

Perceptions of Students and Parents on Statutory Rape Bill: A Basis for an Anti-Child Rape Advocacy

Glyza Mae D. Ascrate¹, Rhea G. Delos Santos², Maricar M. Posadas³, Great I Am W. C. Gismundo⁴
Pangasinan State University

Abstract – Under the Anti-Rape Law of 1997, children with the age of 12 years old and above are seen as old enough to give sexual consent to adults which made the children vulnerable to sexual offenders as they can be manipulated due to their age. In this case, the House Bill 7836 is proposed to amend the current law and increase the age of consent from 12 years old to 16. This study was conducted to determine the perception of students and parents on statutory rape bill. The study was employed by descriptive research supplemented by survey questionnaire. In determining the significant differences between the respondents' profile and their level of acceptability and awareness on statutory rape bill, independent t-test and one way ANOVA was utilized while Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was used to determine the significant relationship between the level of awareness and level of acceptability of the respondents.

Keywords – Statutory rape, Sexual consent, Statutory rape bill, Sexual Activity, Anti-Rape Law, Sexual Assault

INTRODUCTION

Children hold the seed of peace, hope and rectitude that is vital on how the future would be for the coming years. Although small and vulnerable, their role is big enough to deliver a positive change in our society. Thus, the responsibility of bringing them up should be the duty of the family, community and the government. They should live in an atmosphere of love without having to worry on their security that gives them protection especially from rape.

This type of violence against children remains disturbingly common all over the Philippines. According to National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children (2015), every five children, one of them ranging from 13 to 17 years of age has experienced sexual abuse (17.1%), on the other hand, one out of 25 of respondents encountered forced consummated sex during their childhood. On top of that, reports from Center for Women's Resources (2017) stated that rape happens every 62 minutes and 7 out of 10 rape victims are happened to be children.

Based from the current Anti-Rape Law, having a sexual engagement is considered as statutory rape if the other party is below the age of 12. (Limpot, 2020). As stated by Chairperson of the House Committee on Welfare of Children Representative Yedda Marie Romualdez, any sexual contact with a minor under the age of 12 is automatically recognized as rape, regardless of having consent to engage in the sexual activity. But

when the child becomes 12 years old, the law appears to convey that the child is matured enough to engage to any sexual acts with another person.

In 1987, a child of about 12 years of age had been allegedly sexually abused and who later died due to the infection because of an object that was left inside her genital organ. However, the defense counsel of the appellant argued that the girl was 13 years old and had consent to the sexual activity in exchange of money. Unfortunately, the lack of any proof of her age became one of the factors that led the court to acquit the appellant. (People vs Ritter, G.R No. 88582, 5 March 1991)

Several reforms have been carried out following that case but it took decades when the Philippine lawmakers finally prepared for a legislation to increase the legal age in giving consent from 12 to 16 years old. The House Bill 7836 titled "An Act Providing for Stronger Protection Against Rape and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Increasing the Age for Determining the Commission of Statutory Rape" seeks to amend the concept of rape including the definite acts of perversion for sexual gratification, and despite having the victim's forgiveness and engaging to marriage with the offender, criminal liability will not be extinguished. Based from the existing law, an individual charged with rape faces 20 to 40 years of life imprisonment (Limpot, 2020). Romualdez also said that

by establishing the age of consent under the age of 16, the victim will no longer experience trauma for attending several extensive court proceedings and trials.

