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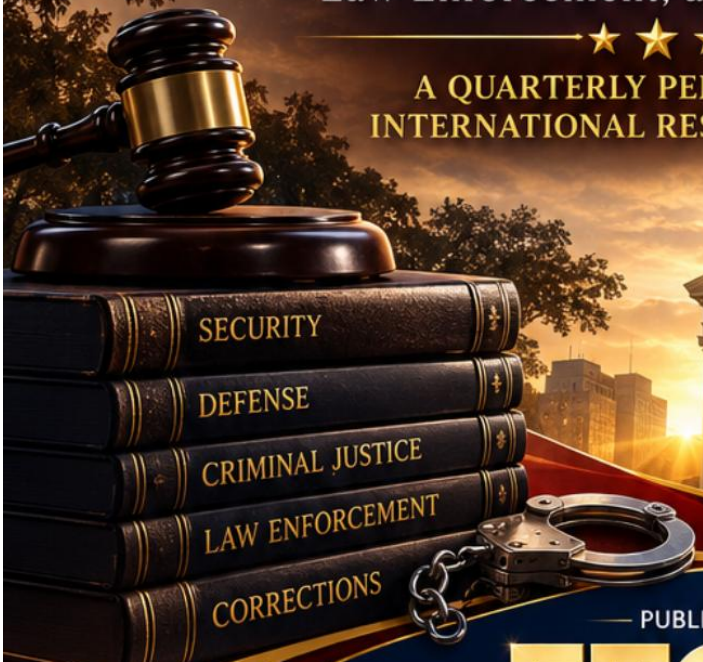
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Disclosure and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation in Pangasinan: A qualitative exploratory study

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Abstract

Aim: This study examined factors influencing disclosure, nondisclosure, and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation in Pangasinan. It also sought to translate survivors' experiences and frontline professional perspectives into policy-relevant and survivor-centered institutional responses.

Methodology: A qualitative exploratory research design was employed. Ten participants, comprising four adult female primary victims and six frontline professionals, were selected through purposive sampling supported by snowball sampling. Data were gathered through 60–90-minute semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis.

Findings: Disclosure emerged as a dynamic and relational process shaped by fear, perceived danger, dependency, trauma, self-blame, shame, stigma, and anticipated consequences. Trust, validation, protection, empowerment, and responsive support facilitated disclosure. Continued criminal justice participation was constrained by uneven awareness, procedural delays, repeated narration, intimidation, financial concerns, perpetrator encounters, and fragmented services, but was strengthened by legal assistance, clear orientation, protection, and coordinated institutional support. The findings informed the SAFE VOICE Program, emphasizing survivor-centered support, facilitated justice, empowerment, trauma-informed services, interagency coordination, and continuous evaluation.

Conclusion: Disclosure and continued criminal justice participation were shaped not only by individual willingness but also by safety, social responses, structural burdens, and access to responsive support. The study provided localized evidence for strengthening coordinated, accessible, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered law enforcement and criminal justice responses to sexual victimization in Philippine provincial settings.

Keywords: *sexual predation; disclosure decisions; adult female primary victims; justice participation; survivor-centered intervention*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence remains a significant public safety, human rights, and criminal justice concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) documented the global burden of violence against women, including non-partner sexual violence. However, victimization does not always result in formal reporting. The United Nations Development Programme et al. (2024) reported that, among 53 countries with available data for 2010–2022, the median proportion of sexual-assault victims who reported their victimization to competent authorities was 17%. Similarly, Wieberneit et al. (2024) identified barriers to reporting, investigation, prosecution, and sentencing of adult female rape and sexual-assault cases, including stigma, psychological reactions, rape myths, and distrust of justice institutions.

Beyond the decision to disclose or formally report sexual violence, survivors' experiences with justice institutions may shape their willingness to continue participating in criminal proceedings, their trust in law enforcement, and their perceptions of institutional responses. Using a procedural justice framework, Hohl et al. (2022) examined police engagement with survivors of rape and sexual assault, highlighting the importance of fair and respectful treatment in police–survivor interactions. Murphy-Oikonen et al. (2022), in a qualitative study of survivors who withdrew from the criminal justice process after reporting sexual assault to police, identified negative experiences with the police process, communication difficulties concerning charging and legal procedures, loss of faith in the justice system, and hopelessness as factors associated with case attrition. From a criminological perspective, these findings suggest that

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survivors' experiences of institutional treatment may influence not only their willingness to pursue criminal complaints but also their confidence in the capacity of law enforcement and justice institutions to respond fairly and effectively. When institutional encounters undermine survivors' trust, they may be less willing to continue participating in criminal proceedings, potentially affecting case progression and accountability for sexual offenses. These concerns underscore the importance of fair, respectful, and trauma-informed institutional responses that sustain survivors' trust and support their continued participation throughout the criminal justice process.

