

# Understanding Violence Against Women and Children Cases Among the Aeta Mag-Antsi Communities in Capas, Tarlac: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) cases within the Aeta Mag-Antsi communities of Barangays Cut-Cut II, Aranguren, and O'Donnell in Capas, Tarlac. The problem addressed was the limited understanding of the perceptions, cultural dynamics, and amicable settlement practices surrounding VAWC cases among this specific indigenous group. The research aimed to capture the experiences of Aeta women or children who were victims, knowledgeable community members, tribal leaders, and local authorities. A qualitative case study approach was used to gather in-depth information on how this human phenomenon took place within the Aeta culture. The study was guided by the Differential Opportunity Theory, Feminist Theory, and Social Disorganization Theory.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) key informants and analyzed using thematic analysis. Key findings revealed that traditional gender norms, limited access to formal law enforcement, and cultural sensitivity to marital privacy significantly influenced the occurrence and handling of VAWC cases. A strong reliance on indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms over formal government systems was observed. The primary conclusion was that the Aeta Mag-Antsi people in these communities have deficient access to local law enforcement agencies, posing an obstacle for the government to enforce RA 9262 effectively. The research emphasized the need for culturally sensitive interventions by government and non-government organizations and the importance of strengthening formal education to empower the Aeta Mag-Antsi tribe against the perpetration of violence. Recommendations for policy enhancement in support of indigenous people and the presence of law enforcement as peacekeepers were also presented.

**Keywords:** Violence Against Women and Children, Aeta Mag-Antsi, Indigenous People, Cultural Dynamics, Domestic Violence, Criminology.

## 1. Introduction

The indigenous population of the Philippines faces drastic environmental, cultural, and geographical changes brought upon by the modernization of the Philippine government. The Aeta population of Capas, Tarlac, specifically the Mag-Antsi tribe, is no exception to the struggle in this ever-changing atmosphere.

The effect of this rapid change is the increased vulnerability of these populations to crimes such as Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), as theorized in Social Disorganization Theory by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay. Historically, the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines was the primary law penalizing acts of violence, but its provisions were insufficient to safeguard the well-being of women and children. Consequently, Republic Act 9262, otherwise known as the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, was created as the first specified penal law to safeguard vulnerable groups from physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse.

Despite these legislative protections, data from the National Demographic and Health Survey (2022) revealed a surge in crimes of morality in the Philippines, recording 8,399 physical injuries and 1,791 cases of rape in 2021. In international contexts, such as the United States, indigenous communities often suffer from domestic violence more predominantly than other groups, yet these statistics are frequently underrepresented in official data. Studies indicate that indigenous individuals encounter significant barriers in accessing justice, often leading to a culture of silence where victims ignore trauma due to a lack of faith in the country's legal system.

The core problem identified in this research is that the Aeta Mag-Antsi people, residing in secluded areas such as Sitio Kalangitan, Sitio Manabayukan, and Sitio Sapang-Kawayan, have deficient access to local law enforcement agencies. This geographical isolation poses a significant obstacle to the enforcement of VAWC laws. Furthermore, traditional gender norms within the tribe often lead to submissive roles for females, increasing their susceptibility to violence. While existing literature, such as studies by Santiago and Aya (2014) or Balahadia et al. (2021), has explored VAWC awareness in areas like Palawan and Laguna, there is a distinct lack of research focusing specifically on the intersection of indigenous cultural dynamics and formal legal mechanisms in Tarlac.

This research proposes a qualitative case study approach to bridge the gap in recognizing VAWC cases among the Aeta Mag-Antsi people. By exploring the perceptions, cultural sensitivities, and the indigenous process of amicable settlement led by tribal chieftains, this study provides new value through its focus on culturally specific dispute resolution. The innovation of this research lies in its dual analysis of traditional tribal mediation versus formal government intervention, aiming to provide authorities with the insights necessary to formulate culturally sensitive interventions.

## 2. Research Method

### Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study approach, which is a design specifically used to understand a particular group or institution in complete detail. Unlike quantitative studies that prioritize numerical data, this approach seeks to answer "how" and "why" specific human phenomena, such as domestic violence and tribal mediation, materialize within a localized context.

### Population and Sampling

The research utilized a purposive sampling method to identify ten (10) key informants who could provide trustworthy and knowledgeable information regarding the issue. The participants were categorized as shown in Table 1 below.

Participant Category	Selection Criteria
Survivors	Aeta women or children who have experienced abuse
Knowledgeable Persons	Aetas with first-hand knowledge of specific VAWC cases

Tribal Leaders	Chieftains or elders acting as primary keepers of order
Persons in Authority	Law enforcement officers or Barangay officials

**Table 1. Categories of Research Participants****Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted in the municipality of Capas, Tarlac, which holds the largest population of Aetas in the province. The specific sites included Sitio Kalangitan (Brgy. Cut-Cut II), Sitio Sapang-Kawayan (Brgy. Aranguren), and Sitio Manabayukan (Brgy. O'Donnell). The geographical location is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Research Procedure**

The chronological course of the research followed a structured protocol to ensure scientific validity and ethical compliance. The steps are summarized in the following algorithm:

**Data Acquisition and Processing**

**Administrative Clearance:** Obtain permits from the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) and local Barangay Chairmen.

