

Knowledge and experiences of violence against women and children in rural Philippines: A mixed-methods study



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the legal awareness and empowerment of women in rural areas of the Philippines, with particular focus on the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act (RA 9262). The legal rights of rural women and the misuse or lack of understanding of these rights remain important concerns. Although protective legal measures exist, many rural women have limited access to legal education, resources, and practical information. This situation reduces their ability to make informed decisions and to protect their social, economic, and legal rights, making them more vulnerable to abuse, violence, and gender discrimination. A mixed-methods approach was used in this study. Data were collected from 269 women in the 5th district of Iloilo. The quantitative phase involved a survey to assess the level of legal awareness, while the qualitative phase included focus group discussions to explore the practical impact of the law. The results show that although most respondents are aware of the existence of legal protections, they have limited understanding of specific forms of abuse covered by the law, particularly sexual and economic violence. The findings also indicate that education and income levels significantly influence legal awareness. The study concludes that legal education programs in rural communities are essential to improve women's awareness of their rights. In addition, efforts to eliminate violence against women and children should be supported by socioeconomic strategies, including promoting women's participation in livelihood programs and educational initiatives on gender-based violence.

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1. Introduction

Violence against women and children remains a pervasive yet often normalized phenomenon in rural Philippine communities, where legal protections exist but are unevenly understood and applied in everyday life. This mixed-methods study examines the gap between formal knowledge and lived realities of violence by exploring how women in rural Philippines perceive, interpret, and experience the provisions of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act (RA 9262).

Despite decades of legislative reform and advocacy, the persistence of violence against women and children in rural Philippines underscores a widening chasm between policy intent and lived reality. The global prevalence of violence against

women and children (VAWC) is as serious as it is alarming, with women and children in developing areas more predisposed to suffering its pernicious effects. Rural areas of the Philippines are characterized by a unique sociocultural context, profound poverty, and geographic isolation, which make prevention and intervention efforts exceedingly difficult (Goswami, 2021). These areas, like many rural areas in the region, remain unaware of or are unable to understand the multiple policy approaches to VAWC that are available. Even policymakers differ in understanding the gaps, and therefore, the interventions remain unaddressed. Women in such situations are most likely to remain dependent on their partner's income due to difficulty in accessing reproductive health services, lack of economic empowerment, and violence against women, primarily due to the absence of faith in the police as a reporting institution (Valdez et al., 2022).

The potential of educational programs and livelihood support interventions was examined in this study regarding their possible role in empowering women and children, reducing their risk of exposure to violence, and fostering autonomy

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and self-reliance. It investigates to what extent respondents' knowledge of their legal rights, coupled with economic empowerment through livelihood support, can interrupt cycles of violence and foster safer community spaces. This research is important because it highlights the lack of options that women have during violence and conflict, especially in places where the interventions available, particularly for intimate partner violence, are absent (Gibbs et al., 2020). It also offers practical strategies for country-level policymakers and NGOs to formulate economic and culturally appropriate intervention strategies that respond to the needs of the people and fill the gap of knowledge concerning the lack of enforcement of laws such as RA 9262 (Panerio and Albay, 2020) that is evident in the high prevalence of domestic violence in the Philippines, where women aged 15 to 49 reported such violence. This study also recognizes the social norms and attitudes that condone domestic violence as serious risk factors and obstacles to effective response, whilst women's empowerment and autonomy, along with the capacity of personal finances, are protective correlates (Sabri et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the impact of different education and livelihood interventions on awareness and violent experience needs more access to more effective, sustainable interventions and strategies.

The Socio-Ecological Model of Heise (1998) provides a framework for understanding the complex interaction between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors that influence the experience and response to violence against women and children. This model highlights how interventions must address multiple levels of influence to reduce and prevent violence effectively. It critically examines how educational initiatives and livelihood support interventions can strengthen the empowerment of women and children, reduce their vulnerability to violence, and promote autonomy and self-reliance.

