

Lived Experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk Personnel in Conducting Fact-Finding Investigations On Violence against Women and Children Cases

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ABSTRACT:- This study explores the lived experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officers as they conduct fact-finding investigations in cases of violence against women and children (VAWC). It seeks to shed light on the emotional, professional, and practical challenges these officers face in the course of their work. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute to policy development and capacity-building efforts that can improve the quality of services provided to VAWC victims. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study was carried out in selected city and municipal police stations, specifically within the WCPD units of Misamis Occidental in Northern Mindanao (Region X), Philippines. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with five (5) selected WCPD officers, with the number of participants determined by data saturation. An interview guide containing open-ended and narrative-based questions was used, and all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method, which involved bracketing, horizontalization, clustering of themes, and the development of textural and structural descriptions leading to a textural-structural synthesis. The findings revealed that WCPD officers often experience significant emotional stress due to the sensitive and traumatic nature of the cases they handle. In addition to emotional strain, officers face operational challenges such as limited manpower, heavy workloads, and inadequate resources, which can hinder timely and effective investigations. Despite these difficulties, participants expressed a strong sense of commitment and compassion toward victims, emphasizing teamwork and emotional resilience as key coping strategies. Several interconnected themes emerged from the analysis, including the psychological impact of repeated exposure to traumatic cases, the daily pressures brought about by resource constraints, and the officers' deep sense of professional responsibility. Participants also highlighted the importance of peer support, collaboration, and emotional strength in helping them manage the demands of their work. In conclusion, while WCPD officers encounter considerable emotional and operational challenges in handling VAWC cases, their dedication to duty, compassion for victims, and support from colleagues enable them to continue delivering essential services. Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening institutional support systems, increasing manpower in WCPD units, providing regular specialized training for handling VAWC investigations, and establishing accessible mental health and counseling services for officers. These initiatives may help improve both the well-being of WCPD personnel and the effectiveness of investigations involving violence against women and children.

Keywords: *children, experience, officers, violence, women*

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) remains a serious and persistent issue in the Philippines despite the implementation of protective laws such as Republic Act No. 9262. Many cases continue to go unreported due to fear, stigma, and limited access to support services, reflecting deeper systemic issues such as gender inequality and cultural norms that tolerate abuse (Liwig-Lomibao, 2024; Ledesma et al., 2023). VAWC often occurs within domestic settings, making intervention more complex and challenging (Masongsong, 2023). Addressing this issue requires not only legal measures but also a deeper understanding of the roles of frontline responders, particularly the Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel (Balahadia et al., 2022).

WCPD personnel play a critical role in conducting fact-finding investigations, including receiving complaints, interviewing victims, gathering evidence, and coordinating with relevant agencies. However, their work is often accompanied by emotional strain, heavy workloads, and limited resources, which may affect both their performance and well-being (Salem et al., 2024; Naganag, 2022; Lazaro, 2025). These challenges highlight the importance of examining their lived experiences, as they operate in environments that demand both professional competence and emotional resilience.

While existing studies have largely focused on victims or legal frameworks, there remains a gap in understanding the perspectives of WCPD personnel as frontline investigators (Reyes-De Lana et al., 2024; Schot, 2022). This study aims to explore their lived experiences in conducting fact-finding investigations on VAWC cases, focusing on the challenges they encounter and the coping mechanisms they employ. The findings seek to inform improvements in training, resource allocation, and institutional support, ultimately contributing to more effective law enforcement practices and enhanced protection for women and children.

1.1 STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to:

1. Explore the lived experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel in conducting fact-finding investigations on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases.
2. Determine the challenges do Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel encounter in conducting fact-finding investigations on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases, and how do these challenges impact their work.
3. Explore how do Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel cope with the challenges encountered in conducting fact-finding investigations on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases?

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design guided by Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of five (5) Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel handling Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) fact-finding investigations in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, selected through data saturation. Data were gathered through researcher-made semi-structured, open-ended interviews, supported by audio recording and field notes, and conducted with informed consent and strict observance of ethical standards, including approval from research ethics committees and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Thematic analysis followed Moustakas' phenomenological reduction process bracketing, horizontalization, clustering of meanings, and development of textural, structural, and composite descriptions to capture both the content and context of participants' experiences. Data were systematically organized and coded using software support to ensure rigor, transparency, and accuracy in identifying emerging themes reflecting the emotional, operational, and professional realities of WCPD personnel in VAWC case handling.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Balancing Compassion and Professional Duty

Balancing compassion and professional duty is a central aspect of the work of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel. As front-line responders to Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases, they are required to listen with empathy, provide emotional support, and understand victims' experiences, while at the same time maintaining objectivity and adhering to legal and professional standards. This balance places a significant emotional burden on WCPD personnel, as they navigate their personal feelings alongside their responsibility to uphold justice and protect victims. WCPD personnel take time to listen, comfort, and understand victims, even when the work is emotionally heavy. At the same time, they gently set aside their feelings so they can do what is right, fair, and necessary to protect the victim and uphold the law (Akinsulire, 2020).