Based from Pangasinan PPO's report, there are 44 violations against women while 208 were violations of children from January 1 until October 11, 2020 despite on the decrease in number of cases. Therefore, this study sought to find out the perception of the students and parents on Statutory Rape Bill as it described the level of awareness of the respondents in terms of the context and implementation of the current law as well as their level of acceptability under the proposed concepts of the said substitute bill. Moreover, this study was designed for a basis to an anti-child rape advocacy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of students and parents on Statutory Rape Bill. Specifically, this study sought to find answers to the following: 1) The profile of the respondents in terms of: a) age, b) sex, and c) civil status. 2) The level of acceptability of students and parents on Statutory Rape Bill. 3) The level of awareness of students and parents on Statutory Rape Bill. 4) The significant relationship between the respondents' profile variables and their acceptability statutory rape bill, and the significant relationship between the respondents' profile variables and their awareness on Statutory Rape Bill.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, descriptive research design was used. The researchers employed a set of questionnaires as data gathering instrument. Questionnaires was utilized in this study to allow the respondents answer accurately as questions are close-ended that will provide quantitative information. All of the data that is being gathered was taken as they utilized solely for the purpose of the study. The results of this descriptive survey were taken as variables of this study, analyze thoroughly, and quantify in order to reach into a basis as an anti-child rape advocacy with regards to the perception of students and parents on statutory rape bill.

Population and Sampling

The sample size of the study was composed of 256 respondents in which 128 of them are Junior High School students of Judge Jose de Venecia Senior Technical-Vocational Secondary School aged between 12 to 16 years old and the other 128 respondents are their parents. The researchers employed the random

sampling in data gathering procedure and used Slovin's formula in determining the sample size.

Data Gathering Instrument

Questionnaire is the major instrument that used in gathering the needed data in determining the perception of students and parents on statutory rape bill. Two sets of questionnaires were prepared and administered by the researchers – one for the students and another for the parents. To measure the condition of the variables of this study, the questionnaires composed of three parts were utilized:

First part covered the profile of the respondents. For the student respondents, it composed of name, age, sex, grade level and general average while for the parent respondents, it included the name, age, sex, civil status, and highest educational attainment. The respondent has the option whether or not to identify the respondent's name as right for privacy and confidentiality was observed.

In the second part, the level of awareness of students and parents regarding the statutory rape was included. It investigated the respondents' awareness about statutory rape by presenting a variety of questions derived from different literature and from the current Anti-Rape Law.

The last part of the questionnaire involved the level of acceptability of students and parents on statutory rape bill where the items are based from the substitute bill, House Bill 7836.

Statistical Treatment

Frequency count and percentage distribution was used to determine and explain the data collected from the profile of the respondents. The researchers used a statistical formula to show the representation and the interpretation of the numerical data gathered. Average weighted mean was used to determine the numerical weighs assigned to various ratings on the level of awareness and acceptability of the respondents. In determining the significant differences between the respondents' profile and their level of acceptability and awareness on statutory rape bill, independent t-test and one way ANOVA was utilized while Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was used to determine the significant relationship between the level of awareness and level of acceptability of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents are from the Junior High School of Judge Jose de Venecia Senior Technical-Vocational Secondary School in Dagupan City and are enrolled on the academic year 2020 – 2021.

Table 1. Profile of the Student Respondents

Profile	Sub-Category	f	%
Age	12	7	5.47
	13	17	13.28
	14	32	25
	15	47	36.72
	16	25	19.53
	Total	128	100
Sex	Male	48	37.5
	Female	80	62.5
	Total	128	100
Grade Level	Grade 7	30	23.44
	Grade 8	31	24.22
	Grade 9	31	24.22
	Grade 10	36	28.13
	Total	128	100
General Average	Below 75	1	0.78
	76 – 80	5	3.91
	81 – 85	19	14.84
	86 – 90	46	35.94
	91 – 95	39	30.47
	96 – 100	18	14.06
	Total	128	100

As what is reflected in Table 1, out of 128 student respondents, 36.72% or 47 students are 15 years old, while the least of the respondents belong to the age of 12 years old with a rate of 5.47%.

As to the sex, majority of the respondents are female with 62.5% while the remaining 48 or 37.5% are male.

Out of 128 student respondents, 36 of them or 28.13% are in Grade 10. While Grade 8 and Grade 9 have both 31 students or 24.22% and the least number of respondents are in Grade 7 with 30 students or 23.44%.

In terms of the general average, 46 or 35.94% of the 128 students have a grade that ranges from 86-90.