In doing so, it aligns with recent scholarship that applies an ecological lens to violence against women in the Philippine context, as illustrated by Kibtiah and Tuharea (2024). It uses a social-ecological lens to explain VAWC as a multi-level issue influenced by factors at the individual, relationship, community, and broader sociocultural levels. At the individual level, experiences such as early-life trauma, mental health challenges, and certain personality characteristics can increase vulnerability to VAWC. Within relationships, dynamics of power and control—including abuse that continues after separation—help shape how violence emerges and persists.

At the community level, conditions like neighborhood deprivation, institutional breakdowns, and poor access to support services can heighten risk. At the societal level, gendered norms, patriarchal structures, and wider inequalities can reinforce VAWC through social tolerance and uneven or inconsistent legal responses. Bringing evidence together across these levels highlights the

importance of prevention and intervention being contextual, interdisciplinary, and culturally responsive, addressing the whole ecology that sustains VAWC.

This study examines how integrated educational and livelihood programs can empower economically self-sufficient women and children to understand, resist, and report violence, in relation to protective self-sufficient factors. It emphasizes the value of early educational action in shaping the attitudes concerning violence against women, which has been shown to raise violence awareness and decrease violent actions in schools and communities (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2023). Thus, this study will help in formulating scalable and sustainable initiatives that, along with addressing the needs of the survivors, work towards the reduction of violence against women and children in the rural areas in the periphery of the Global South.

2. Methodology

This explanatory mixed-methods study examines the intersection of awareness of violence and socioeconomic factors, providing both quantitative and qualitative analyses of lived experiences and violence interventions. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing sequential explanatory designs and, firstly, collecting quantitative data to establish rates of prevalence and rates of impact from interventions. Then, undertaking qualitative analysis to understand the rationale and the more intricate details of the lived experiences, such details form the basis of separate cultural, social, and domestic narratives.

The survey instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire designed to assess the respondents' awareness of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act (RA 9262). The survey contained a range of questions on the awareness of legal protections, with a focus on issues such as sexual violence, economic abuse, and protection orders. The instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure the level of awareness, ranging from 1 (Unaware) to 5 (Very Much Aware). This scale was chosen to allow for a nuanced understanding of participants' awareness levels, with the following dimensions: legal knowledge, awareness of available services, and the ability to identify various forms of abuse. To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing in a neighboring barangay with a smaller sample of 30 women. The feedback from the pilot test led to minor adjustments in wording for clarity and relevance.

The sampling procedure employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that the survey respondents were representative of the broader population in terms of socio-economic status, educational background, and geographical location. The strata were defined as follows: Socio-economic class (low, middle, and high income), educational attainment (primary, secondary, and

tertiary education), and geographical location (urban and rural areas within the 5th district of Iloilo). The use of stratified random sampling ensured that each subgroup within the population was adequately represented. This was crucial for examining how variables like income level, education, and location impacted the respondents' awareness of legal protections and intervention measures. The final sample of 269 respondents was selected randomly from each of the defined strata, allowing the study to assess variations in awareness across these key demographic factors.

Following the quantitative survey, a qualitative study was conducted through interviews and focus group discussions with selected participants. These respondents were chosen based on their extremes of awareness, with some having high awareness and others having low awareness of the VAWC law, to capture a broad range of perspectives. The interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and then subjected to thematic analysis.

The process involved the following steps: Data Familiarization: The interview transcripts were read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial Coding: Key phrases and segments related to awareness and perceptions of the Anti-VAWC law were identified and coded. Theme Development: The codes were grouped into broader themes, such as "knowledge gaps," "legal awareness," and "attitudes toward reporting violence." Theme Refinement: The themes were reviewed and refined, with a focus on ensuring that they accurately reflected the underlying patterns in the data. Thematic analysis helped to uncover patterns that provided a deeper understanding of how women perceive the law and its protections,

offering insights into their awareness, attitudes, and experiences.