The participants shared that their work in the WCPD often touches them deeply, as listening to victims' stories naturally brings feelings of sadness, concern, and a strong desire to see justice served (PO1, PO2). At the same time, they spoke about the quiet frustration of knowing they cannot always move a case forward, especially when victims choose not to pursue legal action, even though the officers genuinely want to help (PO3, PO4) (Johansen et al., 2023). These experiences show how they constantly try to hold onto their compassion while reminding themselves to stay professional and objective, so they can continue supporting victims without being overwhelmed by the emotional weight of the job (PO5) (Andrews, et al, 2020).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

"I really get sad and devastated every time I hear their stories. As part of WCPD, I find myself sympathizing and empathizing with what they are suffering." PO1

"I get affected emotionally as well I want them to receive justice and make the perpetrator accountable" PO2

"Being WCPD personnel, I always attempt to empathize and understand. But at the same time, it pains me when justice cannot be pursued..." PO3

"We want to help them and put the abuser in jail, but we cannot compel them to file a case..." PO4

"Part of me is deeply concerned about the victims, but another part of me also strives to be professional and objective." PO5

The participants' stories show that working in the WCPD is emotionally heavy and deeply personal, as officers are often touched by the pain and struggles of the victims they encounter (PO1, PO2). They shared a genuine desire to see justice served, not just as part of their job, but because they truly care about the people they are trying to help (Arneson, 2022). At the same time, they spoke about the sadness and frustration that comes when justice cannot move forward because of the victims' situations or decisions (Po3, Po4). These moments force them to sit with difficult emotions and accept limits that are beyond their control (Palen, 2024). Despite this, the participants continue to do their work with care, striving to remain professional and objective while holding onto their compassion for the victims they serve (PO1–PO5).

The lived experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel show that investigating VAWC cases is emotionally heavy and often challenging on a personal level (Jumawid, 2025). Listening to victims' stories affects them deeply, bringing feelings of sadness, concern, and frustration, especially when they want justice for the victims but must respect their decisions and circumstances (Bandes, 2021). At the same time, they are expected to stay calm, objective, and professional while managing heavy workloads and limited manpower. This constant balancing of empathy and responsibility can be exhausting, yet they continue to find ways to cope through teamwork, guidance from prosecutors, and small acts of self-care that help them stay grounded (Akinsulire, 2020). Their experiences reflect not only the difficulty of the work but also their dedication to serving victims with care and respect.

These experiences are well explained by Emotional Labor Theory and Stress and Coping Theory. Emotional Labor Theory applies because WCPD personnel must manage their feelings showing compassion and understanding even when they are emotionally affected themselves (Akinsulire, 2020). Stress and Coping Theory is relevant because it explains how they deal with pressure by leaning on colleagues, regulating their emotions, and practicing self-care to protect their mental well-being (Elsy, 2025). Together, these theories help make sense of how WCPD personnel continue doing such emotionally demanding work while maintaining their strength, professionalism, and commitment to helping women and children (Jumawid, 2025).

This study is important because it gives voice to the real, human experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel who work closely with victims of Violence Against Women and Children. It shows how officers are not only enforcers of the law but also listeners, comforters, and witnesses to deep pain, as they try to care for victims while still doing what is fair and required by their profession. By recognizing the emotional weight they carry, the study helps normalize their feelings of sadness, frustration, and concern, and emphasizes the need for understanding, support, and proper guidance in their work. Ultimately, this study highlights that when compassion is acknowledged and supported alongside professional duty, WCPD personnel are better able to remain strong, grounded, and genuinely present for the women and children who rely on them. The theme Balancing Compassion and Professional Duty showed that WCPD personnel often carried a heavy emotional load as they tried to care deeply for victims while still following legal procedures and professional standards. Their experiences revealed the importance of recognizing emotional labor as a natural and unavoidable part of their work, rather than something that should be suppressed. The findings suggested that clear guidance and trauma-informed training could help personnel manage their emotions without losing their sense of professionalism. They also highlighted the need for accessible emotional support, such as counseling or simple opportunities to talk through difficult cases. Overall, allowing compassion to exist alongside professional duty could help WCPD personnel remain effective, resilient, and genuinely supportive of the women and children they serve.

