

Democratizing Safety in Inclusive Pedagogies: A GAD-Based Curricular Framework for Safeguarding Vulnerable Rural Learners Under Safe Spaces Act

Ignie V. Baco Jr.

Faculty, Northern Iloilo State University, Address of University : Batad Viejo, Batad, Iloilo, Philippines, Orcid ID (If available) : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7593-4305>, E-Mail Id : jrignie@gmail.com

HOW TO CITE:

Ignie V. Baco Jr. (2026).
Democratizing Safety in Inclusive
Pedagogies: A GAD-Based
Curricular Framework for
Safeguarding Vulnerable Rural
Learners Under Safe Spaces Act.
International Journal of Special
Education, 41(14s), 148-159

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.
Open access publication under the
terms and conditions
of the Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY)
license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

ABSTRACT:

This study investigates legal literacy of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) and localized safety experiences of rural women and children in Iloilo, Philippines. Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study surveyed 109 rural participants and conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with respondents of gender-based sexual harassment (GBSH). Quantitative results revealed slightly low legal literacy (Mean = 1.97), with significant gaps in understanding specific GBSH definitions and reporting protocols. Qualitative data exposed severe institutional gaps, with the community's perception of the school as a "safe space" yielding a critical distrust and under reporting.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a Gender and Development (GAD) Educational Mainstreaming Framework to systematically integrate RA 11313 into DepEd and CHED curricula for inclusive, transformative learning.

Keywords: Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313), Anti-Bastos Law, Inclusive Education, Gender and Development (GAD), Curriculum Integration.

Introduction

The Global Crisis of Gender-Based Sexual Harassment

Globally, the right to personal safety and bodily integrity is systematically threatened by gender-based sexual harassment (GBSH). In streets, public utilities, workplaces, and digital spaces, millions of individuals navigate a hostile world daily where non-consensual sexual attention has become normalized. Far from being isolated incidents of bad behavior, GBSH represents a global structural violation of human rights that cuts across national boundaries. From the streets of major Western capitals to the public transit systems of highly developed urban centers, public spaces remain battlegrounds for systemic power plays (Alvarez et al., 2026).

Asian countries present a distinct set of challenges where rapid urbanization and high-density public transit systems intersect with deeply embedded patriarchal hierarchies. In many Asian societies, conservative gender expectations and cultures of shame place the burden of "family honor" squarely on women and children. This dynamic often turns harassment into a silent ordeal, where survivors choose not to report abuse to avoid social stigma (Aoyshi, 2026).

According to United Nations ebook, 2025, the digital transition in Asia has also outpaced the development of online safety regulations, leading to a rise in cyber-harassment and online sexual exploitation. For marginalized sectors in Asia, particularly children, these vulnerabilities are magnified. The lack of inclusive infrastructure,

and accessible reporting channels in Asian institutions leaves children with special needs invisible and highly vulnerable to abuse without any means of seeking help.

In the Philippines, a country with a unique contrast between progressive legislation and uneven local enforcement. For decades, the country's legal protections for women and children focused primarily on the domestic sphere, as codified under Republic Act No. 9262, or the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (Anti-VAWC) Act of 2004. However, the enactment of Republic Act No. 11313, known as the Safe Spaces Act of 2019 (Anti-Bastos Law), marked a major legislative shift. This landmark law expands the definition of sexual harassment to include public spaces, online platforms, workplaces, and educational institutions, criminalizing behaviors ranging from catcalling and wolf-whistling to cyberstalking (Mendoza et al., 2025).

Yet, the lived experiences of rural Filipinos reveal a major gap between the law's goals and its actual implementation. In rural barangays, geographical isolation, poverty, and traditional patriarchies limit survivors' access to information and legal remedies. Traditional approaches to preventing gender-based violence (GBV) treat legal literacy as a static resource, assuming that simply passing a law is enough to protect the vulnerable (Zubair et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the intersection of disability and abuse in the Philippines remains a pressing issue. National data from UNICEF indicates that during times of crisis, up to 13% of children with disabilities experience physical, domestic, or sexual abuse. Combined with the fact that approximately 26.56% of Filipino children with disabilities live below the poverty line, these children face an exceptionally high risk of violence and harassment, yet remain largely invisible in community safety and monitoring systems (Chan et al., 2016).