3. Results and discussion

Even with a rising number of information campaigns about gender-oriented laws, there is still a persistent gap in awareness of legislation concerning the protection of women and children against violence. Rural areas of the Philippines face geographic barriers and find it even more challenging to promulgate the necessary legal information pertaining to gender-based violence (De Guzman, 2023). Data from Table 1 indicates the level of respondents' awareness pertaining to the VAWC Law. It presents the highest mean responses and the lowest mean responses.

Considering the questions with the highest mean scores, it seems that respondents had a greater awareness of specific facets of the VAWC Law. These questions involve:

1. How do you perceive the scope of RA 9262?
2. How do you perceive the support services offered to victims of violence prescribed by RA 9262?
3. Do you understand that economic abuse could mean the destruction of property in a household?

Enhanced awareness scores on these questions suggest that respondents have some knowledge of the scope and coverage of Republic Act 9262 (RA 9262), which aims to respond to Violence Against Women and Children in the Philippines. The legal awareness campaign effectively conveyed these basic elements of the law, likely because the elements being conveyed had a direct bearing and relevance.

Table 1: Level of respondents' awareness of the VAWC law

Particulars	Mean	Verbal interpretation
How aware are you of the physical form of violence against women and children?	3.62	Much aware
Are you aware of the law that seeks to address the prevalence of VAWC by their intimate partners, like husband or ex-husband, live-in partner or ex-live-in partner, boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-partner?	3.32	Aware
Are you aware that economic abuse includes destroying household property?	3.30	Aware
Are you aware that sexual violence includes but is not limited to acts causing or attempting to cause the victim to engage in any sexual activity by force, threat of force, physical or other harm, or threat of physical or other harm or coercion?	2.51	Aware
How aware are you of the emotional form of violence against women and children?	2.35	Less aware
Are you Aware that Sexual violence refers to an act which is sexual in nature, committed against a woman or her child? And it includes, but is not limited to: Rape, sexual harassment, acts of lasciviousness, treating a woman or her child as a sex object, making demeaning and sexually suggestive remarks, physically attacking the sexual parts of the victim's body, forcing her/him to watch obscene publications and indecent shows, forcing the woman or her child to do indecent and/or make films thereof, forcing the wife and mistress/lover to live in the conjugal home or sleep together in the same room with the abuser?	2.35	Less aware
Total mean	2.97	Aware

Considering the gaps in awareness of specific issues versus others, the overall score for the different dimensions of awareness appears to be no higher than moderately aware, suggesting that a significant portion of the population has an incomplete understanding of the issues at hand. This paradox highlights the need for targeted educational strategies that bridge the gap between lawmakers' prevailing understanding of the law and its complexities. This scenario brings to the fore the

need for education that is more specialized than the general legal regimes pertaining to the protective measures and the legal instruments available, stating the actions required to be taken for the achievement of financial inclusion, the other arms that counter economic abuse, and women's empowerment (Steinert et al., 2023). The knowledge-behavior relationship regarding these unexplored domains should focus on whether the increase in understanding these domains corresponds to an

increase in willingness to report and seek help. It also implies that provisions of RA 9262, especially its intents, are possibly understood, yet the tactical and structural elements needed for its comprehensive enforcement seem to be unpronounced. This indicates the need for a pivot in direction to more complex, clear, and practical educational materials regarding the elements and processes of its enforcement.

These questions with the lowest mean scores indicate an area where respondents showed less awareness. This includes:

1. Do you consider that sexual violence includes any sexual activity directed at a woman and/or her child? It covers more than rape and also includes sexual harassment, lascivious behavior, the sexual objectification of a woman and/or child, making degrading and/or obscene remarks, sexual assault, the coercive invitation of victims into the viewing of pornographic and/or indecent material, the coercive commission of indecent acts and/or motion picture behavior, and even scenarios where a woman, a mistress, or a partner is made to live with the abuser or sleep in the same room.
2. Do you consider that economic abuse is the victim's inability to control her own money or salary, her own property, and the sole control of the conjugal money and/or the conjugal property?
4. Do you consider that an Anti-VAWC Act Protection Order is an interim protection order to restrain further violence, release women from further violence, and deny them the legal rationalization for the protection?