Hindrances in Filing Cases

The work of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel is emotionally and professionally demanding, particularly when victims face difficulties in formally filing or continuing cases. Various personal, social, and economic barriers often prevent victims from pursuing legal action, which creates

significant challenges for officers conducting fact-finding investigations. Understanding these hindrances provides insight into how the justice process can be affected by circumstances beyond the control of both the victims and the investigators. These barriers also highlight the complex realities faced by WCPD personnel as they strive to support victims while respecting their decisions and limitations in cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC).

Victims of VAWC frequently encounter obstacles that make it difficult to file or pursue legal complaints, including financial dependence, family pressure, and fear of social consequences (Salem et al., 2024). These circumstances can discourage victims from seeking justice, leaving WCPD officers in the difficult position of documenting cases that may not proceed further (Ledesma et al., 2023). The participants shared how emotionally challenging it is to witness victims hesitate or withdraw from filing cases due to family or financial responsibilities (PO1, PO2, PO3). They described the frustration of wanting perpetrators to be held accountable while recognizing that victims cannot be compelled to pursue legal action (PO4). Despite these difficulties, officers remain committed to carefully recording and investigating each report to ensure that victims' concerns are acknowledged and documented (PO5) (Hancock et al., 2021). In many situations, they attempt to gently encourage victims to consider their options while still respecting their autonomy and personal circumstances (PO4, PO5). Their experiences demonstrate the delicate balance between providing empathetic support and maintaining professional responsibility when victims face barriers to filing cases (Po1–Po5) (Vasanthakumar, 2020).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

"It hurts to know that these victims deserve justice, but many will not proceed with the case because of their family's circumstances." PO1

"Sometimes the victim does not file because she is living on the husband." PO2

"Justice cannot be pursued just because the victim doesn't want to continue the case for financial or family issues." PO3

"We want to help them and put the abuser in jail, but we cannot compel them to file a case if they do not want to." PO4

"My responsibility is to record, investigate, and urge them to pursue the case, even if they don't want to." PO5

The participants' narratives illustrate the emotional burden experienced by officers when victims who deserve protection and justice feel unable to pursue legal action due to personal or economic constraints (PO1, PO2, PO3) (Lawther, 2021). Many officers expressed feelings of frustration and helplessness, knowing that the cycle of abuse may remain unresolved despite their efforts to assist victims. However, they also acknowledged the importance of respecting the victims' autonomy and decisions, even when these choices prevent the case from progressing legally (PO4). Instead of forcing victims to take action, officers focus on fulfilling their duties by documenting evidence, conducting investigations, and offering guidance to help victims understand their options (PO5) (Brooks-Hay, 2020). These experiences reflect the emotional complexity of their work as they attempt to uphold justice while recognizing the realities that prevent victims from filing cases.

The lived experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel in investigating VAWC cases demonstrate how barriers to filing cases significantly affect both victims and investigators (Salem et al., 2024). Across issues such as emotional strain, professional responsibility, operational constraints, and the need for collaboration, participants revealed how victims' hesitation or inability to pursue legal action creates additional challenges in their work. Situations involving financial dependence, family pressure, and social stigma often discourage victims from continuing with legal proceedings, leaving officers with limited options despite their commitment to seeking justice (Lavis, 2025). At the same time, factors such as limited manpower and heavy workloads further complicate the investigation process. These experiences reveal how WCPD personnel must balance compassion for victims with professionalism and resilience as they continue to perform their duties effectively (Henson et al., 2024).

These experiences can also be understood through Emotional Labor Theory and Stress and Coping Theory (Kim, 2020). Emotional Labor Theory explains how officers must regulate their emotions when dealing with victims who are struggling to pursue legal action, maintaining empathy and patience even when they feel frustration or helplessness (Bonnes et al., 2025). Stress and Coping Theory helps explain how WCPD personnel manage the pressures associated with these situations by relying on peer support, collaboration, guidance from prosecutors, and personal coping strategies (Beer et al., 2023). Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a

deeper understanding of how officers remain committed and professional while navigating the barriers that often prevent VAWC cases from moving forward (Jumawid, 2025).

This theme is important because it highlights the real-life barriers that prevent many victims from filing or pursuing VAWC cases. For WCPD personnel, witnessing victims struggle with financial dependence, family obligations, or fear of social consequences can be emotionally difficult. Even when officers are determined to seek justice, they must respect the victims' decisions and acknowledge that some circumstances make it difficult for victims to proceed legally. These challenges demonstrate the complex realities faced by investigators who must continue their work despite limitations beyond their control. Understanding these hindrances provides valuable insight into how support systems, awareness programs, and policy improvements can help reduce barriers and encourage more victims to seek justice.