From a Gender and Development (GAD) perspective, legal literacy is deeply intertwined with socioeconomic status and educational access. A survivor's or youth's capacity to recognize,

resist, and report sexual harassment is heavily constrained by their level of formal education, economic independence, and trust in local safety systems.

A major structural problem is the lack of institutional integration of these protective frameworks. While both the Department of Education, 2024 and the Commission on Higher Education, 2015 have issued administrative guidelines on the Safe Spaces Act, the law is rarely integrated into classroom instruction in primary, secondary, or tertiary education. Instead, it is typically limited to occasional, optional seminars or administrative compliance reports.

This study addresses this gap by using a mixed-methods research approach. We combined a quantitative survey of 109 rural participants with qualitative, trauma-informed interviews of 10 selected survivors of domestic violence and public harassment to explore their levels of legal awareness and understand why localized protection mechanisms fail.

Ultimately, this paper focuses on creating a concrete policy and curriculum framework for inclusive education. It argues that systematically integrating the Anti-Bastos Law (RA 11313) into the primary, secondary, and tertiary general education curricula is a vital step toward ending gender-based violence and ensuring that the most vulnerable students, specially those traumatized and those with special needs, are fully protected.

2. Literature Review & Research Gap

2.1. The Legal Landscape of Women's Protection in the Philippines

The Philippine state has constructed a robust legal architecture to safeguard women and children from discrimination and violence. Chief among these is Republic Act No. 9710 (The Magna Carta of Women of 2009), which serves as the comprehensive national policy for human rights, mandating the elimination of discrimination against women and the mainstreaming of GAD across all government sectors (Lim & Canonizado, 2026).

To address domestic harm, Republic Act No. 9262 (The Anti-VAWC Act of 2004) penalizes

physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence within intimate relationships (Castillo & Mantillas, 2024). It famously introduces Protection Orders (Barangay, Temporary, and Permanent) as emergency legal remedies to prevent further abuse.

Expanding these rights beyond domestic relationships, Republic Act No. 11313 (The Safe Spaces Act of 2019) criminalizes GBSH in public spaces, online platforms, workplaces, and educational institutions, Gazette, 2019. It establishes that safe spaces are a universal right, classifying offenses like catcalling, intrusive gazing, and cyber-harassment as punishable violations.

2.2. The Implementation Deficit and Institutional Distrust

Despite this progressive legal landscape, research reveals a significant "rhetoric-reality gap" between policy design and local enforcement (Consignado et al., 2022). At the community level, Barangay VAW Desks are mandated to serve as the primary resource for survivors. However, as point out, these desks are frequently underfunded, understaffed, and operated by officials who lack adequate gender-sensitivity and trauma-informed training. In many cases, local arbiters prioritize family mediation and social cohesion over the safety of the survivor, which discourages victims from reporting abuse (Valdez et al., 2022).

Similarly, the Safe Spaces Act faces structural challenges in educational institutions. Although schools are required to establish a Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI), many institutions do not actively promote these reporting channels (Borito, 2022). As a result, students remain unaware of how to report harassment or express distrust in their school's administrative response.

2.3. The Research and Policy Gap: Lack of Curricular Integration

A systematic review of the literature reveals a major research and policy gap: existing studies on RA 11313 focus primarily on baseline student/community awareness or institutional compliance audits (Borito, 2022). There is an

acute lack of research on how to systematically integrate these legal protections into formal educational. Current educational efforts treat the Safe Spaces Act as an administrative compliance task rather than an instructional requirement. While CHED, 2015 and DepEd, 2024 issue memos on safe spaces, the law's core concepts are rarely integrated into standard textbooks, lesson plans, or subject competencies. Missing Pedagogical Frameworks for GBSH: While general research exists on school bullying and child abuse, there are few pedagogical frameworks showing how to teach students the nuances of gender-based sexual harassment, online safety, and consent across different grade levels (Vanner & Almanssori, 2024). Socioeconomic Stratification of Legal Literacy: Existing research often treats students and rural communities as uniform groups, overlooking how socioeconomic status and formal educational levels affect a person's legal literacy and access to justice (Alibudbud, 2024; Valdez et al., 2022). This study aims to address this research gap by providing empirical evidence of how legal literacy is stratified in rural environments, and utilizing these findings to propose a structured model for integrating the Safe Spaces Act into the primary, secondary, and tertiary curricula.

3. Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the legal literacy, localized safety experiences, and empowerment dynamics of rural children and youth regarding the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313). In mixed-methods research, this design is highly valued for its ability to provide both statistical breadth and conceptual depth. This design consists of two distinct, interactive phases: an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. The statistical results from the quantitative phase establish generalizable trends and locate specific demographic disparities, which then guide the purposive sampling and thematic focus of the qualitative phase.

This methodological approach is particularly well-suited for researching sensitive social problems like gender-based sexual harassment

(GBSH). While quantitative surveys can map out the levels of awareness, they cannot capture the underlying institutional barriers, cultural fears, and power dynamics that cause survivors to stay silent. Using qualitative interviews to build on the statistical data allows this study to construct a more complete, realistic picture of safety and legal literacy in rural communities.

3.1. Quantitative Phase

3.1.1. Participant Selection and Stratified Random Sampling

The target population for the quantitative phase consisted of children and youth residing in the rural communities of the 5th District of Iloilo, Philippines. A sample of 109 participants was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

3.1.2. Instrumentation and Variable Operationalization

The quantitative data was collected using a structured, expert-validated survey instrument designed to measure legal awareness of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313). The instrument is divided into two primary sections:

Socio-Demographic Profiling: Collects categorical and interval data, including age, educational level, and monthly household income.

Psychometric Measurement of Legal Awareness: Features five key indicator questions designed to measure participants' understanding of the provisions, definitions, and reporting channels of RA 11313. These items are evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, where:

1 = Not Aware

2 = Slightly Aware

3 = Moderately Aware

4 = Aware

5 = Very Aware

To ensure the instrument's reliability, a pilot test was conducted with a non-sample cohort ($n = 25$). The resulting data yielded a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.86 for the awareness scale, indicating

strong internal consistency well above the standard academic threshold.

The content validity of the survey was established by a panel of three Gender and Development (GAD) experts and legal scholars, who assessed the alignment of the questions with the specific provisions of RA 11313.

3.1.3. Statistical Alignment and Methodological Precedents

The quantitative design of this study is aligned with established methods in GAD and legal literacy research: The Stratification of Legal Awareness: Our use of stratified random sampling based on socioeconomic indicators aligns with the methodology used by Maher and Hayes (2022), who investigated how educational attainment and literacy levels stratify vulnerability to intimate partner violence. By analyzing these demographic differences, this study can identify exactly which subgroups are most vulnerable to gaps in legal awareness.

The Use of Likert Scales for Legal Awareness: Measuring legal awareness through a 5-point Likert scale follows the research design of (Borito, 2022) who successfully utilized similar instruments to assess student compliance and awareness regarding the Safe Spaces Act in different higher education settings. By combining rigorous statistical sampling with trauma-informed qualitative research, this methodology provides a reliable empirical baseline. This evidence-based foundation is essential for designing effective, inclusive educational reforms to integrate the Safe Spaces Act into school and university curricula.

3.2. Qualitative Phase (Trauma-Informed Survivor Interviews)

Participants: Purposive sampling was used to select \$10\$ survivor-participants from households with lived experiences of domestic violence (under RA 9262) or public/online sexual harassment (under RA 11313) for semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Data Collection: Interviews were conducted in private, secure, and neutral locations to ensure safety and comfort. The interview guide utilized

open-ended, non-leading questions designed to understand:

The survivor's experience of public or domestic harassment.

1. Their attempts to report these incidents to local authorities (such as Barangay VAW Desks, school administrators, or police officers).
2. Their understanding of their legal rights and the structural barriers they faced in seeking justice.

Qualitative transcripts were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using thematic analysis, coding the data to identify key structural barriers, institutional issues, and cultural factors.

3.3. Ethical Considerations & Safety Protocols

Since this study investigated sensitive experiences of domestic violence and sexual harassment, the research design prioritized the ethical principle of non-maleficence (do no harm) over data collection (Ore, 2021). The following strict safety and ethical protocols were maintained:

1. Informed Consent and Assent: All adult participants provided written, informed consent after a detailed briefing on the study's scope, risks, and benefits. For participants under the age of 18, written parental/guardian consent was secured alongside the participant's written assent. All participants were explicitly informed of their right to skip any question or withdraw from the process at any point without consequence.
2. Anonymization and Data Security: To protect participants from retaliation and social stigma in tight-knit rural communities, all identifiers (such

as names and specific local landmarks) were removed. Pseudonyms (e.g., Participant S, Participant M) and generic geographical descriptors were used. Digital transcripts were encrypted and stored in password-protected cloud drives accessible only to the principal investigators.

