti-trafficking persons law, anti-sexual harassment law, and the safe spaces law.

The number of reported cases have been decreasing prior to the movement restriction policy (community quarantine). In January 2020, there were 1,383 reported cases nationwide; down to 1,224 in February 2020, then dipping further in March 2020 to 1,044.