Table 2. Profile of the Parent Respondents

Profile	Sub-Category	f	%
Age	30 and below	19	14.84

Sex	31 – 40	21	16.41
	41 – 50	53	41.41
	51 – 60	30	23.44
	61 and above	5	3.91
	Total	128	100
Civil Status	Male	28	21.88
	Female	100	78.13
	Total	128	100
	Single	17	13.28
	Married	86	67.19
	Separated	6	4.69
Highest Educ. Attained	Widowed	8	6.25
	Cohabiting	11	8.59
	Total	128	100
	Elementary Graduate	6	4.69
	High school Undergraduate	13	10.16
Highest Educ. Attained	High school Graduate	36	28.13
	College Undergraduate	24	18.75
	College Graduate	41	32.03
	Vocational Graduate	8	6.25
	Total	128	100

As shown in table 2, 53 under the category of 41-50 years old and least of the respondents were from 61 above years old. As for their sex, 100 or 78.13% of the parent respondents are female and majority of them are married that comprised of 67.19%. For the parents respondents' educational attainment, 41 or 32.03% have finished their college degree and the least number of respondents are elementary graduate.

Table 3. Level of Awareness of the Respondents on Statutory Rape in terms of its Context

Scores	Students		Parents	
	f	%	F	%
9 – 10	6	4.69	10	7.81
7 – 8	51	39.84	43	33.59
5 – 6	42	32.81	55	42.97
3 – 4	24	18.75	19	14.84
0 – 2	5	3.91	1	0.78
Mean	5.98		6.14	
Standard Deviation	1.801		1.782	
Description	Moderately Aware		Moderately Aware	
Descriptive Equivalent: 7.5 -10 = <i>Highly Aware</i> , 5-7.4 = <i>Moderately Aware</i> , 2.5-5 = <i>Slightly Aware</i> , 0-2.4 = <i>Not aware</i>				

Table 3 shows that 51 or 39.84% of the student respondents got the score of 7 – 8 points while 42 of them registered a score of 5 to 6 points. Five students or

3.91% had 0 – 2 points and 6 or 4.69% tallied 9 – 10 points regarding the context of the statutory rape.

As to the parent respondents, 55 or 42.97% of them scored 5 – 6 points and 43 or 33.59% of them got 7 – 8 points. Ten parents scored with the range of 9-10 points and only one parent got 0-2 points.

The students got a mean of 5.98 while the parents have a mean of 6.14. Both means were interpreted as moderately aware. The result is similar to the study of Foster (2017) which indicates that students are knowledgeable about some of the basic facts of child sexual abuse, however there are still gaps in their knowledge that needs to be addressed.

Table 4. Level of Awareness of the Respondents on Statutory Rape in terms of its Implementation

Scores	Students		Parents	
	f	%	F	%
9 – 10	4	3.13	10	7.81
7 – 8	24	18.75	23	17.97
5 – 6	53	41.41	59	46.09
3 – 4	30	23.44	28	21.88
0 – 2	17	13.28	8	6.25

Mean	5.00	5.41
Standard Deviation	2.00	1.998
Description	Moderately Aware	Moderately Aware
Descriptive Equivalent: 7.5 -10 = <i>Highly Aware</i> , 5-7.4 = <i>Moderately Aware</i> , 2.5-5 = <i>Slightly Aware</i> , 0-2.4 = <i>Not aware</i>		

The table 4 indicates that 53 or 41.41% of the student respondents scored 5 – 6 points. Thirty or 23.44% of the students got 3 – 4 points and 24 of them or 18.75% gained 7 – 8 points. Out of 128 student respondents, only four of them got 9 – 10 points and 17 or 13.28% had 0 – 2 points.

In regards to the parent respondents, majority got a score of 5 – 6 points, 28 or 21.88% of them recorded 3 – 4 points, and 23 or 17.97% tallied 7 – 8 points. Ten out of 128 parent respondents had 9 – 10 points while eight of them scored 0 – 2. The students and parents got a mean of 5.00 and 5.41 which can be classified as moderately aware. The result is contrary to the study of Grant et. al (2017) which presented that 82.35% of the parents and 72.22% of the students were unaware of sexual misconduct policies.