These concerns are also relevant in the Philippine context, where legal frameworks establish protections and assistance mechanisms for victims of sexual violence. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 8353 (1997), Republic Act No. 8505 (1998), and Republic Act No. 9262 (2004) establish legal frameworks for addressing rape, providing assistance to rape victims, and protecting women and children from specified forms of violence. Nevertheless, legal safeguards do not necessarily ensure accessible, survivor-centered justice. In Pangasinan, reported rape cases increased from 255 during the corresponding period in 2023 to 274 from January 1 to December 15, 2024 (Arguel & Cayabyab, 2024). Although these figures demonstrate the continuing public-safety relevance of sexual violence, recorded cases cannot establish the full extent of victimization or explain why survivors delay disclosure or refrain from reporting.

Despite existing research on sexual violence, limited qualitative research has examined disclosure and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims in a provincial Philippine setting while integrating survivor and frontline-professional perspectives. In this study, adult female primary victims refers to women aged 18 years or older who directly experienced sexual predation, either beginning before age 18 and continuing into adulthood or occurring at age 18 or older. They are distinguished from secondary or indirect victims who did not directly experience sexual predation. This study examined the personal, psychological, relational, institutional, legal, and structural conditions shaping disclosure and criminal justice participation in Pangasinan. Its findings informed the proposed SAFE VOICE Program—Support, Advocacy, Facilitation, and Empowerment through Victim-Oriented Intervention, Counseling, and Education.

This study contributes to victimology, criminology, and crime-prevention scholarship by conceptualizing sexual-victimization disclosure as a dynamic, relational, and ecological process shaped by interacting personal, relational, community, institutional, legal, and structural conditions rather than as a single, static act of reporting. This perspective provides a basis for developing survivor-centered disclosure mechanisms intended to support offender detection, evidence preservation, and broader crime-prevention efforts.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Recent literature and studies characterize disclosure of sexual victimization as a complex and context-dependent process shaped by psychological, interpersonal, sociocultural, and institutional conditions. Fear, trauma, shame, self-blame, stigma, anticipated consequences, and distrust of institutions may inhibit disclosure, while safety, validation, supportive relationships, and responsive institutions may facilitate it. Wieberneit et al. (2024) identified barriers throughout the criminal justice process, including rape myths, procedural delays, and distrust of legal institutions, indicating that difficulties may extend beyond the initial decision to report. Similarly, Fileborn et al. (2024) found that belief, validation, and supportive responses encouraged disclosure, whereas disbelief, victim-blaming, and invalidation discouraged it. Latiff et al. (2024) further demonstrated the influence of family, cultural values, and social context. Together, these studies show that disclosure is not solely an individual decision but a relational and structural process shaped by survivors' social environments and interactions with formal institutions.

Consistent with this view, disclosure and subsequent justice engagement unfold through dynamic, operational pathways within law enforcement and criminal justice administration. International research highlights how frontline policing practices and institutional responses can shape survivors' experiences and decisions to continue participating in criminal proceedings. High rates of case attrition across investigative and prosecutorial stages may be associated with rigid, adversarial, or re-traumatizing police responses that undermine survivors' trust in law enforcement and contribute to disengagement from criminal proceedings (Campbell et al., 2025). Conversely, survivor-centered institutional responses, including respectful communication, clear explanations of legal procedures, and supportive engagement throughout the criminal justice process, may help address experiences that contribute to case attrition and loss of trust in justice institutions (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022). While studies of digital disclosure and alternative reporting pathways demonstrate that survivors often seek initial support outside formal channels (de Roos et al., 2025; Katz et al., 2021; Mathews et al., 2025; Subramanian, 2023), the transition from informal disclosure to formal reporting may also depend on survivors' perceptions of institutional accessibility, responsiveness, and support. However, much of this international literature remains concentrated on Western settings and on child or technology-facilitated sexual

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victimization, limiting its direct applicability to adult female primary victims of sexual predation in provincial Philippine communities.

Within the Philippine context, research reveals comparable psychological and social barriers while highlighting the influence of local cultural and institutional conditions. Osmeña and Barrera (2021) identified shame, community stigma, and reliance on informal support networks among young victims of sexual abuse, while Miranda et al. (2023) documented delayed disclosure among adult Filipino women associated with shame and fear of judgment. Dulawan and Bance (2024) similarly reported trauma, fear of exposure, shame, and limited trusted avenues for disclosure among adult survivors of online sexual abuse and exploitation. These studies indicate that disclosure may remain constrained not only by the effects of victimization but also by the responses and support available within survivors' immediate social environments.