3. Trauma-Informed Interviewing & Psychological First Aid: Interviews were conducted by GAD-trained researcher specializing in trauma-informed communication. The researchers monitored participants for signs of distress (such as hyperventilation, crying, or withdrawal). In accordance with ethical standards, a local referral network of mental health professionals, family counselors, and social workers was established to provide free psychological support to any participant experiencing re-traumatization during or after the study.

4. Reflexivity Statement: The researcher acknowledged the positionality as academic researcher. To prevent paternalistic bias—which often frames rural survivors as "uneducated" or "helpless"—the researchers utilized reflective journaling to remain aware of their own privileges, ensuring that the survivors' voices were presented with dignity, agency, and analytical accuracy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Quantitative Results: Measuring Awareness of the Anti-Bastos Law The quantitative data shows that while general awareness of protective laws exists, there are significant gaps in understanding the specific provisions of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313).

Table 1: Awareness Mean Scores of Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) and Protective Provisions

Indicator / Question	Mean Interpretation	
High Awareness Domains		
1. General awareness of the existence and purpose of RA 11313	2.3	Slightly Aware
2. Awareness that physical groping and flashing are punishable crimes	2.4	Slightly Aware
Low Awareness Domains		
3. Awareness that catcalling and wolf-whistling in public are punishable under the law	1.89	Slightly Aware

4. Awareness of what constitutes gender-based online sexual harassment	1.82	Slightly Aware
5. Knowledge of how to report school or workplace sexual harassment	1.44	Not Aware
Grand Mean Score	1.97	Slightly Aware

The table presents a critical and highly stratified picture of legal literacy regarding the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) among the surveyed rural demographic. The metrics show a Grand Mean Score of 1.97, statistically categorizing the cohort's overall legal literacy firmly within the "Slightly Aware" threshold. However, analyzing the data as a single average hides a critical variance between the different indicators.

To understand the true distribution of legal awareness, contrast of the highest-scoring and lowest-scoring variables was done. Considered as the Cognitive Domain, the highest baseline awareness is observed in Indicator 2 (Awareness that physical groping/flashing are crimes; Mean = 2.4) and Indicator 1 (General awareness of RA 11313; Mean = 2.3). On the contrary, the absolute statistical floor is observed in Indicator 5 (Knowledge of how to report school or workplace harassment; Mean = 1.44), which falls into the "Not Aware" category, and considered as Operational Domain.

There is a highly concerning gap of 0.96 points between recognizing physical violations and actually knowing how to report them. This points to a clear "cognitive-operational disconnect." The participants can identify overt physical abuses, but they are statistically disarmed and unable to navigate the reporting and legal protection systems meant to safeguard them.

Normalizing Subtle Harassment: Verbal and digital violations—such as catcalling and wolf-whistling (Mean = 1.89) and online sexual harassment (Mean = 1.82)—are statistically closer to the "Not Aware" boundary. This suggests that non-physical forms of gender-based sexual harassment (GBSH) are highly normalized and ignored in rural areas.

The critical lack of reporting awareness (Mean = 1.44) is strongly supported by the multi-level assessment of Barangay VAW Desks, which showed that local protective offices are

frequently underfunded, understaffed, and lack standardized, public-facing reporting protocols. When local safety desks do not actively advertise their services, reporting literacy inevitably plummets (Calderon et al., 2023).

This is further supported by results from, (Valdez et al., 2022), she points out that even when victims recognize harassment, structural barriers, fear of victim-blaming, and a lack of clear reporting channels actively prevent them from seeking help. This explains why operational knowledge remains at a "Not Aware" level.

The low scores for catcalling (Mean = 1.89) and online harassment (Mean = 1.82) align with findings from (Borito, 2022), who observed that while youths often recognize physical harassment, they frequently minimize verbal and online GBSH as harmless jokes or normal peer interactions.

Studies by (Ayere et al., 2025) present a contrasting perspective, showing significantly higher baseline scores of legal literacy among students in urbanized higher education settings. This contrast highlights that the low awareness observed in the study is not a universal trend among youth, but rather a geographical and educational access issue unique to rural, underserved communities.