The theme Hindrances in Filing Cases revealed that WCPD personnel often encounter situations where victims are unable or unwilling to pursue legal complaints due to financial dependence, family pressure, or personal fears. These barriers can delay or prevent cases from moving forward, leaving officers frustrated despite their commitment to assisting victims. Participants emphasized that while they strive to encourage victims to consider legal action, they must ultimately respect their decisions and circumstances. These experiences highlight the importance of addressing social and economic barriers that discourage victims from filing cases. Overall, understanding these challenges provides insight into the realities faced by WCPD personnel and underscores the need for stronger support systems and awareness initiatives to help victims pursue justice.

Emotional and Psychological Challenges

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel face significant emotional and psychological challenges in their work, as they are continuously exposed to the trauma and suffering of victims of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC). Hearing these stories often evokes sadness, frustration, or even helplessness, while heavy caseloads, limited staff, and administrative demands add further pressure. To navigate these challenges, officers rely on teamwork, guidance from supervisors and prosecutors, and personal coping strategies, which help them manage stress while maintaining professionalism and providing compassionate support. Understanding these emotional and psychological demands highlights the resilience, emotional labor, and dedication required of WCPD personnel to carry out their vital work effectively. Working in the WCPD can be emotionally and mentally draining, as officers are constantly exposed to the pain and trauma of victims (Foley, 2024). Hearing these stories often leaves them feeling sad, frustrated, or even helpless at times. To cope, they lean on their teammates, seek guidance from supervisors or prosecutors, and support one another through the challenges. This teamwork and shared understanding help them manage the stress while continuing to do their jobs with care (Kelly, 2020). It shows just how much emotional strength and resilience are needed to handle such sensitive cases every day.

The participants shared how much they rely on teamwork and collaboration to navigate the challenges of VAWC investigations (PO1, PO2). They explained that leaning on colleagues and consulting with prosecutors not only provides practical guidance but also emotional support when cases feel overwhelming (Heumann, 2024). This sense of shared responsibility helps them feel more confident and reduces the fear of making mistakes (PO3, PO4). Working closely with others also makes handling complicated cases smoother while ensuring they follow the right procedures (PO5) (Meyer & Norman, 2020). Overall, their reflections show that having a supportive team is vital for managing both the work and the emotional demands of the job (PO1–PO5).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

"When I'm uncertain about a case, I don't hesitate to seek help from my fellow investigators. Supporting one another not only makes the work lighter but also helps prevent mistakes." Po1

"I believe teamwork is essential. Whenever one of us feels uncertain about a case, others step in to guide or assist, ensuring that the investigation continues smoothly." Po2

"When a case becomes complicated, I usually consult the prosecutor. Their guidance ensures that our actions remain consistent with the law and follow proper procedures." Po3

"For me, it's reassuring to know that prosecutors can review the cases we handle. Their guidance helps us avoid overlooking important details and ensures that we always follow due process." Po4

"Working hand in hand with colleagues and prosecutors gives us confidence in our decisions. It allows us to handle cases more efficiently while making sure everything stays within the bounds of the law" Po5

The participants' stories show just how important teamwork and collaboration are in the daily work of WCPD personnel. They shared that leaning on colleagues and consulting with prosecutors provides both guidance and reassurance, especially when cases are complicated or uncertain (PO1–PO5) (Barsky, 2024). This support helps them avoid mistakes while making sure investigations are thorough and follow the law. Working together also gives them confidence and makes managing a heavy workload feel more manageable (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Overall, their experiences highlight that having a strong, supportive team is key to doing their work well while staying grounded and supported.

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel face many challenges when investigating cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), and these challenges deeply affect how they do their work. They often feel emotionally weighed down by the trauma and suffering of the victims, especially when justice cannot move forward because of the victims' personal or family situations, highlighting the theme of Emotional and Psychological Challenges (Herman, 2023). On top of this, heavy caseloads, limited staff, and administrative duties stretch their time and energy, sometimes slowing down investigations. Despite these difficulties, officers continue to carry out their duties with dedication, leaning on teamwork, guidance from prosecutors, and personal coping strategies to stay effective (Enter, 2023). Their experiences show the emotional strength and professionalism required to handle such sensitive and demanding work (Rose & Palattiyil, 2023). This situation can be understood through Emotional Labor Theory, which applies because WCPD personnel must carefully manage their own emotions showing empathy, patience, and understanding toward victims while staying professional and objective. The theory helps explain how officers balance their personal emotional responses with the need to provide support and conduct thorough investigations, highlighting the emotional effort and resilience their work demands.

