

A Framework for the Development of iJuanaBeSafe: a Web-Based Platform Against Gender-Based Violence



Nerissa Liban Javier, Thelma Domingo Palaoag

Abstract: Gender-based violence (GBV) has been one of the pervasive social problems not only in the Philippines but also around the world. Despite several passages of legislation that protect the rights of women and children, victims are still shrouded in silence that often leads to self-harm, isolation, depression, and suicidal attempts. Recognizing the continuing prevalence of gender-based violence, the study aims to create a framework for the development of iJuanaBeSafe: a Web-Based Platform against Gender-Based Violence. Through the development of the system, the PRMSU GAD office can establish gender-friendly spaces, provide psychological support, capacity building, access to GAD services, and many others. The design and functional requirements of the system were derived from the interviews conducted with the Gender and Development (GAD) Office, Extension Coordinator, and Guidance Coordinator. Supplemental data were derived from observations and document analysis. Upon implementation, the system shall serve as the resource hub of the Gender and Development unit of PRMSU that will help them to provide assistance to meet the specific needs of victims. This web-based platform can be used for wide information dissemination to increase awareness and knowledge against gender-based violence. In general, with the integration of the system, the PRMSU GAD office can implement its mandate to achieve gender equality efficiently and effectively.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Web-Based Information System, Violence against Women

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global problem that affects people all around the world, not only in the Philippines. It is an entrenched social issue that violates the rights mostly of women and girls. However, emerging research shows that members of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queer (or questioning) and other sexual identities or the LGBTQ+ community and men who don't adhere to patriarchal masculine expectations, such as gay men are also subjected to gender-based violence [1][2]. These individuals are often targeted due to their "gender nonconformity, gender expression, and gender identity" [1].

GBV is manifested in different ways such as intimate partner violence, threats or coercion, verbal abuse, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and laws and regulations restricting the access of women and girls [3]. It is certainly alarming that despite several passages of legislation that protect the rights of women and children, victims are still shrouded in silence, which often leads to self-harm, isolation, depression, and suicidal attempts. There are a number of harmful consequences that survivors of GBV face. Their fear has led to isolating themselves and altering their daily routine to avoid particular people or places [2]. So many cases among women go unreported because of the "culture of silence" that fosters violence. Furthermore, the reluctance in participation of those who know (especially if the perpetrator is a relative) and victim-blaming attitudes contribute to the tolerance and condonement of gender-based violence, thus preventing women from resorting to legal measures [4]. The rising usage of information and communication technologies (ICT) by the general public has highlighted the necessity to develop digital solutions to assist victims of GBV [5]. It has been an important tool not only in the fast dissemination of information about forms of violence but also in the formation of online support groups to reduce feelings of isolation, provide victims with security, and empower victims especially women [6]. Literature shows that ICT was of great help in supporting victims of GBV. Nowadays, people may easily look for information, report violent situations, and receive therapy for psychological illnesses like anxiety and depression because of expanded global Internet access. [7]. According to [8] online platforms make it easier for victims to deal with social danger and inhibition and encourage them to share thoughts and sentiments. It has also been noted by [9] that the use of technology-driven interventions among victims of GBV can provide more privacy and reduce stigma exposure. According to the study of [10], the most common reason provided by relocated GBV survivors for not seeking aid was a lack of knowledge about where to look for assistance. It is therefore imperative to spread information about the services and programs for GBV to the broadest potential audience by using Web technologies. The adoption of a web-based system demonstrates the advancement of information and communication technology as a means of disseminating information that is fast and accurate [11]. Primary intervention using instructional tools may be more easily disseminated via the Internet and web-based platforms, which target groups are already familiar with [12].

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* Correspondence Author

Nerissa Liban - Javier*, College of Communication and Information Technology, President Ramon Magsaysay State University, Iba, Philippines. Email: ner.liban@gmail.com

Thelma Domingo - Palaoag, Graduate Program Coordinator of the College of Information Technology and Computer Science, University of the Cordilleras, Baguio City, Philippines. Email: tpalaoag@gmail.com

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Hence, the purpose of this paper is to introduce a framework for the development of a web-based platform against gender-based violence that can be used by the PRMSU GAD unit to improve the delivery of services among its clientele. The proposed system allows users to access online information and services via a website and make it accessible via a mobile application widget. Using the Rich Site Summary (RSS) feed, data from web to mobile application can be updated and the same information is available on both platforms [13].