Beyond interpersonal and cultural influences, access to legal protection and responsive institutions is particularly important when disclosure progresses toward formal reporting and criminal justice participation. Encabo and Dura (2024) found varying levels of awareness of Republic Act No. 9262 but limited evidence that knowledge of legal protection necessarily translated into actual reporting. ECPAT et al. (2022) documented limited knowledge of where to report, alongside substantial nondisclosure, among Filipino children subjected to online sexual abuse and exploitation. Similarly, SaferKidsPH-UNICEF and Plan International (2024) identified stigma, victim-blaming, and social norms that may hinder disclosure and timely protective responses.

The Foundation for Media Alternatives (2025) documented technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the Philippines and highlighted gaps in survivor support. Limited knowledge of reporting channels and inadequate or inaccessible government, legal, and psychosocial assistance may hinder victims of technology-facilitated gender-based violence from seeking help and reporting abuse. Although these findings specifically concern technology-facilitated gender-based violence, they highlight broader considerations regarding access to protection and justice. The existence of laws and reporting mechanisms alone does not necessarily ensure that victims can access or use them; meaningful access also depends on whether victims understand the available pathways and whether law-enforcement, protection, and justice institutions are accessible, responsive, and capable of providing survivor-centered support.

Taken together, international and Philippine literature converge in showing that disclosure and continued criminal justice participation are shaped by interacting psychological, interpersonal, sociocultural, and institutional conditions. Fear, trauma, shame, stigma, disbelief, social pressure, limited awareness, and institutional mistrust may constrain disclosure, while validation, trusted relationships, accessible assistance, procedural fairness, and responsive institutional treatment may facilitate engagement with the justice system. The literature also highlights the relevance of victim protection, trauma-informed responses, and coordination among institutions in addressing barriers that may arise after initial disclosure. Nevertheless, findings from international studies and research focused on children or technology-facilitated victimization cannot automatically explain the experiences of adult female survivors in provincial Philippine settings.

Despite these contributions, three related gaps remain. Contextually, evidence on disclosure within provincial Philippine communities such as Pangasinan remains limited. Empirically, adult female victims of sexual predation remain underrepresented compared with child- and technology-focused populations. Conceptually, disclosure has often been examined as an outcome rather than as an evolving process that may progress from silence or informal disclosure to formal reporting and continued participation in criminal proceedings. Consequently, limited research has examined how personal, psychological, familial, community, institutional, legal, and structural conditions interact as adult female victims decide whether, when, to whom, and under what circumstances to disclose and whether to continue engaging with the criminal justice system.

The present study addressed these gaps by examining disclosure as an evolving process and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation in Pangasinan, integrating their perspectives with those of frontline professionals. Rather than focusing only on whether disclosure occurred, the study examined the conditions that facilitated or constrained disclosure and continued participation in criminal proceedings. In doing so, it provided contextually grounded evidence for survivor-centered policy, procedural, and programmatic measures relevant to victim protection, law-enforcement response, interagency coordination, public safety, and justice-system reform.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), applied to victim disclosure and criminal justice participation within an overarching Transformative Paradigm and an informed constructivist perspective. Within victimology and criminological scholarship, Bronfenbrenner's

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framework explains how victim disclosure and sustained criminal justice participation are shaped across interacting ecological levels: the microsystem of family and interpersonal support, the mesosystem of community and frontline agency interactions, the exosystem of law enforcement protocols and prosecutorial practices, and the macrosystem of cultural norms and legal statutes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). From a criminological perspective, this ecological model demonstrates how systemic institutional barriers and procedural friction at outer system levels directly constrain individual reporting decisions. Concurrently, CBT explains the victimological mechanics of reporting by framing disclosure as a cognitive appraisal process (Beck, 1976). In criminal justice contexts, cognitive appraisals of danger, perpetrator retaliation, self-blame, shame, and anticipated institutional disbelief reinforce silence, non-reporting, and case attrition. Conversely, cognitive appraisals of police validation, physical protection, and procedural justice serve as critical cognitive catalysts that empower survivors to overcome trauma-induced avoidance, engage with law enforcement, and sustain participation throughout judicial proceedings.

The constructivist perspective guided the interpretation of how participants understood safety, disclosure, procedural fairness, and justice through their lived experiences with legal and protection institutions. In contrast, the Transformative Paradigm directed attention to power imbalances, institutional vulnerability, survivor voice, and structural inequality, emphasizing institutional accountability and informing recommendations for survivor-centered justice and institutional reform. From a justice-governance perspective, institutional accountability requires responsive procedures, survivor protection, and clear institutional responsibilities and interagency coordination. Together, these complementary victimological and criminological perspectives guided the qualitative inquiry, structured the analysis of participant accounts, and informed the development of survivor-centered policy, procedural reforms, and the proposed SAFE VOICE Program.