This study matters because it shows the very human side of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel who deal with painful and traumatic stories every day. It reminds us that they are not just officers doing a job, but people who feel sadness, frustration, and emotional exhaustion as they listen to victims and try to help them. Constant exposure to suffering, heavy workloads, and limited resources can slowly wear them down, even as they continue to do their best. By recognizing these emotional and psychological struggles, the study helps normalize what they go through and highlights the importance of teamwork, guidance, and emotional support in helping them cope. In doing so, it emphasizes that caring for the mental and emotional well-being of WCPD personnel is essential so they can stay strong, compassionate, and present for the women and children who depend on them.

The theme Emotional and Psychological Challenges revealed that WCPD personnel often carried a heavy emotional weight from dealing with traumatic cases every day. Many felt sadness, frustration, and even helplessness as they tried to support victims while keeping up with the demands of their work. These experiences showed just how much continuous exposure to trauma could affect their mental and emotional well-being. Without proper support or ways to cope, personnel were at risk of burnout and emotional exhaustion. Overall, recognizing these challenges highlights the importance of care, understanding, and support to help WCPD personnel stay resilient and continue their vital work effectively.

Limited Response in Building Cases

Investigating cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) presents significant procedural and operational challenges for Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel. Limited staffing, heavy caseloads, and complex administrative and legal procedures often stretch officers' time and energy, creating delays and increasing mental and physical fatigue. Even when necessary equipment is available, shortages in personnel or unfilled positions can hinder timely and thorough case management. Recognizing these challenges highlights the need for adequate resources, clear guidelines, and effective organizational support to help WCPD personnel perform their duties efficiently while maintaining the quality of service provided to victims. WCPD personnel often face challenges that make investigating VAWC cases more difficult than it already is (Salem et al., 2024). With limited staff, heavy caseloads, and paperwork to manage, they sometimes struggle to give each case the time and attention it deserves. Working with specialized units or following complex legal procedures can also slow things down, adding to the pressure (Stoessel, 2021).

These experiences show just how important proper resources, clear guidelines, and good time management are for their work. Despite these hurdles, officers remain committed to handling each case carefully and professionally (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022). The participants shared that even though they have the necessary equipment, the lack of enough personnel makes their work much harder (PO1, PO2). Being short-staffed stretches their time and energy, making it difficult to respond quickly or give each case the attention it deserves (PO3, PO4) (Maben et al., 2022). This extra workload often leads to both physical and mental fatigue, adding to the stress of the job (PO3, PO4). When positions go unfilled after retirements, the pressure increases, affecting the overall quality of service they can provide (PO5) (Parker, 2022). Their

reflections show just how important having enough staff is to ensure they can do their work effectively and sustainably (PO1–PO5).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

"To be honest, we're doing alright in terms of equipment. We have the radios, patrol cars, and other equipment we require. Manpower is the true problem... Our time and energy are stretched, and it impacts our ability to react to cases promptly." PO1

"No, we lack sufficient staff... We are left in a bind if an officer retires and no one steps up to take their place right away. We wind up covering a lot of ground, which reduces the amount of time we have to thoroughly examine or address every case." PO2

"We have everything we need, but we're short-staffed... It feels like the entire team is working extra hours, both mentally and physically... It hinders our ability to serve the community and makes our job more difficult." PO3
In terms of manpower, we're short. When you have fewer people, response times get delayed, investigations get backed up, and fatigue creeps in sooner." PO4

"Even with resources, we still lack enough personnel. Each retirement or empty position not immediately filled creates a genuine void not only in personnel, but in expertise. That impacts the overall quality of service." PO5

The participants' stories show that, while they generally have the equipment they need, a shortage of personnel is a major challenge for WCPD officers. They explained that having too few staff stretches their time and energy, delays responses, and makes it hard to give every case the attention it deserves (PO1–PO5) (Eyal, 2025). When officers retire or positions remain unfilled, the burden falls on the remaining team, increasing both physical and mental strain. This not only causes fatigue but can also affect the overall quality of service they provide to the community (Todaro Franceschi, 2024). Overall, the participants emphasized that having enough people on the team is just as important as having the right tools to ensure that victims receive timely and thorough support (Gregory et al., 2022).

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel face many challenges when investigating cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), and these challenges directly affect how they do their work (Salem et al., 2024). One of the biggest difficulties they shared is the shortage of manpower, which stretches their time and energy, slows responses, and makes it hard to give every case the attention it deserves, reflecting the theme of Procedural and Operational Challenges. Even when equipment and resources are available, having too few staff increases fatigue and can impact the quality of service, putting extra mental and physical pressure on officers (Stogner, 2020). Balancing these operational demands alongside the emotional weight of victims' trauma creates a high-stress environment that requires focus, resilience, and careful prioritization. Despite these obstacles, officers rely on teamwork, collaboration, and personal coping strategies to stay effective and continue providing vital support to those in need (Gafni et al., 2024).