Using the proposed system, the web application allows the users to access the services at any time, from any location, and from any PC with an Internet connection. Likewise, for places with limited internet connectivity, mobile applications have the ability to keep information in which users may still get all the important information without relying on the internet. With this available feature, the system allows the user the flexibility and convenience to access the application. The proposed system shall serve as the resource hub where gender projects, information, and services are organized within an online, easily accessible, and secure management system. With the help of this online platform, a wide audience shall have increased access to GAD services and programs, which can thus help in cultivating a culture of zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

To fully capture the functional requirements and the necessary process from the target users, which is vital in the development of iJuanaBeSafe, the qualitative research design was used in the study. This design was adopted since it is mainly concerned with the how's and why's of a given situation.

B. Data Collection

The gathered data were mainly collected from interviews, observation, and document analysis. An in-depth interview with the PRMSU GAD Coordinators, Extension Director and Guidance Counselor, and other stakeholders were conducted to identify the specific process and requirements that are needed to be incorporated in the proposed system. Likewise, the interviews allowed the researcher to learn more about their experiences in providing services that provide bigger perspectives in the inclusion of additional features in the proposed system. To support the functional requirements set by users, document analysis such as gender-based related programs/activities and support system, was also carried out thoroughly. Document analysis involves the evaluation and interpretation of data obtained from the review of documents and records pertinent to a study [14]. From this data, the design and functionalities of the proposed system were drawn

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After careful consideration of all the gathered data, the architectural framework (see Figure 2) of the proposed system was created.

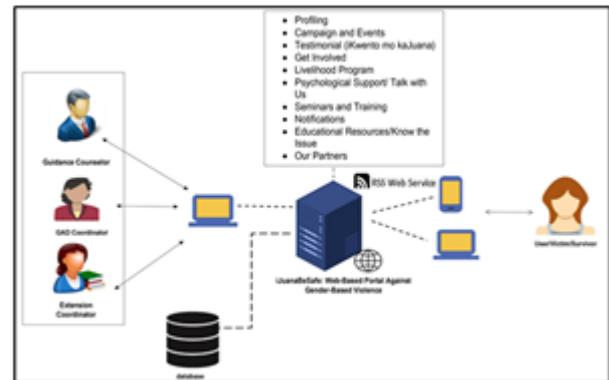


Fig 2. Proposed Architectural Framework of I Juana Be Safe: A Web-Based Platform Against Gender-Based Violence

As depicted in figure 2, the proposed system shall have two (2) types of users, the administrator (GAD, Extension Coordinator and Guidance Counselor) and the client (victims/survivors). Originally, the administrator of the proposed system was only the GAD unit however upon interview, the GAD Coordinator stressed the need to include psychological intervention and livelihood programs since the proposed system concerns GBV. According to the GAD Coordinator, GBV victims often suffers depression, anxiety, and worst mental problem that is why psychological support is critical. Furthermore, the need for the inclusion of livelihood programs is also a must so that women can have economic independence. Due to this, the researcher included the Guidance Counselor and Extension Coordinator (since the extension coordinator is in-charge in the livelihood programs of the University) as administrators of the proposed system. After a thorough review of the gathered data, the following functional requirements shall constitute the proposed system.

Profiling. The information of victims/survivors shall be stored in the database to help the GAD provide services that are suitable to the needs of its clients. According to the GAD Coordinator, this feature shall help them identify the places where abuses mostly happened, to whom, and what kind of abuses. Through this, they can develop appropriate programs and services.

Campaign and Events. Based on the interview, information dissemination about gender issues is an important tool to combat GBV. It has been noted by the GAD Coordinator the need to raise the awareness about gender issues, through this module, by showcasing all the different activities that GAD promotes in support of gender equality.

Testimonials (iKwento mo kaJuana). "Talking and being with women who share similar situation and/or stories like them allows them to feel safe, open up and participate"- GAD Coordinator. Through this module, victims can share their experiences and be an eye-opener to those victims of violence encouraging other victims as well to speak and tell the abuses they are experiencing. The system has an online social network for victims of abuse. These social networks shall enable individuals to share their experiences, seek assistance and support, and gain access to information and resources from their fellow victims of violence.

Get Involved. This can be used for those individuals who want to give help and support to those victims of violence. This is also a platform to join the advocacies of GAD. According to [15] community participation encourages community members to think critically about underlying inequities between men and women, so urging them to change gender norms and prevent GBV.

Seminars and Training. The module shall be used by GAD unit to help in honing and strengthening the skills, abilities, and resources of individuals to thrive in the fast-changing community. From the interview, GAD pointed out that according to the recipients of the previous seminars and training, these helped them gain confidence and capacity to talk about previously taboo themes, make persuasive arguments to avoid GBV, and conduct and initiate gender-related activities.