Research by (Baog & Cagape, 2026) debunks the idea that low legal literacy is an unchangeable cultural norm. Their research proves that early, school-based educational interventions can quickly raise awareness of reporting channels and denormalize subtle harassment. This supports this research argument that integrating these laws into the curriculum is a highly effective way to close these awareness gaps.

Thus, leaving RA 11313 training to optional public seminars is an ineffective policy. This approach results in a highly stratified distribution of safety knowledge, where only privileged

individuals develop legal literacy. To turn these "Slightly Aware" and "Not Aware" scores into functional, life-saving knowledge, the Safe Spaces Act must be systematically integrated into the formal school curriculum. Standardizing this education in primary, secondary, and tertiary classrooms is the only way to eliminate the cognitive-operational gap and ensure that every student has the tools to recognize, resist, and report harassment (Aida et al., 2025).

4.2. Qualitative Results: Lived Realities and Institutional Gaps

The qualitative interviews with the 10 selected survivor-participants revealed deep-seated structural barriers that prevent victims from seeking help or reporting abuse.

To understand the qualitative meaning behind the quantitative metrics, researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten (Mean = 10) purposively selected survivor-participants. The thematic analysis of their lived experiences revealed a deep divide between the protective intent of the law and the reality of seeking justice in rural settings. The qualitative data converged around three major themes, exposing the systemic, institutional, and cultural barriers that prevent survivors from seeking help.

Theme 1: The Normalization of Catcalling and Verbal Harassment as Cultural Play

The first theme highlights how non-physical gender-based sexual harassment (GBSH) is widely normalized in rural public spaces. This matches the low quantitative scores for verbal GBSH awareness. This normalization is kept alive by local officials who often dismiss survivors' concerns:

"Every time I walk past the tricycle terminal, the drivers whistle and make remarks about my body. When I tried to report this to a barangay official, he laughed and said, 'They are just appreciating you, don't be too sensitive.' I felt humiliated and realized the barangay does not understand the law." - Participant S, 19, High School Student (Experienced Catcalling)

This dismissal by local authorities directly supports the low quantitative rating of local Safe Spaces Act promotion. In Philippine local

governance, barangay officials are legally designated as the first responders under the Safe Spaces Act harassment, they reinforce a culture where women are expected to tolerate street-level harassment. As (Consignado et al., 2022) observe, local arbiters often minimize non-physical harassment, prioritizing male privilege and community peace over a survivor's safety. Furthermore, (Borito, 2022) point out that when authority figures treat catcalling as a minor issue or a compliment, it prevents youth from recognizing these behaviors as punishable crimes, keeping legal literacy at a superficial level.

Theme 2: Online Harassment and the Technical Gaps in Support Systems

The second theme focuses on the rise of digital gender-based sexual harassment in rural areas. While online spaces are highly accessible, local protection systems remain deeply inadequate:

"A man from our neighboring barangay created a fake profile and posted edited, suggestive photos of me online. When I went to the local police, they told me they didn't have an IT officer or cyber-crime unit to trace it. They told me to just deactivate my account. I felt completely helpless." - Participant M, 25, College Student (Online Harassment)

This narrative highlights the lack of practical, local support systems for digital crimes, aligning with the low quantitative score for online harassment awareness. In rural environments, local safety desks are rarely equipped with the training or technology to address online sexual abuse.

This technological gap leaves survivors in a double-bind: they are exposed to pervasive digital harassment but face a complete lack of support when seeking help from local authorities (Colburn et al., 2023). This institutional failure isolates survivors, turning online spaces into highly unsafe environments where abusers operate with little fear of consequences (Koch et al., 2025).

Theme 3: Institutional Distrust and Fear of Victim-Blaming

The third theme reveals how public judgment and victim-blaming prevent survivors from

reporting harassment. This is reflected in the critically low rating of the community as a "safe space":

"I was grabbed on a public jeepney on my way home. I wanted to report it, but in our small town, everyone knows everyone. I was afraid people would ask what I was wearing. The community always blames the woman first."- Participant K, 21, Senior High School Graduate (Harassment Public Transport)

This experience demonstrates that simply having laws like the Safe Spaces Act is not enough if the social environment remains hostile to survivors. The fear of public shame, rumors, and being blamed for the harassment forces many survivors to choose silence as their best option (Jaskulska et al., 2026).