This study matters because it shows what WCPD personnel go through behind the scenes as they try to help victims while dealing with limited staff, heavy workloads, and complicated procedures. Even when they have the right equipment, having too few people on the team means they are constantly stretched thin, tired, and pressured to do more with less. These challenges can slow their work and make it harder to give each case the time and care it deserves, which is frustrating for officers who genuinely want to help. By highlighting these realities, the study reminds us that supporting victims also means supporting the people who serve them. Addressing staffing shortages, simplifying processes, and strengthening organizational support can ease the burden on WCPD personnel and allow them to do their work with greater focus, care, and confidence.

The theme Procedural and Operational Challenges showed that WCPD personnel often faced hurdles in managing the rules, processes, and daily demands of their work. Heavy caseloads, limited resources, and complicated administrative procedures sometimes made it difficult for them to help victims as quickly or effectively as they wanted. These experiences highlighted how organizational and systemic barriers could add stress and slow down their work. The findings suggested that clearer guidelines, better resources, and simpler processes could make their tasks more manageable and less overwhelming. Overall, tackling these challenges would allow WCPD personnel to focus more on supporting victims while carrying out their responsibilities with confidence and efficiency.

Peer support and Team Collaboration

Peer support and team collaboration play a vital role in the work of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel. Investigating cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) can be emotionally and operationally demanding, and officers often rely on their colleagues for guidance, reassurance, and practical assistance. Working closely with teammates and consulting with supervisors or prosecutors not only helps ensure investigations are thorough and follow proper procedures, but also provides emotional support that strengthens resilience. Understanding the importance of peer support and collaboration highlights how teamwork enables WCPD personnel to manage stress, maintain professionalism, and continue delivering effective and compassionate services to victims. Peer support and teamwork are a lifeline for WCPD personnel as they navigate the challenges of VAWC cases.

Leaning on colleagues allows them to share ideas, ask for advice, and offer each other encouragement, which helps lighten the emotional load and prevent errors (Jhonson, 2020). Working closely with prosecutors and other professionals also gives them reassurance that their investigations are thorough and follow the law (Huemann, 2024). This sense of collaboration builds confidence and makes handling complicated cases feel more manageable. Overall, having a supportive team helps officers stay grounded, both emotionally and professionally, as they do their work. The participants shared how much they rely on teamwork and collaboration to handle the challenges of VAWC cases (PO1–PO5). They explained that talking through difficult situations with colleagues helps ease the emotional weight and often brings fresh ideas and perspectives (PO3, PO4, PO5) (Ellinor & Girard, 2023). Consulting with prosecutors also gives them reassurance and confidence that they are following the law correctly (PO3, PO4). When they feel uncertain, knowing that colleagues are ready to guide and support them makes the work feel less overwhelming (PO1, PO2) (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Overall, their reflections show that having a supportive team and strong collaboration helps them stay resilient, confident, and effective in their work (PO1– PO5).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

“When the cases feel overwhelming, I seek advice from my colleagues. Talking to them makes me realize that I’m not handling the stress alone” PO3

“It lightens the burden because we share ideas and strategies.” PO4

“I put a lot of value on teamwork. Talking things through with colleagues gives me fresh perspectives.” PO5

“When I’m uncertain about a case, I don’t hesitate to seek help from my fellow investigator.” PO1

“I believe teamwork is essential. Whenever one of us feels uncertain about a case, others step in to guide or assist.” PO2

“When a case becomes complicated, I usually consult the prosecutor” PO3

“It’s reassuring to know that prosecutors can review the cases we handle.” PO4

“Working hand in hand with colleagues and prosecutors gives us confidence in our decisions.” PO5

The participants’ stories show just how important teamwork and collaboration are for WCPD personnel. They shared that leaning on colleagues for advice and support helps them cope when cases feel overwhelming or complicated, giving both emotional relief and practical guidance (PO1–PO5) (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). Working together allows them to share ideas, gain fresh perspectives, and make sure investigations are thorough and accurate. Consulting with prosecutors also reassures them that they are following the proper legal procedures (Green & Roiphe, 2023). Overall, their experiences highlight that having a supportive team and strong collaboration is key to managing stress, staying confident, and doing their work effectively (Tannenbaum et al., 2021).