The respondents who provided the Protection Order feedback seem unaware of certain forms of abuse, namely, sexual violence, economic violence, and legal protections, which in this case were outlined as Protection Orders. With the existence of these forms of abuse coupled with court orders, respondents still did not seem to grasp the subject sufficiently, pointing to the need for better education and outreach concerning these topics. The absence of information could stem from the sociocultural context, which endorses some of these behaviors, or from a lack of accessible, culturally specific educational material about these issues.

It is, therefore, vital to devise specific strategies that will attempt to fill these gaps in the knowledge, using community-driven initiatives to bridge the gaps through the provision of factual and complete information. In addition, taking the necessary steps to fill these gaps is essential to empower people to understand and address the covert violence that is often overlooked (Goswami, 2021; McKay White et al., 2022). This proves the pervasive nature of cultural stigma and the administrative gaps out of which the violence silence syndrome is born and which, in turn, is the most potent mechanism of violence (Dziva et al., 2020).

The mean net score of the respondents' awareness of the VAWC law (moderation level) is

2.97. This suggests that the respondents have some understanding and at least a little awareness of the law; nonetheless, a superficial understanding. There is awareness of RA 9262 and the Victim Support Services, but knowledge about sexual violence, economic abuse, and protection orders is inadequate. This suggests a lack of strategic and detailed instruction in VAWC educational initiatives. Furthermore, it is crucial to assess the practical relevance of this moderate level of awareness in relation to the availability of legal assistance and supportive mechanisms (Barrick and Worsham, 2020). The gap in understanding violence against women and children and its legal and social countermeasures involves focused gap awareness and education. These educational measures will equip women and children with the necessary tools to recognize and report any form of abuse, thus reinforcing the legal frameworks in place to protect them. Understanding social abuse culture, which is usually associated with victim blaming and abuse shunning (Malawis-Ignacio, 2021), and advancing the cultural competence of more formal service providers (Green et al., 2024) is necessary to build a social culture that supports reporting abuse.

Legal rights and protections of women's awareness should be floating above the positive and negative legal aspects, the context of which includes sexual violence and economic abuse, which were mostly overlooked and were noted with great concern. The respondents acknowledge the existence of laws that help curtail economic abuse and protection orders, but economic abuse and other legally protective measures are the center of great misconceptions. Therefore, the existence of educational measures on rights and the law, as well as protective measures for individuals, is of great importance.

These do not constitute the only information regarding the stigma and social norms underlying the violence against women and children that advocate for the non-reporting of this violence. It involves ensuring that there is no violence in the culture, legal, social, or religious frameworks that preach violence against women, children, and other forms of discrimination, and reporting violence, the lack of which inhibits access to support services and help (Crespo-López et al., 2025). Gram et al. (2024) argued that societal intolerance toward violence against women and children and lack of access to justice for victims stem from a lack of understanding, awareness, and proactive education building systemically. Respondents in the study exhibited a moderate degree of knowledge concerning the Violence Against Women and Children Law; however, significant misconceptions about specific types of abuse and the legislation's provisions that would remedy them were evident. Education should focus on increasing the understanding of sexual violence, economic abuse, and the application of protection orders. This inclusive method will enhance the legal system's capacity and promote a social atmosphere where violence is routinely

monitored, reported, and dealt with, improving the overall security for women and children (Lowe et al., 2022).

Table 2 illustrates that there is a significant difference in the level of the respondents' awareness differentiated by age, level of education, and income of the household. Grouping participants by income illustrated a disparity in awareness about VAWC (p-value = 0.00). This demonstrates that income may determine the awareness a woman possesses of the corresponding VAWC laws and the corresponding legal protections. The post hoc analysis indicates awareness of VAWC legal protections among women in the income bracket of 10,000 and below, earning 0.05, indicating a sluggish average difference in awareness and supporting the idea that legal protection informational resources may be limited. In contrast, women in the income brackets of 10,000-20,000 and 20,000-30,000 also exhibited stronger awareness and statistically significant levels (p = 0.00). This indicates that the resources that directly improve a person's awareness, including education, community programs, and media campaigns, are more accessible at a higher income level.