Educational Resources / Know the Issue. This module shall let the users know essential information regarding their rights, laws, resources, and support regarding violence and abuses. A wide variety of materials about gender equality shall be available in this module. Women are better able to make informed decisions and understand and execute their rights when they have access to information [16].

Livelihood Program. Registered users can access and enlist on the livelihood programs that the extension office is offering. These livelihood programs provide opportunities for survivors of gender-based violence to become financially independent. Through these programs, survivors of gender-based violence improve their economic and living conditions. Through livelihood programs, women can have economic independence. According to [17] economic empowerment interventions have the potential to minimize the number of women who are subjected to violence.

Psychological Support/Talk with Us. Research shows that survivors of gender-based violence, especially sexual abuse have been shown to have a high frequency of psychological distress and mental problems [18]. The guidance counselor shall use this module to provide the emotional support that victims need to cope with emotional stress.

This mental health service can assist victims and survivors in dealing with the psychological and emotional consequences of victimization, as well as begin and continue the healing process. The platform allows victims to express their fears, worries, and feelings in a secure, impartial environment. This helps a lot of people to cope and move forward after experiencing abuse. Talking to someone allows you to get things off your chest and let go of unpleasant memories. Additional features were included in the system based on the results of document analysis.

Notifications. Notifies registered users whenever there is an incoming seminar, training or event, new story, livelihood program, or anything that is posted to a notification topic. Most web-based applications use notifications to inform users of new activity.

Our Partners. A list of advocates is provided in this module to help the victims easily reach out to different agencies that support the fight against gender-based violence. All the information shall be stored in a database and can be accessed by the clients (survivors/victims) via a web-based platform or through a mobile application. The

data shall be updated on the webserver and the recorded information in the database shall be displayed in the web interface. The information can be accessed through a mobile application widget with no or limited internet connectivity via RSS Feed. When the user uses the mobile application widget the RSS reader shall display the same content that on the website.

This shall allow users to be updated on the important content and discussions on the website without the need to go directly to the site. With these available technologies, even if there is limited or no internet connectivity at all, the clients (survivors/victims) can still have access to the different modules, stay up to date and get relevant information. The main client of the proposed system (but not limited to) are the victims or survivors of gender-based violence.

According to [19] the use of an online environment allows the victims to easier ask for help, talk, and participate freely without inhibition and fear of social stigma. Everyone especially GBV victims can access the different modules on the proposed system. Through this, access to information, programs, and services related to gender-based violence are beyond reach. The GAD Coordinator(s), Guidance Counselor(s), and Extension Coordinator(s) could also utilize this platform to promote their mandate. With the help of the system, increased awareness and community involvement in fighting violence shall be achieved.

IV. CONCLUSION

The use of information and communication and information technology as tools to assist GBV victims has been widely recognized. Recognizing the prevalence of gender-based violence and the need to help the victims prompted the researcher to develop a framework iJuanaBesafe: a Web-Based Platform against Gender-Based Violence that can be utilized by GAD. This Web-Based Platform can be used to deliver the programs and services of GAD faster to a wider audience.

Through this technology-driven platform, wide information dissemination that increases awareness, involvement and knowledge against gender-based violence can be achieved. From the integrated modules in the framework, people can have wider discernment of gender equality.

Literature revealed that the use of technology-driven platforms helps survivors of GBV to engage and participate in online support groups and seek psychological assistance without the fear of social stigma and pressure. In general, with the adoption of the proposed system, the PRMSU GAD office can implement its mandate to achieve gender equality efficiently and effectively. However, despite the broad use of web-based and mobile applications nowadays, some people face considerable obstacles in accessing and using digital tools of various kinds, hence the researcher recommends that there should be available training and practice for the use of the proposed system. It is also strongly suggested to look into funds that shall support the development of the system.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Nerissa Liban - Javier is a faculty of Communication and Information Technology at President Ramon Magsaysay State University. Currently, she is pursuing her doctorate degree in Information Technology at the University of the Cordilleras. She is a passionate teacher and also a research enthusiast. She has also a passion for system development. Her interest includes mobile and web-based development and natural language processing



Dr. Thelma Domingo - Palaoag is the Graduate Program Coordinator of the College of Information Technology and Computer Science at the University of the Cordilleras. She is also the Director of the UC Innovation and Graduate Program Coordinator of the College of Information Technology and Computer Science Technology Transfer Office. She is passionate about writing and publishing researches in various disciplines. Her research interests focus on game-based learning, e-learning, machine learning, data analytics, intelligent systems and artificial intelligence. Her involvement and exposure to various research projects and publications make her a notable academic researcher.