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel cope with the many challenges of investigating Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases through teamwork, support from colleagues and supervisors, and personal strategies for managing stress, reflecting the theme of Peer Support and Team Collaboration. They shared that leaning on fellow investigators, discussing complicated cases together, and consulting prosecutors not only provides guidance but also helps lighten the emotional burden of the work (Fox, 2020). Personal coping strategies, like setting professional boundaries, regulating emotions, and taking small moments to recharge, also help them stay balanced. These approaches allow officers to remain resilient, focused, and professional, even when dealing with emotionally heavy and demanding cases (DenkFlorea, 2020). Overall,

their experiences show how collaboration, support, and self-care are essential for sustaining both their well-being and their ability to serve vulnerable victims effectively (Cayir et al., 2021).

This can be understood through Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which fits because it explains how WCPD personnel manage the stress that comes with their work. By using problem-focused strategies, like consulting colleagues and prosecutors, and emotion-focused strategies, such as regulating feelings and practicing self-care, officers are able to handle the pressures of their role. The theory helps show how these coping methods reduce stress, improve decision-making, and support both emotional resilience and professional effectiveness in such challenging work.

This study is important because it shows just how much WCPD personnel rely on each other to get through the tough and emotionally heavy work of helping victims of violence. Investigating these cases can be overwhelming, but having colleagues to talk to, share ideas with, or simply lean on makes a big difference. Consulting with teammates and prosecutors gives them confidence that they are handling cases correctly, while also easing the emotional weight they carry. This support helps them stay focused, avoid mistakes, and feel less alone in their work. Overall, the study highlights that teamwork, understanding, and collaboration aren't just helpful—they are lifelines that allow WCPD officers to stay strong, compassionate, and effective for the women and children who depend on them.

The theme Peer Support and Team Collaboration revealed that WCPD personnel leaned on their colleagues for encouragement, advice, and understanding when facing difficult cases. Having a supportive team helped them feel less alone and better able to cope with the emotional demands of their work. Working together also made tasks easier, improved decision-making, and allowed them to provide better care for victims. The findings showed that strong teamwork and open communication were key to keeping morale high and stress manageable. Overall, a culture of peer support and collaboration helped WCPD personnel face challenges together and do their work more effectively.

Work-life Balance and Self-Care Practices

Maintaining work-life balance and practicing self-care are essential for Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel, given the emotionally and professionally demanding nature of investigating Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases. Continuous exposure to victims' trauma, heavy workloads, and operational pressures can lead to stress, fatigue, and burnout if not properly managed. Officers employ a variety of self-care strategies—such as setting personal boundaries, engaging in restorative activities, and seeking support from colleagues—to sustain their well-being and effectiveness on the job. Recognizing the importance of work-life balance and self-care highlights how WCPD personnel manage their own mental and emotional health, enabling them to continue serving victims with compassion, resilience, and professionalism. Officers take time for small personal comforts, like breaks or simple activities that help them relax, to recharge and protect their mental health (Blumberg et al., 2021). They also set gentle boundaries to avoid becoming too emotionally attached to victims, which allows them to stay focused and prevent burnout (Palen, 2024). These habits help them approach each case with patience and care, without letting stress interfere with their work. Overall, taking care of themselves enables officers to stay strong, compassionate, and effective in supporting those who need them (Carlson-Johnson et al., 2020).

The participants shared how they cope with the emotional weight of their work by combining simple self-care with professional boundaries (PO1–PO5). Some find comfort in small personal routines, like enjoying a favorite meal, to relax and recharge when stress feels overwhelming (PO1, PO2) (Gobin, 2025). Others focus on staying emotionally balanced, offering empathy and support without letting the victims' struggles take over their own well-being (PO1–PO5). By keeping this balance, they can continue helping and listening to victims while protecting themselves from burnout (PO3, PO4, PO5) (Livanou et al., 2024). Overall, their reflections show that caring for themselves while staying professionally grounded helps them stay strong, compassionate, and effective in their work (PO1–PO5) (Andrews et al., 2020).

These are evident in the response of the police officers during the conduct of the interview:

“When I’m under emotional stress, I usually cope by treating myself to good food... it helps me relax and regain my calm.” PO1

“I also find that eating something I enjoy is a simple but effective way to cope with stress. It helps me recharge.” PO2

“I do not get too emotionally attached to the individuals that I assist. it is about performing my job well without emotion interfering.” PO1

"I empathize with my clients but don't let their suffering overwhelm my emotions. I psychologically remove myself." PO2

"One should not get too emotionally attached keeping my emotional well-being intact so that I can continue to do my work correctly." PO3

"I assist, listen, and support but not become emotionally involved" PO4

"I maintain a professional detachment so I can be available for the next case" PO5

The participants' stories show how WCPD personnel manage the emotional weight of their work in ways that help them stay grounded and effective. Some find comfort in simple self-care practices, like enjoying a favorite meal, to relax and recharge when stress builds up (PO1, PO2) (Gobin, 2025). At the same time, they are careful not to become too emotionally attached to the victims they assist, balancing empathy with professional boundaries to protect their own well-being (PO1–PO5). By regulating their emotions and maintaining a sense of detachment, they can continue supporting victims without letting the work overwhelm them (Ferriera, 2023). Overall, these strategies highlight how self-care and emotional boundaries are essential for staying resilient and effective in such challenging and sensitive work.

Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel cope with the challenges of investigating Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases through a mix of personal self-care and professional strategies, reflecting the theme of Work-Life Balance and Self-Care Practices. Many shared that simple things, like enjoying a favorite meal, help them relax and regain focus when the emotional weight of their work becomes heavy (PO1, PO2) (Harris, 2022). At the same time, they are careful not to become overly attached to the victims they assist, regulating their emotions and maintaining professional boundaries so they can continue providing support without being overwhelmed (PO1–PO5). These strategies allow officers to handle the emotional strain of sensitive cases, stay resilient, and perform their duties effectively (Stogner et al., 2020). Overall, their experiences show that self-care, emotional regulation, and professional detachment are vital for sustaining both their well-being and their ability to help others (Puslons & Gall, 2020).

This can be understood through Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which applies because it explains how WCPD personnel manage the emotional pressures of their work. By practicing self-care, regulating their emotions, and maintaining professional boundaries, they use both emotion-focused and problem focused strategies to reduce stress (Hamid, 2024). The theory helps illustrate how these coping mechanisms enable officers to stay resilient and effective while continuing to provide empathetic and professional support to victims.

This situation can be understood through Role Strain Theory, which is applicable because WCPD personnel must juggle multiple responsibilities handling heavy caseloads, completing administrative work, and supporting emotionally vulnerable victims often with limited resources (Crivatu et al., 2023). The theory helps explain why these competing demands create stress and can challenge an officer's ability to perform effectively (Demerouti, & Bakker, 2023). Recognizing these strains also highlights why teamwork, guidance, and institutional support are so important for helping officers stay resilient, professional, and capable in such a demanding role (Stogner et al., 2020).

This study is important because it shows the very real ways WCPD personnel take care of themselves while doing such emotionally heavy work. Dealing with the trauma and struggles of victims, along with long hours and heavy workloads, can be exhausting, both mentally and physically. The study highlights how officers use simple self-care practices—like taking breaks, enjoying a favorite meal, or just finding small moments to relax—to recharge and protect their well-being. At the same time, they carefully maintain professional boundaries, so they can empathize and support victims without letting the emotional weight of the work overwhelm them. By balancing self-care with their responsibilities, WCPD personnel are able to stay resilient, focused, and compassionate, making sure they can continue helping women and children effectively. It shows that looking after themselves isn't selfish—it's essential for them to keep doing this difficult but vital work. The theme Work-life Balance and Self-Care Practices showed that WCPD personnel often found it hard to separate the demands of their job from their personal lives. Long hours, heavy caseloads, and constant exposure to traumatic cases sometimes left them feeling drained and emotionally worn out. Those who made time for self-care, set personal boundaries, or found ways to relax outside of work felt more resilient and better able to handle stress. The findings highlighted how important it was to support healthy work-life balance and personal well-being. Overall, taking care of themselves helped WCPD personnel stay energized, protect their mental health, and continue helping victims effectively.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the real, human experiences of Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel, showing the delicate balance they maintain between caring deeply for victims and fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Officers face heavy emotional and psychological pressures from being constantly exposed to trauma, alongside operational challenges like staff shortages, high caseloads, and complex procedures. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrate incredible dedication and resilience, leaning on strategies such as teamwork, peer support, and self-care to keep going. The findings make it clear that WCPD personnel's effectiveness and well-being are closely tied to the support they receive from their institutions. Their commitment ensures that women and children receive the care and protection they need, even under challenging circumstances.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

To help Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) personnel perform their duties effectively while protecting their well-being, strong institutional support must be a top priority. First, staffing levels should be increased to ease heavy caseloads and reduce fatigue, allowing officers to handle each case thoroughly and on time. Second, ongoing specialized training on best practices, handling sensitive cases, and using new technologies should be provided to strengthen their skills and confidence. Third, accessible mental health and psychosocial support, such as counseling and debriefing, is essential to help officers manage stress and prevent burnout. Finally, closer collaboration with agencies like the DSWD and PAO will help streamline victim protection and legal support, ensuring that women and children receive the care and justice they deserve.

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