

Rape, VAWC keep rising

Even before this global health crisis, violence against women was plaguing 1 out of every 4 Filipinas who is married or has been married at least once in their lives

Daily Tribune (Philippines) · 28 Sep 2021 · A1 · BY PAULA ANTOLIN @tribunephil_phau

In what could be indicative of cases nationwide and worldwide, the Quezon City government on Monday raised an alarm over the rising cases of rape and Violence Against Women and Children

(VAWC) amid the implementation of lockdown rules to stem the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the city.

With children staying at home and with most of them attending classes online, QC Police District Director BGen. Antonio Yarra reported an increasing trend in VAWC cases and rape in the first eight months of the year compared with the same period of last year.

Yarra said the pandemic has contributed largely to the increase in cases, and pointed to the lost work opportunities and financial difficulties experienced by families that led to domestic conflicts.

He noted that from 58 reported VAWC cases from

January to August 2020, 87 new cases have been logged over the same period this year.

There were 130 rape cases logged from January to August 2020. There are now 158 cases reported in the same stretch this year.

Cases of physical abuse also rose from 63 to 119, and psychological abuse from 17 to 25 incidents.

In an article at the height of the lockdowns due to the pandemic late last year, Gustavo Gonzalez, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines, warned about the rise of gender-based violence as “one of the most insidious consequences of the pandemic”.

“Even before this global health crisis, violence against women was plaguing 1 out of every 4 Filipinas who is married or has been married at least once in their lives. We know the incidence and numbers escalate during disasters but one can only estimate what impact this might have on the whole country,” he said.

“The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that there had been a 20 percent increase in domestic violence globally. A study commissioned by UNFPA approximates that intimate partner violence will increase by 16 percent in the country. By the end of the year, there will be an estimated 839,000 women who are married or who have been married at least once in their lives who would experience GBV during this pandemic,” Gonzalez added.

Also, the UNFPA’s State of World Population Report revealed that across the globe, from 2020 to 2030, there could be an additional 13 million girls under 18 who would marry, resulting from the disruption of programs and services, and economic challenges brought by Covid-19.

“When parents from low-income families are unable to find jobs, the deepening poverty brought by the pandemic can push families to consider marrying off their daughters in the hopes of a better life for their children,” Gonzalez said.

He also warned that perpetrators and human traffickers are taking advantage of the economic hardships of families.

In the Philippines, where 73 million Filipinos, or some 67 percent of the population, use social media, the Internet is a platform for cybercriminals preying on women and young people, he shared.

“Social media provides much room for abusers to engage in sexual exploitation of women and young people behind closed doors and in front of a webcam. Gender-based online sexual harassment

continues to rise especially targeting young women and girls. Widespread are rape jokes, rape threats, and other sexist remarks that negatively impact women and girls. It is important to note that gender-based online sexual harassment is punishable by law, under RA 11313, or the Safe Spaces Act,” Gonzalez stated.

The Philippines has implemented various degrees of lockdown rules, the strictest of which was the enhanced community quarantine or ECQ that was first implemented in March last year.

Various lockdown formulations have also been introduced but the country has yet to recover fully as different variants of the coronavirus have altered the global responses, including the race to find vaccines and medications that would suppress the health scare.

There were 130 rape cases logged from January to August 2020. There are now 158 cases reported in the same stretch this year.