Figure 1
Qualitative Model of Disclosure and Criminal Justice Participation

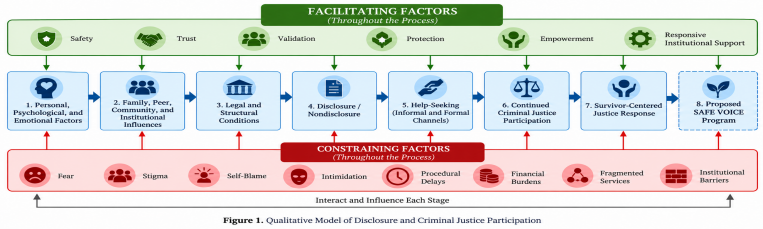


Figure 1. Qualitative Model of Disclosure and Criminal Justice Participation

The conceptual model illustrates how personal, psychological, and emotional factors; family, peer, community, and institutional influences; and legal and structural conditions shape disclosure decisions and continued criminal justice participation. Facilitating and constraining factors may influence survivors' experiences throughout the process. The findings inform a survivor-centered justice response and the proposed SAFE VOICE Program.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of Philippine laws, the Philippine National Police–Women and Children Protection Desk (PNP-WCPD), social welfare services, shelters, and criminal justice mechanisms, adult female primary victims of sexual predation may still delay disclosure, remain silent, or disengage from formal criminal justice proceedings. The problem extends beyond individual willingness to disclose because fear, dependency, trauma, family and community reactions, stigma, limited knowledge of available services, procedural burdens, and institutional responsiveness may influence whether victims disclose their experiences and continue participating in criminal justice processes. Although these factors have been examined in various contexts, limited qualitative evidence from Pangasinan has examined their interaction from both survivor and frontline-professional perspectives. This gap limits the availability of localized evidence for understanding barriers and facilitators to disclosure and continued justice participation. The study therefore addresses the need for contextually grounded evidence that can inform law-enforcement practice, victim protection, interagency coordination, and survivor-centered criminal justice responses.

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Research Objectives

General Objective:

To examine the factors influencing disclosure, nondisclosure, and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation in Pangasinan and to develop a survivor-centered intervention response based on the findings.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the personal, psychological, and emotional factors influencing disclosure or nondisclosure among adult female primary victims of sexual predation;
2. To analyze how family, peer, community, and institutional influences facilitate or constrain disclosure and continued criminal justice participation;
3. To assess the legal and structural conditions affecting victims' participation in criminal justice proceedings;
4. To identify policy and procedural measures that could strengthen safe disclosure, continued justice participation, and survivor-centered institutional responses; and
5. To propose a survivor-centered intervention program based on the findings to strengthen disclosure, justice participation, and coordinated institutional support.

Research Questions

1. What personal, psychological, and emotional factors influenced adult female primary victims' decisions to disclose or remain silent about their experiences of sexual predation?
2. How did family relationships, peer interactions, community conditions, and institutional support facilitate or constrain disclosure and continued criminal justice participation?
3. What legal and structural conditions affected adult female primary victims' participation in criminal justice proceedings?
4. What policy and procedural measures could strengthen safe disclosure, continued justice participation, and survivor-centered institutional responses?
5. What survivor-centered intervention program could be proposed based on the findings?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine the factors and contextual conditions influencing disclosure, nondisclosure, and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation. The design was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' accounts and frontline professionals' perspectives concerning the personal, psychological, relational, institutional, legal, and structural conditions surrounding disclosure and continued participation in criminal justice processes. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to explore these dimensions while maintaining alignment with the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Population and Sampling

The study included 10 participants: four adult female primary victims, two PNP-WCPD officers, two social workers, and two psychometricians. Purposive sampling selected participants with relevant personal or professional experience, while snowball sampling supplemented victim recruitment through referrals (Patton, 2015). Primary victim-survivors were eligible if they were female, aged 18 or older, had directly experienced sexual predation either during adulthood or beginning before adulthood and continuing over time, could discuss experiences of disclosure, nondisclosure, rescue, referral, or engagement with institutional or criminal justice processes, were willing to participate voluntarily, and could provide informed consent and participate safely. Professional key informants were selected based on their direct involvement in victim protection, policing, social work, psychological assessment, or psychosocial intervention, with at least six months of relevant experience. The head social worker of the Haven for Women referred four of six identified eligible victims; the other two were not endorsed because they had recently participated in other studies. Two psychometricians participated because the intended licensed psychologist was unavailable. The WCPD

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chief referred two officers from the Dagupan City Police Office (DCPO). Sample adequacy was evaluated through the lens of Information Power and Thematic Sufficiency in reflexive thematic analysis (Malterud et al., 2016), where sample richness—rather than numerical scale—was achieved through the narrow study scope, highly specific participant characteristics, dense institutional context, and the strong empirical recurrence of patterns across both survivor and professional accounts.

Instruments

Researcher-developed semi-structured interview guides served as the primary data collection instruments, with separate versions tailored for adult female primary victim-survivors and professional key informants. The interview guides were informed by relevant criminological and victimological literature and applicable legal statutes, including Republic Act Nos. 8505 and 9262.