These inequalities highlight the importance of creating VAWC awareness and supporting access programs with a focus on women's income disparity. This intervention is necessary for alleviating the awareness of socioeconomic proxies, which in turn strengthens and improves the ability of at-risk communities to recognize and intervene in violence episodes (Haque et al., 2022). Moreover, the combination of poverty and domestic violence also increases the level of risks and, therefore, the need

for special assistance to low-income victims. This is in line with the evidence showing that poverty increases the risk of intimate partner violence, which emphasizes the need for women's economic empowerment for violence prevention (Jud et al., 2023). Women's economic marginalization makes VAWC prevention important since it limits women's ability to escape abusive relationships, and as such, works against them. There are also, however, understood protective factors that lower the risk of victimization, such as income and level of education attained (Anuyah, 2025).

Access to legal documents and sociological studies concerning VAWC is dependent on the level of formal education attained. As the tertiary level of education is attained, awareness of the appropriate legal documents governing VAWC issues significantly increases. The difference in awareness of secondary and tertiary education warrants deeper consideration of the implications of higher education and its influences on social issues, legal systems, and public policy. This provides the rationale for developing and implementing proactive response strategies for strong curricula on human rights, gender, and violence education nationwide, including for programs targeting remote areas. These programs should be integrated with legal education liberalization at the grassroots level, targeting low- and moderately literate areas and those with culturally remote populations. These programs and policy sets will contribute to reducing and/or eradicating oppressive cultural and societal beliefs that sustain violence and other forms of social injustices, especially in poorly educated and highly vulnerable communities (Maher and Hayes, 2023).

Table 2: Significant difference in the respondents' awareness of VAWC law

Variable	Category	Mean difference	Std. error	p-value	Interpretation
Age	18-32 years old	0.009	0.065	0.648	Not significant
Age	31-40 years old	0.07679	0.657	0.185	Not significant
Age	41-50 years old	0.032	0.063	0.954	Not significant
Age	51-60 years old	-0.085	0.665	0.701	Not significant
Educational attainment	Secondary level	-0.059	0.029	0.089	Not significant
Educational attainment	College level	0.059	0.0283	0.000*	Significant
Educational attainment	College graduate	0.370	0.030	0.000*	Significant
Household income	₱10,000 and below	-0.325	0.134	0.630	Not significant
Household income	₱10,001-₱20,000	-0.001	0.044	0.071	Not significant
Household income	₱20,001-₱30,000	0.086	0.029	0.000*	Significant
Household income	Above ₱30,000	0.325	0.130	0.000*	Significant

*: p < 0.05 = Significant

Further examination demonstrates the differences in Violence Against Women and Children protocols legal documents that exist between the respondents with postsecondary education and those who attained the college level (p = 0.00). The respondents who graduated with a college degree were the most aware of VAWC policies. In consideration of post-secondary education, it has been noted that the field allows for deeper integrated thinking and critical thinking, as well as the acquisition of information on wider social parameters. While the awareness of graduates

cannot be disentangled from the incorporation of social justice, human rights, and legal studies, as well as the primary interaction with a multitude of texts and social information, it shows the correlation that still exists between the social VAWC greatly.

The access to educational resources to be able to teach VAWC in the institutions of higher learning and the ability to identify and respond to the negative aspects of gender violence enrich civil literacy, as demonstrated in Villardón-Gallego et al. (2023). This degree of civil literacy, as it pertains to legal education and legal matters related to the violence

against women and children in the country, has also been framed and consequences have also been demonstrated in the works of [Erten and Keskin \(2018\)](#) and [Makhene \(2022\)](#). With that being said, the level of education available to women worldwide and the girls in the back or rural communities continues to be a significant barrier to the spreading of this form of education, for which information and resources should be designed to eliminate ([Frola et al., 2024](#)). The need to eliminate these gaps goes beyond the provision of educational resources; it also entails the concomitant need to improve legal awareness and literacy, especially for women and children in poverty and other marginalized communities. There are also mental and social resources that need to be allocated to a VAWC educational program that is designed with consideration to culture, as well as access.