This dynamic is well-documented by (Alibudbud, 2024), who notes that the fear of community judgment is a major barrier that prevents Filipino women from seeking justice. When local communities default to questioning a survivor's clothing or actions, they protect the abuser and isolate the victim.

This pervasive fear of social shaming explains why many survivors remain silent, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive GAD education that addresses victim-blaming attitudes (Aoyshi, 2026).

These qualitative findings expose a clear policy challenge: passing progressive laws is not enough if they are not supported by local enforcement and widespread public education. To change these attitudes, we must move beyond occasional, optional seminars and systematically integrate GAD, RA 9262, and RA 11313 concepts directly into our general education curricula.

This ensures that every student, regardless of their background, develops a strong understanding of bodily autonomy, consent, and their legal rights.

5. Proposed GAD Educational Mainstreaming Framework

To address the research gap and the structural barriers identified in this study, the researcher developed the propose a comprehensive GAD

Educational Mainstreaming Framework. This model aims to integrate the provisions of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) into the core curricula of primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

5.1. Primary Education Integration (DepEd K-to-6)

Target Subject: Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (EsP / Values Education) and Physical Education & Health.

Instructional Focus: Introduce foundational concepts of bodily autonomy, personal boundaries, and respect for others.

Key Topics:

- My Body, My Rules: Teaching children to recognize the difference between safe and unsafe touches.
- Respecting Personal Space: Helping students understand that they must respect other people's physical boundaries.
- Non-Sexist Language: Encouraging children to use respectful, non-discriminatory language in school and play settings.

5.2. Secondary Education Integration (DepEd Junior and Senior High School)

Target Subjects: Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies), Personal Development, and Media & Information Literacy (MIL).

Instructional Focus: Build a clear understanding of gender equality, legal rights, and digital safety under the Safe Spaces Act Department of Education, 2024.

Key Topics:

- Understanding RA 11313 (Junior High): Teaching students about the definitions of public and street-level harassment (such as catcalling and unwanted sexual remarks).
- Healthy Relationships and Consent (Senior High): Discussing the dynamics of consent, peer pressure, and preventing dating violence
- Digital Citizenship and Cyber-Safety (MIL): Teaching students to identify and report online sexual harassment, cyber-stalking,

and the unauthorized sharing of private media.

5.3. Tertiary Education Integration (CHED General Education Curriculum)

At the tertiary level, GAD concepts and the provisions of RA 11313 should be integrated into core General Education (GE) courses to ensure that all students, regardless of their major, develop strong legal literacy

Understanding the Self

Unit Topic: Gender Identity, Bodily Autonomy, and Consent.

Learning Objectives: Help students identify how gender roles are socially constructed, understand the importance of personal boundaries, and recognize gender-based harassment.

Application: Students analyze scenarios to distinguish between friendly communication, unwanted attention, and punishable harassment.

Ethics

Unit Topic: Power Dynamics, Gender Equity, and the Ethics of Safe Spaces.

Learning Objectives: Analyze the ethical implications of gender-based violence, challenge victim-blaming behaviors, and discuss the moral responsibility of bystanders.

Application: Students examine real-world case studies to evaluate how community silence and institutional bias affect a survivor's journey to healing and justice.

The Contemporary World

Unit Topic: Global Gender Rights Frameworks and National Implementation.

Learning Objectives: Compare local laws (such as RA 11313) with international human rights standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Application: Students evaluate the effectiveness of Philippine legal protections in comparison to global policies on gender equality and public safety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Enhanced Conclusion: The Imperative for Curricular Integration of the Safe Spaces Act

This mixed-methods study highlights a critical gap in how gender-based violence and harassment are addressed in rural Philippine communities: having progressive laws on paper is not enough if the public lacks functional legal literacy and local institutions fail to enforce those protections. While most participants are aware that protective laws exist, they often struggle to recognize non-physical violations—such as verbal, economic, and online harassment—as punishable offenses. Furthermore, because legal literacy is strongly linked to socioeconomic status and formal education, we must find ways to democratize this information. The formal education system offers the most effective, scalable vehicle for GAD mainstreaming and violence prevention.

