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ENHANCING THE INVESTIGATION OF RAPE CASES INVOLVING CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW (CICL): A CASE STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S DESKS IN ANGELES CITY

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores methods to enhance the investigation of rape cases involving CICL handled by the Women's and Children Desks (WCPD) of Angeles City Police Office. It aims to identify current practices, challenges, and recommendations for improving investigative procedures. The study employs qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus group discussions with investigators and social workers. Findings reveal that while WCPD investigators follow established operational procedures guided by the penal statutes and police protocols, they face significant challenges, such as limited forensic capabilities, inadequate training, and insufficient victim support services. Proposed recommendations include enhanced training programs focusing on child psychology, trauma-informed interviewing techniques, and cultural sensitivity. Additionally, increasing forensic resources and strengthening inter-agency collaboration are essential for improving case outcomes. An action plan prioritizing a child-centered approach and addressing budget constraints is crucial for effective case management. The study underscores the need for comprehensive support systems for victims and the importance of ongoing professional development for investigators.

KEYWORDS: *rape case investigation, CICL, Women's and Children Desks, Angeles City Police, forensic capability, trauma-informed approach, child-centered approach, inter-agency collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse remains a critical issue globally, significantly impacting individuals and communities. Discussions and interventions often prioritize victims, frequently overlooking perpetrators, especially minors. Understanding the characteristics, backgrounds, and influences that shape minor perpetrators is crucial for developing effective preventive strategies and guiding them toward becoming responsible members of society. According to Asuncion et al. (2022), 931 minor perpetrators were involved in sexual abuse cases, predominantly male (55.9%) and aged 15-19. These offenders often had direct connections to victims and exhibited patterns of abusive behavior influenced by their environments.

The complexity of rape cases involving minors, particularly in a culturally diverse and socioeconomically complex country like the Philippines, presents unique challenges. This study aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the investigative processes, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural influences shaping responses to such cases within the Philippine legal system. By examining real-life cases, legal statutes, and societal attitudes, the study seeks to offer insights and recommendations for improving the handling of these sensitive cases.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study explores ways to enhance the investigation of rape cases managed by the Women's and Children Desks of Angeles City Police Office. Specifically, it aims to determine:

1. Existing practices employed in the investigation of rape cases involving minors.
2. Challenges faced by investigators in handling these cases.
3. Recommendations for improving investigative procedures and techniques.
4. Proposed action plans to improve the investigation of rape cases involving minors.

METHODOLOGY

Narrative Analysis Method

This study employs a narrative analysis methodology, focusing on the stories and experiences of investigators, social workers, and survivors. Narrative analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of personal accounts, providing rich insights into the investigative processes, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Participants

Participants include investigators from the Women's and Children Desks and social workers. Investigators are responsible for evidence collection, interviewing, case building, and maintaining a trauma-informed approach. Social

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workers provide emotional support, advocacy, and coordinate multidisciplinary efforts.

Data Gathering Tools

Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews provided deep insights into individual experiences, while FGDs captured shared experiences and differing perspectives. Document analysis included reviewing case files, protocols, and training materials.

Data Analysis

Data were processed using narrative analysis, which involves identifying key themes and patterns within personal stories and experiences. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of the perspectives and challenges related to the investigation of rape cases involving minors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existing Practices

Investigative procedures are guided by the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines and other relevant laws. Key steps include initial assessment, medical examination, forensic evidence collection, interviews, case build-up, and coordination with judicial authorities. The age of minor victims is determined through official documents, medical assessments, and expert evaluations. The investigation process emphasizes a child-centered and trauma-informed approach, involving trained professionals and inter-agency collaboration.

Challenges Faced by Investigators

Limited Time for Investigation

The legal time limit for investigating crimes involving children poses a significant challenge, restricting the ability to conduct thorough investigations. This constraint aims to protect the child's well-being but often limits the collection of comprehensive evidence.

Child Sensitivity and Trauma

Investigators must approach child victims with sensitivity, considering their emotional and psychological state. Training deficits and lack of empathy can lead to revictimization and hinder the investigative process. Establishing trust and a safe environment is crucial but challenging due to the trauma experienced by victims.

Limited Disclosure and Communication Barriers

Child victims often face difficulties in articulating their experiences due to fear, shame, and trauma. Language barriers, especially with foreign victims, further complicate communication and delay reporting.

Forensic Evidence Collection

Collecting forensic evidence from minors requires specialized training and sensitivity to avoid further trauma. Limited resources and budget constraints hinder the availability of necessary equipment and trained personnel.

Support Services and Interagency Coordination

Ensuring access to counseling, medical care, and legal advocacy is essential but often limited due to resource constraints. Effective inter-agency collaboration is crucial for comprehensive case management but is challenged by communication and coordination issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training and Capacity Building

Regular and specialized training should be provided to investigators, focusing on trauma-informed interviewing techniques, child psychology, forensic evidence collection, and legal procedures. Training should also cover cultural sensitivity, bias, and collaboration with other agencies.

Victim-Centered Approach

Adopt a victim-centered approach prioritizing the needs and well-being of survivors. This includes treating survivors with respect and empathy, offering support services, and ensuring a child-friendly environment during interviews and interactions.

Enhanced Protocols and Procedures

Develop clear and comprehensive protocols for handling rape cases involving minors, covering evidence collection, victim support, legal procedures, and inter-agency collaboration. Utilize technology, such as body-worn cameras, for accurate documentation and transparency.

Specialized Units and Support Services

Establish specialized units within the Women's and Children Desks, focusing on cases involving minors. Ensure the availability of support services, including counseling, medical care, and legal advocacy. Strengthen inter-agency collaboration through regular meetings and shared resources.

CONCLUSION

Improving the investigation of rape cases involving minors requires a multi-faceted approach that includes specialized training, a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach, clear protocols, and effective inter-agency collaboration. By addressing these areas, the Angeles City Police Office can enhance its ability to provide justice and support to survivors, ensuring a more effective and compassionate response to such sensitive cases.

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