The violence against women and children is examined further through interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews illuminate the extent of the respondents' understanding of the legal framework of gender-based violence and their opinions about the effectiveness of the barangay's protective actions. The following analysis highlights the responses based on the thematic evaluation of responses. Regarding the promotion of the Safe Spaces Act by the barangay, the respondents regard the promotion of the Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act 11313) within the community as being of a fair or moderate level. This means that some level of effort is made toward promotion, but there is still a substantial distance from the level of promotion that is needed within the community. This marks the importance of the need for active promotion and community outreach for the Safe Spaces Act so that the Act is known and regarded as a protective measure for the vulnerable in the communities ([Rivano and Rivano, 2022](#)).

Regarding experiences of sexual harassment in public spaces, respondents relate a low level of self-acknowledgment to the experience of sexual harassment in public spaces as captured under the Safe Spaces Act. This means that respondents who do not undergo these experiences do not justify that they are not happening. In terms of the Perception of Barangay as a Safe Space, respondents indicated the public perceives the barangay as not a "safe space" free from harassment, violence, and bullying. This result sends deep concerns about the level of protection that the barangay can offer. The situation that they describe indicates the absence of minimum security not only for women but for all citizens. The cause of this could be a lack of enforcement, apathy from the community, or the absence of awareness campaigns. Their results underline the importance of the barangay in enhancing and strengthening the protective measures for people at risk of suffering violence and abuse. Respondents feel that the legal educational materials on women's rights are accessible via social media and websites. This indicates that they have not utilized other sources of educational materials like brochures, textbooks, and

magazines. Hence, the barangay needs to take the initiative to devise strategies to improve the distribution and availability of these materials, possibly through community centers and public gatherings. Furthermore, these materials should be tailored to the community's educational levels and language to maximize effectiveness. Their practical functioning would also be enhanced by instructions to streamline the self-protecting processes through violence self-identification. For decades now, elements of education, propaganda, social and economic structures, and home and family gender relations have been found salient to be integrated components of the processes of victimization ([Valdez et al., 2022](#)). This stands in contrast to the concept of victimization that is described as 'delayed,' that is, responses that are defined as 'time bound' as opposed to instantaneous in relation to the violent act. It is the case, though, that the tactical response choices advocated must rest on a paradigmatic rather than a gradual construct. The paradigms must incorporate attitudinal ('instinct') shifts across strata descending from the behavioral and structural keystones of change: family, individual, and community, and cut across all the levels.

The community perception of the Safe Spaces Act and the strategies of the barangay to promote it have been incorporated into 'Other' violences woven into the legal tier. Women's perception and individual feelings of safety, especially about the discrimination of expression, are gaps that ethnographic drawing snapshots illuminate. These gaps make the Safe Spaces appear to the public in a manner that subverts the conditions of women and children in the community. These outcomes suggest the importance of more customized educational programs concerning the enforcement of laws on the books, expanded "community outreach" programs, and structures to counterbalance the lack of advocacy for the protective feelings of women by their legal rights. The legal protective advocacy presented in this qualitative data also indicates the dissonance in outcomes as legislatures intended versus on-the-ground reality, and thus indicates the need for more grassroots and cohesive interventions in the violence prevention and management spectrum.

It is equally important to pinpoint that a substantial volume of scholarly work exists on the topic of gender violence, legal frameworks that need to be deepened and broadened. The efforts in question need to not only communicate information but also engage community members on the gendered social relations of power that result in violence ([Sabri et al., 2022](#)). Such an approach is necessary for the application of legal instruments aimed at the improvement of the conditions of women and children, particularly in remote regions where the patriarchal culture is still prevalent as the primary mode of social organization. In recent times, an enduring aspect of violence against women has started to attract attention, highlighting the necessity of multifaceted frameworks that address

not only violence but also its trivialization and the subsequent harassment that follows. The new wave of younger women has been at the forefront, harnessing technology to transform the conversation and to push for accountability for violence and systems that enable it. The recent surge in activism, particularly from the survivor-led initiatives, has significantly influenced the most recent shifts in

legislation and policy pertaining to gendered violence (Loney-Howes et al., 2024).