Consequently, there is an urgent and non-negotiable need to structurally integrate the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) directly into the academic curriculum rather than treating it as an external administrative mandate. This integration is necessary for three fundamental reasons:

1. **Dismantling Early Socialization of Harassment:** Schools are the primary institutions where social norms are reinforced or challenged. Integrating RA 11313 into the curriculum systematically denormalizes behaviors like catcalling and online harassment before they become deeply ingrained peer behaviors..
2. **Democratizing Legal Safety:** Relying on optional seminars creates a privilege gap where only students with access to specialized resources obtain legal literacy. Classroom integration guarantees that every student—regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or program of study—receives equal and comprehensive instruction on bodily autonomy and their rights under the law.
3. **Overcoming Institutional Distrust:** By embedding reporting protocols directly into

graded lessons, educational institutions demystify the Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) and barangay reporting pathways. This curricular transparency actively breaks down the culture of silence and systemic distrust identified among survivors.

6.2. Actionable Policy and School-Based Recommendations

To bridge the gap between legislative intent and the harassment experiences of students and rural communities, the following school-based activities and institutional reforms are recommended:

1. Mandate Curriculum Integration (CHED and DepEd). Formally integrate the provisions of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) into the primary, secondary, and tertiary general education subjects. This ensures that every student learns about consent, bodily autonomy, and their legal rights (CHED, 2015; DepEd, 2024).

Pedagogical Application: Replace dry, abstract legal lectures with active classroom methods. Instructors should utilize case-study analyses of online harassment, role-playing of bystander intervention scenarios, and structured debates on power dynamics in relationships to build real-world, critical decision-making skills.

2. Implement Transformative School-Based Activities

To reinforce classroom learning, academic institutions must establish continuous, student-led co-curricular activities: Establish GAD-Themed Peer Advocacy Networks: Form student-led peer counseling and advocacy groups in basic and higher education. These networks will run localized "Safe Space Campaigns" (e.g., #BawalBastos campus murals, interactive freedom walls, and student-produced podcasts) to encourage peer-to-peer reporting and support.

Conduct Digital Safety and Cyber-Response Bootcamps: Partner with computer science departments and external cyber-security experts to host hands-on workshops. Students will learn how to secure their digital footprints, document

online sexual harassment, and use reporting mechanisms on major social media platforms.

Organize Annual "Safe Campus" Audits: Mobilize student councils and school CODI representatives to conduct collaborative campus mapping. Students will actively identify physical areas (e.g., unlit hallways, isolated campus spots) and institutional processes that feel unsafe, directly presenting these findings to school administrations for immediate structural action.

3. Professionalize Local VAW and Campus Desks (DILG and School Administrations). The school can conduct regular, mandatory, trauma-informed training for local officials, school security personnel, and CODI members to ensure they handle harassment and abuse reports with sensitivity, confidentiality, and respect.

Establishment of clear, highly visible "Safe Spaces Hotlines" on campus and provide physical and digital reporting dropboxes to bypass the fear of public humiliation and victim-blaming.

4. Partner with Communities through Service-Learning. Connect schools and universities with local barangays to deliver accessible, dialect-specific legal literacy campaigns and GAD workshops directly to rural residents. Utilize college student organizations to conduct community extension programs, translating the legal jargon of RA 11313 into localized theater performances, pocket guides, and community-level forums in regional dialects (e.g., Hiligaynon).

5. Link Legal Literacy with Economic Support

Integrate GAD and legal education into local livelihood and financial literacy programs to help women build the economic independence necessary to escape abusive environments. Schools should design community-based technical-vocational training courses for rural women that pair livelihood skills (e.g., entrepreneurship, crop management) with legal rights training, ensuring that economic self-sufficiency and legal agency are developed simultaneously.

Implementing these structural changes will help close the gap between legislative policy and the

unsafe sexual experiences of vulnerable populations. This comprehensive approach will

make our schools, online spaces, and communities genuinely safe for everyone.

