

Title: People of the Philippines v. Francisco Ejercito

Facts:

This case involved a serious allegation of rape against Francisco Ejercito (Ejercito), who was accused of committing the crime against a 15-year-old high school student known in the case as AAA. On the evening of October 10, 2001, AAA was cleaning a chicken cage at her home when Ejercito suddenly appeared, pointed a gun at her, and threatened her and her family's lives. Ejercito then proceeded to rape AAA. AAA chose not to disclose this incident immediately due to fear and later moved to the city for her studies. Ejercito tracked her down, persistently contacted her, and forced her to take "shabu" (methamphetamine) before sexually abusing her again, from 2002 to 2005. AAA's illicit relationship with Ejercito ceased after his wife filed a complaint and her mother intervened. Post-rehabilitation, AAA finally reported the rapes to the authorities in 2005.

Ejercito was charged and pleaded not guilty, claiming a consensual relationship with AAA from 2002 to 2004. He asserted that AAA voluntarily lived with him despite family objections, and was surprised by the rape charge relating to a period when they were lovers.

Issues:

1. Whether or not the charge against Ejercito for the crime of rape stands beyond reasonable doubt.
2. The proper characterization and classification of the criminal act under the Revised Penal Code (RPC), as amended, or Republic Act No. 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act).

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court denied the appeal, affirming the conviction of Ejercito with modifications. Based on AAA's testimony and the circumstances of Ejercito's intimidation and use of a deadly weapon, the Court upheld the findings of both the RTC and the CA, which convicted Ejercito of rape under Article 266-A of the RPC, as amended by RA 8353 (The Anti-Rape Law of 1997).

The Supreme Court noted the prosecution had established all elements of rape as defined under Article 266-A of the RPC, as amended by RA 8353, and hence Ejercito should be convicted under it rather than Section 5 (b) of RA 7610.

Doctrine:

The decision reiterated the doctrine that penal laws should be applied more favorably to the accused, with a more special legal provision prevailing over a general one, even if enacted earlier. It also emphasized that the complete statutory elements of rape, including sexual intercourse, can be validly punished under Article 266-A of the RPC, as amended, regardless of the victim's age.

Historical Background:

RA 8353, otherwise known as the Anti-Rape Law of 1997, expanded the definition of rape and consequently amended the RPC. The act reclassified rape from being a crime against chastity to a crime against persons. It also introduced specific circumstances that qualify and increase the penalty for the crime. RA 7610, passed earlier, focuses on protecting minors from exploitation and abuse and prescribes penalties for such acts, including sexual intercourse under coercive conditions. The Court's analysis clarified the prevailing application of RA 8353 over RA 7610 in cases of rape involving minors.