**Participant Engagement:** Establish rapport with informants and explain the purpose and implications of the study.

**Data Acquisition:** Conduct semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIS) using open-ended questions designed to allow free narration of experiences.

**Transcription:** Convert audio recordings into written text for systematic review.

**Thematic Analysis:** Identify codes from the responses, categorize them into groups, and generate overarching themes.

**Validation:** Secure feedback from participants to verify the accuracy of the analyzed data before finalization.

**Data Gathering Tools and Treatment**

The primary tool was a semi-structured interview guide formulated by the researchers to satisfy the Statement of the Problem (SOP). Data treatment involved thematic analysis, where qualitative responses were broken down into codes to determine recurring patterns in cultural perception and settlement practices. All gathered data were secured to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the indigenous participants.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****3.1. Cultural Perceptions and the "Culture of Silence"**

The study found that the perception of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) among the Aeta Mag-Antsi is deeply intertwined with traditional gender norms and the value placed on marital privacy. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews indicate that the community often views domestic conflicts as private family matters, which significantly hinders formal reporting.

A recurring theme identified in the analysis is the "culture of silence." Victims often hesitate to report abuse due to a lack of faith in the formal justice system and the perceived social stigma within the tribe. This is further exacerbated by the tribe's geographical isolation in Sitios such as Kalangitan, Manabayukan, and Sapang-Kawayan, where access to law enforcement is limited. Table 2 summarizes the primary types of violence observed and their cultural context within the tribe.

Category of Abuse	Key Observed Indicators	Cultural Context/Perception
Physical Violence	Bodily harm, hitting, kicking	Often seen as a disciplinary measure
Sexual Violence	Acts of a sexual nature, rape	Underreported due to extreme shame
Psychological	Shouting, blaming, profane language	Frequently dismissed as a "normal" marital spat
Economic Abuse	Financial dependency, withholding support	Linked to traditional male-provider roles

**Figure 2. Types of VAWC and Tribal Context**

### 3.2. Community Reactions and Social Disorganization

Guided by the Social Disorganization Theory, the results show that the rapid environmental changes in Capas, such as the construction of New Clark City, have compromised ancestral domains and created social instability. This instability has increased the vulnerability of women and children to violent attacks. The common population typically reacts to domestic harm with a preference for internal communal stability rather than seeking external legal intervention. This reaction is influenced by Feminist Theory dynamics, where men hold dominant masculine roles and submissive females are often conditioned to accept secondary positions in the household.

### 3.3. Indigenous Amicable Settlement Practices

A primary finding of this research is the Amicable Settlement process conducted by tribal leaders or chieftains. As the primary keepers of order, these leaders utilize traditional justice methods to preserve communal peace (pp. 19, 41). Figure 2 outlines the typical flow of a VAWC case within the Aeta Mag-Antsi community.

1. Process of Indigenous Dispute Resolution
2. Initial Report: Incident reported to the tribal elder or chieftain.
3. Mediation: Chieftain listens to both parties in an informal setting.
4. Settlement: Use of corporal punishment, apologies, or monetary settlement.
5. Referral: Cases are only referred to the PNP or Barangay if the chieftain deems the crime too severe or if a non-indigenous person is involved.

This reliance on indigenous systems highlights a gap between the mandates of Republic Act 9262 and actual tribal practice. While these settlements provide immediate resolution, they often fall short of the legal protections intended by national law, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive government training and presence in these isolated areas.

## 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm the theoretical expectations established in the introduction, illustrating how environmental instability and geographical isolation directly contribute to the vulnerability of the Aeta Mag-Antsi community. As theorized through Social Disorganization and Differential Opportunity, the rapid modernization surrounding Capas, Tarlac, has created a "transition zone" where traditional tribal structures struggle to align with formal legal protections. The results and discussion demonstrate a clear compatibility with these frameworks, as the documented "culture of silence" and the tribe's strong reliance

on indigenous amicable settlement are direct consequences of deficient access to local law enforcement and a persistent adherence to traditional gender norms.

Ultimately, the research concludes that while Republic Act 9262 provides a robust national legal framework, its enforcement remains ineffective in isolated ancestral domains. The preference for tribal mediation over formal government intervention often results in VAWC cases being settled internally, which may provide immediate communal peace but fails to offer the comprehensive physical, psychological, and economic protections intended by the law.

The prospect for developing these research results lies in the creation of culturally sensitive training modules for both the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Local Social Welfare and Development Office. Application of these findings can lead to a hybrid justice model where tribal leaders are officially trained in the basic human rights provisions of RA 9262, allowing for settlements that respect indigenous culture without compromising the safety of women and children. Further studies should explore the long-term psychological impact of these traditional settlements on Aeta youth and investigate the effectiveness of mobile "Women's Desks" in increasing the rate of formal reporting within remote mountainous sites.

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