Reference

- Aida, N., Sukanto, B., Perdana, N. A., Fauzah, A. S., & Annur, G. Y. (2025). Establishing Anti-Sexual Violence Centers to Promote Safe Educational Environments. *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Studies*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijins.v26i1.1318>
- Alibudbud, R. (2024). Intimate partner violence, women's health, and rights in the Philippines. *Women's Health*, 20, 17455057241267099. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17455057241267099>
- Alvarez, L. S., Álvarez-Alvarado, J. M., Gutiérrez, A. F., & Rodríguez-Reséndiz, J. (2026). Operationalizing Symbolic Violence to Advance Gender Equality: Women's Mobility and Everyday Injustices in Public Transport in Mexico. *Societies*, 16(4), 105. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc16040105>
- Aoyshi, F. F. (2026). *Victim Blaming*. <https://doi.org/10.17613/5NP5G-ZFV16>
- Ayere, M., Okoth, B., Silander, C., & Hellberg, K. (2025, September). Feasibility of Addressing Gender-Based Violence by Creating Digital Gender Hubs in Mixed Secondary Schools in the Nyalenda Informal Settlement in Kisumu, Kenya. *Eleventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning - Working Papers*. Eleventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. <https://doi.org/10.56059/pcf11.5723>
- Baog, I. W., & Cagape, W. E. (2026). Promoting a VAW-Free College: A Quantitative Analysis of Gender and Development Awareness among College Students. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 10(1), 5702–5714. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2026.10100440>
- Borito, R. L. (2022). Awareness, Attitude, and Compliance With RA11313 – Safe Spaces Act among College Students In A Higher Educational Institution In Laguna. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 05(06). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v5-i6-06>
- Calderon, M., Cortez-Vergara, C., Brown, L., Lowe, H., Abarca, B., Rondon, M., & Mannell, J. (2023). Assessing essential service provision for prevention and management of violence against women in a remote indigenous community in Amantaní, Peru. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 22(1), 204. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-023-02012-3>
- Castillo, J. R., & Mantillas, C. (2024). Sustainable Livelihood Program in Selected Local Government Units of Rizal Province, Philippines: Basis for an Action Plan. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(11). <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0476>
- Chan, K. L., Emery, C. R., & Ip, P. (2016). Children With Disability Are More at Risk of Violence Victimization: Evidence From a Study of School-Aged Chinese Children. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31(6), 1026–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514564066>
- Colburn, D. A., Finkelhor, D., & Turner, H. A. (2023). Help-Seeking From Websites and Police in the Aftermath of Technology-Facilitated Victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(21–22), 11642–11665. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605231186156>
- Consignado, G. D., Sunga Amparo, J. M., & Alday Alampay, E. G. (2022). Community-Based Violence Against Women (VAW) Desks in the Philippines: A Multi-Level Assessment. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 30(2), 901–926. <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.30.2.25>
- Jaskulska, S., Jankowiak, B., Perez-Martinez, V., Porru, S., Carta, A., Wallner, M., Stifter, V., Topa, J., Andruszkiewicz, I., Waszyńska, K., Munoz-Haba, A., Carrasco, J. M., & Vives-Cases, C. (2026). Restoring a sense of safety among survivors of sexual harassment in higher education: Policy recommendations from the UNI4EQUITY multinational study. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 11, 1782978. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2026.1782978>
- Koch, L., Russo Riva, M. P., & Steinert, J. I. (2025). Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Against Politically Active Women: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Political Consequences and Women's Coping Behaviors. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 15248380251343185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251343185>
- Lim, R. P. S., & Canonizado, J. L. U. (2026). Gender and Development Program Implementation among Public Secondary Schools in Region III, Philippines. *American Journal of Education and Technology*, 5(1), 33–38. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajet.v5i1.6050>

- Mendoza, L. M., Sumande, C. M. R., & Mendoza, M. C. (2025). No More Catcalling: Awareness of College of Criminal Justice Education Students on Republic Act 11313 Also Known as Safe Spaces Act. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(10), 852–859. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000074>
- Ore, T. (2021). Ethical Issues in Family Violence Studies in Maternal and Child Health Settings. *Health and Primary Care*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.15761/HPC.1000216>
- Valdez, I. K. M., Arevalo, Ma. V. P. N., Robredo, J. P. G., Gacad, S. L. S., Villaceran, M. A. J., Libang, G. R., Dela Paz, E. P., Rubin, K. S. T. A., & Eala, M. A. B. (2022). Violence against women in the Philippines: Barriers to seeking support. *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific*, 23, 100471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2022.100471>
- Vanner, C., & Almanssori, S. (2024). Efforts to Enhance Education About Gender-Based Violence: A Teacher Workshop and Toolkit. *Studies in Social Justice*, 18(2), 362–371. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v18i2.4476>
- Zubair, M., Latif Naz, F., & Yasir, W. (2024). Gender-Based Violence and Legal Responses: Analyzing the Effectiveness of Legal Frameworks. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(3), 1408–1421. <https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.3.114>