Three specialists with expertise in clinical psychology and trauma, criminology and qualitative research, and WCPD practice evaluated the instruments for clarity, relevance, sequencing, and ethical sensitivity. Their recommendations were incorporated before data collection. The interview guides were subsequently pilot-tested with one non-participant to assess the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, and necessary refinements were made before the actual interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected from March to June 2026 through individual, face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews with primary victim-survivors and professional key informants. Interviews were conducted in private and secure settings. Interviews with primary victim-survivors, as well as the social workers and psychometricians stationed at the Haven for Women of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), were conducted within the facility's specialized client assessment room in Dagupan City. For the WCPD officers, interviews took place in a private room within the WCPD office at the DCPO. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. A trauma-informed and non-coercive approach was maintained throughout the interviews. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Treatment of Data

Interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis. The researcher first became familiar with the transcripts and generated initial codes from the participants' accounts. The codes were then reviewed and organized into candidate themes, which were subsequently examined, refined, defined, and named. The analysis considered both explicit meanings and underlying patterns in the data. The resulting themes were reviewed against relevant coded extracts and the complete transcripts to ensure coherence and grounding in participants' accounts. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate the themes.

The accounts of primary victims and frontline professionals were examined for convergent and divergent perspectives concerning barriers, facilitators, institutional conditions, and survivor needs. The resulting themes were subsequently examined in relation to the research questions and study objectives.

Following thematic analysis, the findings were synthesized to identify areas of convergence among identified barriers, facilitators, survivor needs, and recommended institutional measures. This synthesis served as the empirical basis for formulating the proposed SAFE VOICE Program.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional ethical clearance and permission were obtained from the DSWD Field Office 1 under Document Reference Number DRN-I-FO-PPD-PDPS-A-COMM-25-12-8607-S, dated December 9, 2025, before data collection commenced. Official institutional permissions and gatekeeper authorizations were likewise secured from participating organizations, including the Haven for Women and the DCPO, in accordance with applicable institutional requirements and the DSWD research protocol (Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD], 2024). Written informed consent, including consent for audio recording, was obtained from all participants before the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline any question or withdraw from the study without penalty.

Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities, and access to research data was restricted and password-protected. Given the sensitive nature of sexual victimization, interviews were conducted using trauma-informed and non-coercive procedures in private settings. Psychosocial support through the Haven for Women was

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made available when needed. Data handling and confidentiality procedures were implemented in accordance with applicable institutional requirements and the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are organized around the five research questions. Reflexive thematic analysis of interviews with adult female primary victims and frontline professionals identified recurring patterns concerning disclosure and nondisclosure, family and community responses, institutional support, participation in criminal proceedings, and measures for strengthening survivor-centered responses. The findings from the first four research questions were subsequently examined integratively to address the fifth research question and provide the empirical basis for the development of the SAFE VOICE Program. The findings are discussed in relation to relevant literature and the study's theoretical and interpretive framework, with particular attention to implications for law enforcement, victim protection, public safety, and justice system reform.

1. Personal, Psychological, and Emotional Factors Influencing Disclosure Decisions

Feeling Unsafe: Fear, Vulnerability, Dependency, and Anticipated Consequences of Disclosure
Carrying the Invisible Burden: Self-Blame, Trauma, and Internalized Stigma
Restoring the Courage to Disclose: Trust, Protection, and Empowerment

1.1 Feeling Unsafe: Fear, Vulnerability, Dependency, and Anticipated Consequences of Disclosure

Fear constrained disclosure when victims remained accessible to perpetrators, experienced threats, or were affected by financial and familial dependency.

> ***Primary Victim 4: "Di ako nagsusumbong, kasi malapit lang yung bahay nila noong ano, nakikita ko sila."*** ("I did not report it because their house was nearby, and I could still see them.")

Her account indicated that silence could function as a protective response when disclosure was perceived as increasing exposure to retaliation rather than reflecting unwillingness to seek help. Consistent with Wieberneit et al. (2024), safety concerns, power imbalances, and anticipated consequences can impede reporting. Ecological and cognitive-behavioral perspectives help explain how perceived danger shaped disclosure decisions. Accordingly, reporting and referral procedures should assess perpetrator proximity, retaliation risks, dependency, and threats to significant others.

1.2 Carrying the Invisible Burden: Self-Blame, Trauma, and Internalized Stigma

Beyond physical safety, disclosure was constrained by self-blame, shame, trauma, fear of judgment, and anticipated rejection.

> ***Primary Victim 3: "Opo, naiisip ko na kasalanan ko. Mas nahirapan po akong magsumbong."*** ("Yes, I thought that it was my fault. It became more difficult for me to disclose.")