To integrate the key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, a joint display table has been constructed. Table 3 shows the result of the quantitative findings and the qualitative insights gathered; a key findings analysis was added to highlight the comparison.

Table 3: Quantitative and qualitative results on respondents' income and educational status

Demographic group	Quantitative findings (awareness level)	Confidence interval (95%)	Qualitative insights	Key findings
Low income	2.5 (moderately aware)	2.4 - 2.6	Lack of access to legal resources and education	Lower awareness linked to socio-economic barriers
Middle income	3.5 (aware)	3.4 - 3.6	Better access to information and community programs	Higher awareness due to better educational and resource access
High income	4.2 (very aware)	4.1 - 4.3	Active participation in legal workshops and programs	Increased awareness with higher income and education
Tertiary education	4.0 (very aware)	3.9 - 4.1	Understanding of legal terms and protections	Education level is a key factor in higher awareness
Primary education	2.8 (moderately aware)	2.7 - 2.9	Limited knowledge about legal protections	Awareness levels are lower among those with primary education

In synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative findings, it was observed that although many respondents exhibited awareness of the general provisions of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act (RA 9262), substantial gaps persist in their understanding of specific forms of abuse—particularly sexual violence and economic abuse. These inconsistencies underscore the multidimensional nature of awareness, suggesting that surface-level familiarity with the law does not necessarily translate into accurate recognition of abusive behaviors in everyday contexts. This pattern becomes more apprehensive when the survey results are interpreted alongside the narrative accounts elicited through interviews.

Qualitative responses illustrate how normalized gender roles and culturally embedded expectations may obscure respondents' ability to identify legally defined forms of violence. For instance, one participant indicated that a husband's decision to purchase beer rather than food for the household should not be construed as violence because the income was "his daily earnings" and he was merely "relaxing after a hard day at work." Another respondent suggested that it is inappropriate for a wife to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband, even when she is physically exhausted after domestic labor, such as doing laundry throughout the day. These accounts suggest that respondents may interpret economic decision-making and sexual consent primarily through marital entitlement and traditional household hierarchies, rather than through the legal frameworks articulated under RA 9262. Collectively, such narratives provide compelling evidence of limited substantive understanding of the VAWC law, particularly with respect to economic and sexual dimensions of abuse.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the data collected suggest that the relationship between educational attainment and knowledge about violence against women and

children's laws is positive. There is a better understanding of awareness when the level of education is at least the secondary level; however, a college degree is highly correlated with a better understanding of the legal framework. Thus, the education system needs to focus on increasing legal awareness, as highlighted in the data, especially for women with lower levels of education. This highlights the importance of targeted literacy programs that share vital legal information and enhance the effectiveness of legislation within vulnerable communities. These programs are essential to close the existing gaps in legal information and practice to ensure the survivors have access to safety and justice systems.

Economic empowerment, arguably the most crucial factor, enables women to exit violent relationships. Livelihood programs for women should be prioritized. Consequently, future employment programming should be designed to work in conjunction with legal aid and legal advocacy. The combination of legal education and advocacy with income-generating activities provides a holistic and integrated approach to supporting vulnerable women. This approach facilitates women's economic empowerment while enhancing their ability to access justice and safety in a sustainable manner. This form of integration not only advances practical activities but also informs the ongoing work on gender-responsive policies by reinforcing the need for comprehensive responses to gender-based violence. Examining the integrated approaches in the light of socioeconomic and cultural diversity will further advance this study to assist in constructing policy and program models based on empirical evidence.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Given the sensitive nature of the study, appropriate measures were taken to ensure participants' safety, privacy, and emotional well-being. All data were anonymized and treated with strict confidentiality in accordance with ethical research standards and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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