Table 5. Acceptability of the Respondents on the Proposed Concepts of Statutory Rape Bill in terms of the Context of Abuse

Indicator	Students		Parents	
	AWM	Descriptive Rating	AWM	Descriptive Rating
Increase of age of sexual consent from 12 to 16 years old.	3.18	Undecided	3.54	Slightly Acceptable
It will be a statutory rape if the victim ages 14 to 16 years old and the age gap between the offender exceeds to 4 years.	3.91	Slightly Acceptable	4.02	Slightly Acceptable
It will be considered statutory rape of the victim is 13 years old and below and the offender is 16 years old and above.	3.96	Slightly Acceptable	4.02	Slightly Acceptable
A victim over 16 years old but has physical, mental, or psychological disability when sexually abused should be also considered statutory rape.	4.05	Slightly Acceptable	4.40	Acceptable
Insertion of finger into child's private area under 16 should automatically be guilty of statutory rape.	4.34	Acceptable	4.42	Acceptable

Under the proposed bill, any adult who engaged with sexual intercourse with child under 16 should automatically be guilty of statutory rape.	4.22	Acceptable	4.49	Acceptable
Placing or rubbing the male reproductive organ into the child's private area under 16 should automatically be guilty of statutory rape.	4.22	Acceptable	4.57	Acceptable
The absence or lack of physical act or resistance shall not be interpreted as consent.	3.70	Slightly Acceptable	3.80	Slightly Acceptable
Overall Average Weighted Mean	3.95	Slightly Acceptable	4.17	Slightly Acceptable

As presented in the table, the level of acceptability of the student and parent respondents in terms of the context of the statutory rape bill is slightly acceptable with an overall average weighted mean of 3.95 and 4.17, respectively.

The highest average weighted mean in the student respondents is 4.34 which implied that most of the students accept the concept where the insertion of the offender's finger into the child's private area under 16 would be automatically guilty of statutory rape.

As to the increase of age of sexual consent from 12 years old to 16, the students are undecided to accept the said proposed concept having a 3.18 average weighted mean which may seem to disagree with the data presented by Thilakarathna & Jayarathna (2021) which says that the student respondents accept that there should be amendments to the law that punishes the accused who is convicted of having a sexual intercourse with a girl below 16.

On the other hand, 4.57 is the highest average weighted mean in the parent respondents where they

accept that placing or rubbing the male reproductive organ into the child's private area would be guilty of statutory rape.

Parents are more acceptable in the concept of increasing the age of sexual consent from 12 to 16 years old in comparison to student respondents who are undecided. It also shows that parents accept that victims over 16 years old but has disability when sexually abused should be also considered statutory rape while the students have 4.05 weighted mean that can be interpreted as slightly acceptable.

Table 6. Acceptability of the Respondents on the Proposed Concepts of Statutory Rape Bill in terms of the Implementation

Indicator	Students		Parents	
	AWM	Descriptive Rating	AWM	Descriptive Rating
The proposed bill, House Bill 7836 will give equal protection to boys and girls.	4.34	Acceptable	4.65	Acceptable

Remove the “marriage as forgiveness” exemption where the perpetrator is freed of legal responsibility if the perpetrator marries the victim.	3.74	Slightly Acceptable	3.95	Slightly Acceptable
Penalty for statutory rape should be reclusion perpetua or 40 years of imprisonment.	4.25	Acceptable	4.57	Acceptable
There should be no more cash settlement under this bill.	3.84	Slightly Acceptable	4.57	Acceptable
There should be no more withdrawal of criminal cases.	4	Slightly Acceptable	4.49	Acceptable
When grooming results in the consummation of any acts of sexual abuse or exploitation, the person responsible for the grooming shall be liable for rape.	4.07	Slightly Acceptable	4.67	Acceptable
A new provision mandates that it will be the duty of the health care providers, teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers and any local or national officer to report to the Department of Social Welfare and Development the incidents of rape and other sexual offenses.	4.32	Acceptable	4.67	Acceptable
Overall Average Weighted Mean	4.08	Slightly Acceptable	4.43	Acceptable

The table implied that in the level of acceptability, the students have an overall weighted mean of 4.08 which means that they slightly accept the proposed concepts of the statutory rape bill in terms of its implementation while the parent respondents, having a 4.43 overall average weighted mean, accept the proposed concepts.