The account illustrated how responsibility for victimization could become internalized, while victim-blaming, disbelief, and stigmatizing reactions could reinforce this psychological burden. This finding was consistent with Fileborn et al. (2024) and McElvaney et al. (2022), who linked negative social responses, shame, and self-blame with disclosure difficulties. Consistent with CBT and Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, negative self-appraisals could interact with stigmatizing social environments to reinforce avoidance. For law enforcement and justice-system practice, frontline personnel should therefore use trauma-informed, nonjudgmental communication that avoids reinforcing self-blame and clearly locates responsibility with the perpetrator.

1.3 Restoring the Courage to Disclose: Trust, Protection, and Empowerment

Although fear and psychological burden constrained disclosure, decisions could change when trust, protection, validation, and meaningful assistance became available.

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Primary Victim 3: "Parang gumaan po konti kasi may pinagsumbungan na po ako. Parang nabigyan po ako ng lakas ng loob para magsumbong." ("I felt somewhat relieved because I finally had someone to tell. It was as though I was given the courage to disclose.")

The account demonstrated that courage was not solely an individual trait but could develop relationally when victims encountered people perceived as trustworthy, supportive, and capable of helping. This was consistent with Fileborn et al. (2024), who found that belief, validation, and supportive responses facilitated disclosure. The present study further indicated that trust depended less on kinship or formal position than on the perceived trustworthiness and helpfulness of the recipient. Consistent with the Transformative Paradigm, empowerment therefore required conditions that enabled victims to exercise agency with safety and dignity. For law enforcement and public safety practice, WCPD officers and other frontline providers should treat rapport, confidentiality, validation, and clear explanation of available assistance as operational components of effective reporting and investigation.

2. Family, Community, and Institutional Influences on Disclosure

Family Relationships: Between Protection, Silence, and Betrayal
Community Responses: Between Support, Stigma, and Silence
Institutional Support Systems as Pathways to Protection, Justice, and Recovery

2.1 Family Relationships: Between Protection, Silence, and Betrayal

Family relationships functioned as both sources of protection and barriers to disclosure. Victims could encounter disbelief, victim-blaming, loyalty toward the perpetrator, and pressure to preserve family stability, while other relatives provided belief, protection, and advocacy.

Primary Victim 1: "Doon sa barangay. Agad po sinabihan ko yung ate ko. Pero hindi siya naniniwala." ("At the barangay, I immediately told my older sister. But she did not believe me.")

The family therefore emerged as a relational environment in which competing loyalties, economic concerns, and perceptions of the perpetrator influenced responses to disclosure. The same participant subsequently received support from another relative, showing that protective and silencing responses could coexist within the same family. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory situated these experiences within the victim's immediate social environment, while Philippine literature similarly documented familial, economic, and sociocultural influences on disclosure. For law enforcement and victim protection, family members should not automatically be treated as protective resources; WCPD personnel, social workers, and prosecutors should assess whether particular relatives provide genuine support or contribute to intimidation, victim-blaming, offender protection, or pressure to discontinue a case.

2.2 Community Responses: Between Support, Stigma, and Silence

Community relationships could likewise facilitate disclosure or reinforce silence. Trusted individuals outside the family sometimes became initial recipients of disclosure, while gossip, judgment, victim-blaming, local loyalties, and reluctance to intervene discouraged help-seeking.

Primary Victim 2: "Yung madam ko po. Naniwala siya. Kasi mabait." ("My teacher. She believed me. She was kind.")

The participant's disclosure to her Grade 6 teacher demonstrated how trust, kindness, and anticipated belief could create sufficient interpersonal safety for disclosure. This was consistent with Fileborn et al. (2024), who found that belief and validation facilitated disclosure whereas victim-blaming and invalidating responses discouraged it. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, schools and other community settings could either support or obstruct the transition from informal disclosure to formal assistance. For public safety and community-based prevention, barangay personnel, educators, and other potential first recipients should therefore be prepared to recognize sexual victimization, respond without blame, maintain confidentiality, and facilitate appropriate law-enforcement or social-welfare referrals.

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2.3 Institutional Support Systems as Pathways to Protection, Justice, and Recovery

Formal institutions became particularly important when victims required protection, psychological assistance, referral, and access to justice.

> ***Primary Victim 4: "Hindi na ako takot, kasi nandito ako."*** ("I am no longer afraid because I am here.")

Institutional support improved the victim's immediate sense of safety and facilitated access to further assessment, psychosocial intervention, and recovery services following disclosure. However, institutional processes could also impose additional burdens through repetitive narration or reporting environments perceived as inaccessible. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Transformative Paradigm highlight how interactions among law enforcement, social welfare, residential facilities, and other services can convert formal rights into meaningful protection. The findings indicated that support and participation could continue beyond the initial disclosure through assessment, protection, evidence gathering, case development, and recovery. For law enforcement and justice-system reform, WCPD, social welfare, prosecution, and psychosocial services should therefore provide confidential and gender-sensitive reporting, trauma-informed interviewing, coordinated referrals, and continuity of support while minimizing avoidable repetitive narration.

3. Legal and Structural Conditions Affecting Participation in Criminal Proceedings

Uneven Awareness: Navigating Legal Rights and Victim Services
Structural Barriers that Discourage Participation in Criminal Proceedings
Institutional Support as a Pathway to Justice Participation

3.1 Uneven Awareness: Navigating Legal Rights and Victim Services

Victims demonstrated uneven awareness of legal rights and available services. General knowledge of the law did not necessarily translate into practical knowledge of where or how to obtain assistance.

> ***Primary Victim 3: "Laws, opo. Nanunuod-nuod naman po ako. Services, hindi po. Nung nandito na po ako."*** ("Yes, I knew something about the laws because I had seen information about them. But I did not know about the services until I came here.")

The account revealed a distinction betw**een legal awareness and service navigation:** victims could recognize that legal protections existed without knowing the reporting pathways or services available to them. For some, this practical knowledge developed only after rescue, referral, or institutional admission. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework and the Transformative Paradigm suggest that rights become meaningful only when information and assistance are practically accessible, consistent with Philippine literature identifying gaps between legal awareness and help-seeking knowledge (Encabo & Dura, 2024; Sales et al., 2023; SaferKidsPH-UNICEF & Plan International, 2024). For law enforcement and public safety policy, legal-information campaigns should therefore specify where to report, what services are available, what victims can expect after reporting, and how protection and assistance can be accessed.

3.2 Structural Barriers that Discourage Participation in Criminal Proceedings

Continued participation became difficult when procedural, emotional, social, and economic burdens accumulated, including repeated narration, intimidation, prolonged proceedings, incidental expenses, family pressure, perpetrator encounters, and perceived inequalities in wealth or influence.

> ***Primary Victim 3: "Natatakot tsaka nahihiya din po. Nahihiya po akong i-kwento ulit."***
> ("I was afraid and embarrassed. I felt ashamed to tell the story again.")

Repeated narration imposed psychological, financial, and institutional burdens, potentially reinforcing fear and avoidance among vulnerable victims. Wieberneit et al. (2024) identified procedural delays and safety concerns, while Murphy-Oikonen et al. (2022) examined sexual-assault case attrition. Hohl et al. (2022) emphasized procedural justice

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in police engagement. Accordingly, justice agencies should minimize repetitive questioning, protect survivors from intimidation, clarify procedures, and coordinate services to reduce the burden of continued participation.

3.3 Institutional Support as a Pathway to Justice Participation

Institutional support helped victims manage criminal proceedings through protection, legal and financial assistance, procedural guidance, shelter, psychosocial support, referrals, and continuing encouragement.

> ***Primary Victim 1: "Tumaas yung tiwala ko sa gobyerno."*** ("My trust in the government increased.")

The account suggests that responsive treatment, clear guidance, and sustained assistance can strengthen institutional trust and confidence in navigating justice processes. This aligns with trauma-informed support (Herman, 2023; WHO, 2021) and evidence linking coordinated referrals and responsive frontline services to public trust (Staab et al., 2024). Support should therefore continue through investigation, prosecution, and hearings, with coordinated protection, referrals, and follow-up.

4. Policy and Procedural Measures to Strengthen Safe Disclosure and Institutional Response

Expanding Community Education, Prevention, and Empowerment Programs
Strengthening Victim-Centered Institutional Policies, Trauma-Informed Care, and Recovery Services
Enhancing Interagency Collaboration and Survivor-Centered Justice Systems

4.1 Expanding Community Education, Prevention, and Empowerment Programs

Participants emphasized that prevention and disclosure support should begin before a survivor reaches crisis or formal protective care. Community education should include legal rights, available services, reporting pathways, gender sensitivity, anti-victim-blaming messages, and safe help-seeking.

> ***Primary Victim 3: "Kung alam ko yung batas, magsusumbong ako."*** ("If I had known the law, I would have reported it.")

The findings also support proactive identification of vulnerable families through community and institutional outreach. The goal is not to pressure survivors into disclosure but to ensure that when they are ready to seek help, trustworthy and accessible pathways already exist.

4.2 Strengthening Victim-Centered Institutional Policies, Trauma-Informed Care, and Recovery Services

Participants identified repetitive questioning as an institutional procedure that could increase psychological burden after disclosure.

> ***WCPD Officer 2: "Mas effective yung isang interview lang while all agencies involved will watch and listen discreetly para maiwasan ang retraumatization. Para maiwasan ang retraumatization, paulit-ulit na tanong, nakakapagod."*** ("It is more effective if the survivor undergoes only one interview while all agencies discreetly observe and listen to avoid retraumatization. Repeated questioning is emotionally exhausting and retraumatizing.")