The data also implied that the students accept the three concepts which are the equal protection to boys and girls, life imprisonment as penalty and the new provision regarding the reporting on the incident. The equal protection to boys and girls has the highest average weighted mean, rated as 4.34, for the student respondents. The data is supported by Tenzer (2019) where it was stated in the study that feminists advocate the legislatures to push for reform of statutory rape laws concerning the gender-specific sexual assault to recognize that both men and women have to be treated equally.

Parents accept all the concepts aside from removing the ‘marriage as forgiveness’ clause even if the perpetrator marries the victim. The highest average weighted mean in the parents is 4.67 which shows that parents accept the new provision mandates where someone with authority can report to the DSWD the crime of rape and other sexual offenses. This is similar to the report of Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2014 where 46 states in USA had mandatory policy that it will be the duty of school employees, teachers, parents, family members or the students themselves to report the suspicions of child abuse, including sexual abuse.

Table 7. Significant Difference Between the Respondents' Profile Variables and their Level of Awareness

Respondent	Profile Variable	Test Statistics Computed	Sig	Conclusion
Student	Age	f=2.801	.029	Significant
	Sex	t=3.634	.000	Significant
	Grade Level	f=5.036	.003	Significant
	Gen. Average	f=6.222	.000	Significant
Parents	Age	f=2.163	.077	Not Significant
	Sex	t=2.336	.021	Significant
	Civil Status	f=1.175	.325	Not Significant
	Highest Educational Attainment	f=3.626	.004	Significant

The data shows that in the test for the significance between the student respondents' profile variables and their awareness in statutory rape, the p-value of age, sex, grade level and general average was lesser than the significance level of 0.05. Hence, there was significant difference between their profile variables and level of awareness.

Students who are 15 years old have the highest weighted mean, while 12 years old students gained the lowest weighted mean. This implies that the students who are older has a more awareness to the statutory rape compared to the students who are younger. This coincides to the study of Do et.al (2019) which suggest that age is a factor for the proper perception of the students to child sexual abuse. Increase in age means being more knowledgeable in preventing the said abuse.

Female respondents have a higher level of awareness compared to male respondents which is contrary to the findings of Abeid (2015) which says that male respondents are more aware than female respondents. In terms of the grade level, Grade 8 students have the highest weighted mean while Grade 7 students have the lowest. The respondents who have a general average of 96-100 gained the highest rate on the level awareness while the students who have 76-80 as their general average got the lowest rate.

On the parent respondents, there is no significant difference in age and civil status of parent respondents while there is a significant difference in the sex and educational attainment of the parents. The level of awareness of male parents has a higher mean than the level of awareness of female parents. This indicates that male parents are more aware compared to female parents. The result contradicts the findings that AlRammah, et al. (2018) presented where it has been found in their study that the sex of the respondents has no significance on their perception scores.

Parents who have college degree gained the highest level of awareness while elementary graduate parents have the lowest level. The data is in line to the study of Abeid et.al (2015) which says that having a higher level of education is correlated with higher level of knowledge in sexual offenses.

Table 8. Significant Difference Between the Respondents' Profile Variables and their Level of Acceptability

Respondent	Profile Variable	Test Statistics Computed	Sig	Conclusion
Students	Age	f=2.084	.087	Not Significant
	Sex	t=0.843	.401	Not Significant
	Grade Level	f=1.201	.312	Not Significant
	Gen. Average	f=2.969	.015	Significant
Parents	Age	f=0.671	.613	Not Significant
	Sex	t=2.305	.023	Significant
	Civil Status	f=0.679	.608	Not Significant
	Highest Educational Attainment	f=1.101	.363	Not Significant

The data implies that in the general average of the student respondents, it garnered a p-value of .015 which is lesser than the significance level of .05 which means that the difference in their general average has a significance on their acceptability to statutory rape bill. The highest weighted mean is the students who have a grade that ranges from 96-100 while the grades below 75 got the lowest weighted mean.