The recommendation highlights the importance of organizing investigative procedures to minimize survivors' psychological burden, consistent with Wieberneit et al. (2024), who recommend trauma-informed interviewing and victim-centered support throughout criminal justice proceedings. Cognitive Behavioral Theory helps interpret how trauma-related distress may contribute to avoidance. Accordingly, where legally and procedurally feasible, law enforcement agencies should coordinate interviews, referrals, staffing, and information-sharing while safeguarding confidentiality, survivor safety, evidentiary requirements, and due process.

4.3 Enhancing Interagency Collaboration and Survivor-Centered Justice Systems

Effective assistance also depended on coordination among institutions rather than on the performance of any single agency.

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> ***WCPD Officer 1: "Bago namin ini-interview yung bata, tatawagan ko na agad ang DSWD. Pag nandiyan na ang social worker, nandiyan ang nanay at ang biktima, saka kami nag-iinterview."*** ("Before we interview the child, I immediately coordinate with the DSWD. Once the social worker, the mother, and the victim are present, we proceed with the interview.")

Although the officer described a procedure involving a child victim, the account illustrates the potential value of coordinating investigative and protective responsibilities. Campbell et al. (2025) similarly found that survivors in a U.S. multidisciplinary cold-case initiative valued being believed, supported, and prepared by coordinated practitioners. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory further highlights the importance of connections among institutions in shaping access to support. For justice-system reform and public safety governance, interagency coordination should reduce rather than transfer administrative burdens to victims through clear referral pathways, defined institutional responsibilities, appropriate information-sharing, and continuing case management among WCPD, social welfare, prosecution, healthcare, psychological, and other relevant services. Ultimately, modern public safety governance in sexual violence cases cannot succeed through isolated agency actions; it requires an integrated, multi-sectoral institutional architecture.

5. Proposal of the SAFE VOICE Program

The findings provided the empirical basis for formulating the proposed SAFE VOICE Program—Support, Advocacy, Facilitation, and Empowerment through Victim-Oriented Intervention, Counseling, and Education. The program translated the identified barriers, facilitators, survivor needs, and recommended institutional measures into a survivor-centered framework for prevention, protection, recovery, justice participation, and reintegration.

5.1 Support and Recovery Services Findings on trauma, fear, and safety informed survivor-centered counseling, empowerment, and recovery services (Herman, 2023; Dulawan & Bance, 2024).

5.2 Advocacy and Community Prevention Limited service awareness and community barriers informed rights education, accessible referrals, and vulnerable-family monitoring (Wieberneit et al., 2024).
5.3 Justice Facilitation and Coordination Procedural delays, intimidation, financial burdens, and fragmented services informed coordinated case management and continuous program evaluation to support survivors throughout criminal proceedings (Wieberneit et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The study concluded that disclosure and continued criminal justice participation among adult female primary victims of sexual predation in Pangasinan were shaped by interacting personal, psychological, relational, institutional, legal, and structural conditions. Fear, perceived danger, dependency, trauma, self-blame, stigma, and anticipated consequences constrained disclosure; trust, validation, protection, and responsive support facilitated it. Participation after disclosure was affected by uneven service awareness, repeated narration, intimidation, delays, financial concerns, perpetrator encounters, and fragmented services.

These findings contribute directly to crime prevention, victim-centered policing, criminal justice system improvement, and public safety governance by demonstrating the necessity of addressing both individual and institutional conditions surrounding sexual violence disclosure and justice participation. Specifically, the findings suggest that effective public safety governance cannot rely on isolated agency actions or fragmented procedural handoffs; rather, robust public safety governance requires unified, trauma-informed, accessible, and coordinated institutional responses across law enforcement, social welfare, prosecution, healthcare, and judicial systems. The qualitative findings provided the empirical basis for formulating the proposed SAFE VOICE Program as a conceptual framework; however, its practical utility, acceptability, and efficacy require separate pilot implementation and systematic evaluation before any claims regarding its operational effectiveness or broader institutional adoption can be made.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the PNP-WCPD, DSWD, Local Government Units, justice-sector agencies, healthcare providers, schools, barangays, and protection partners may consider piloting and evaluating the proposed SAFE VOICE Program. Legal and service awareness, confidential reporting and referral pathways, and vulnerability monitoring may be strengthened to improve access to information, protection, and assistance.

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Relevant agencies may strengthen trauma-informed interviewing and coordinated case management to reduce unnecessary repeated narration and facilitate access to psychosocial, legal, and protective services. Coordination may include clear referral pathways, defined responsibilities, designated focal persons, appropriate information-sharing procedures, and confidentiality safeguards.

Before broader adoption, the proposed SAFE VOICE program may undergo pilot implementation, systematic evaluation, and refinement to assess its feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness. Effectiveness and broader applicability can only be established through systematic evaluation; the present qualitative findings do not, by themselves, support such claims.

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