As to the parent respondents, the data reveals that the sex of the parent respondents have .023 p-value which means that it is significant. Hence, there is significant difference between the sex of the parent respondents and their acceptability. The respondents who are male have higher weighted mean compared to the female and it implies that male respondents acknowledged more the context of the bill compared to the female respondents. However, it seems to contradict the findings that Koon-Magnin (2008) presented which says that female respondents are more critical than male respondents in their evaluations of the victim, the perpetrator, and acceptance to the act.

Table 9. Significant Relationship between the Respondents' Level of Awareness and Level of Acceptability

Respondent	Coefficient, r	n	P-value	Conclusion
Students	0.373	128	.000	Significant
Parents	0.227	128	.000	Significant

The data revealed that there is a significant relationship between the respondents' level of awareness and their level of acceptability. As for the student respondents, the direction of the relationship is positive which means that these variables tend to increase together and their strength is moderate having a correlation r of .373. While for the parents, the direction is also positive meaning, as their level of awareness increases, their level of acceptability also increases. However, the strength of their correlation is weak having a correlation r of .227.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In light of foregoing finding, the following conclusions and recommendations were drawn:

In terms of the awareness, students and parents are moderately aware regarding the statutory rape in terms of its context and the implementation. While as to their acceptance to the bill, students slightly accept the proposed concepts while parents accept the implementation. It is highly encouraged to strengthen the collaborative relationship with the stakeholders like parents, teachers and the Local Government Units (LGUs) regarding the information dissemination on the current laws like Republic Act 8353 or Anti-Rape Law and the proposed concepts of the bill by raising the

issue in a forum like the Parent-Teacher Association meeting.

Age, sex, grade level and general average have significant difference in terms of the students' awareness. In terms of the age, it is similar with the study of Gismundo, et al., (2016) which says that the older the respondents are, the more they are aware with the consequences of sexual activity. On the other hand, there is a significant difference in terms of the sex and highest educational attainment of the parents' awareness. Parents who have higher degree are more likely to be aware of statutory rape. Also, the level of awareness of male parents has a higher mean than the level of awareness of female parents. This indicates that male parents are more aware compared to female parents. The result contradicts the findings that AlRammah, et al. (2018) presented where it has been found in their study that the sex of the respondents has no significance on their perception scores. The school is encouraged to conduct a seminar, lecture or programs related to statutory rape such as awareness in giving consent, ways to identify sexual abuse, and reducing the risk factors of rape in every school year in an effort to continually increase the awareness of the students.

In terms of their level of acceptability, students' general average and parents' sex have significant differences. Students who have higher grades and parents who are male are more likely to accept the statutory rape bill. Students and parents should be educated to the House Bill 7836 especially on its implementation, when and how statutory rape is committed, safe spaces, and the involvement of consent during the sexual activity.

As the respondents' level of awareness to statutory rape increases, their level of acceptability to the statutory rape bill also increases. This is similar to the conclusion that Mathews & Collin-Vézina (2016) presented where it stated that improved awareness is one of the key attributes to facilitate an increase in beneficial outcome in policy reform and development of social norms. The legislators should pass the bill, RA 7836, and establish more anti-child rape advocacies or policies to address the issue regarding the child rape in the country like building more centers or haven for rape victims in every municipality and city.

Students are undecided in accepting the concept of increase in age of consent from 12 to 16 years old while parents are slightly acceptable with it. Further

research is recommended with a wider number of respondents to conduct a parallel study which can lead to the comparison of the findings of this research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not be possible without the guidance, encouragement and cooperation of the people who served as the inspiration for the completion of this study: To Ascrate family, delos Santos family, Posadas family and Gismundo family who has supported them all the way and whose encouragement has pushed them to give all it takes to finish what they have started.

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PLEASE INCLUDE CONTACT INFORMATION:

NAME: GREAT I AM W. C. GISMUNDO

CONTACT NO: 09477905116

EMAIL ADDRESS:

GIAGISMUNDO.LINGAYEN@PSU.EDU.PH