

XXX, PETITIONER, VS. PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, RESPONDENT.

G.R. No. E-00648, July 29, 2026

Ponente: HERNANDO, J.

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HERNANDO, J.:

This Petition for Review on Certiorari[2] filed by XXX seeks to reverse and set aside the Decision[3] dated April 30, 2025 and the Resolution[4] dated September 16, 2025 of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR No. 04480 finding him guilty beyond reasonable doubt of violation of Section 5 (i) of Republic Act No. 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004.

XXX was charged with violation of Section 5 (i) of Republic Act No. 9262. The accusatory portion reads:

That on or about the 10[th] day of June 2020, in the [5] and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, accused [sic] being having sexual relationship and impregnated one [AAA],[6] caused unto said [AAA] mental and/or emotional abuse by willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, unilaterally withdrawing their application for marriage license at the Office of the Local Civil Registrar of , effectively breaking his promise to marry [AAA], which acts caused psychological and emotional anguish and suffering to said [AAA], to her damage and prejudice.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[7]

Upon arraignment, XXX did not enter a plea. Consequently, the trial court entered a plea of "not guilty" on his behalf. During the pre-trial, the parties stipulated on the identity of the accused, and trial ensued thereafter.

Version of the Prosecution

Sometime in 2019, XXX, a police officer, and AAA, a public school teacher, entered into a romantic relationship after four months of courtship. In April 2020, AAA discovered she was pregnant, news which was positively received by the couple. Initially, the relationship was harmonious. XXX visited AAA's home frequently to attend to her needs during her pregnancy.[8]

However, in May 2020, AAA suddenly lost contact with XXX. It was only during the last week of that month that XXX reconnected with her and took her for a medical check-up. During this time, they also visited XXX's house, where AAA met his parents.[9]

On May 28, 2020, XXX and his family visited AAA's home to meet her parents. Both families agreed that the couple should marry, and they scheduled a visit to the Local Civil Registrar (LCR) on June 1, 2020, to apply for a marriage license.[10]

On the appointed date, AAA was informed by XXX's colleagues that he had been called to a police operation and could not attend. This came as a shock to AAA, as XXX had previously assured her he would seek permission from his superiors to be relieved of duty for the wedding preparations. AAA felt utterly humiliated and ashamed, having already informed her family and friends of the impending marriage license application.[11]

Six days later, XXX reached out to AAA, apologized for his absence, and requested a new schedule. On June 11, 2020, they successfully lodged, their application. The following day, however, AAA learned that XXX had withdrawn it. Upon verification with the LCR, AAA confirmed the withdrawal as XXX had reportedly claimed that AAA was aware of his actions and that his family and friends did not favor the union.[12]

AAA subsequently filed the instant case. She was examined by Ms. Rovianne Lamsin (Lamsin), a Municipal Social Welfare Development Office (MSWDO) officer, who also testified in court. Lamsin confirmed her case study, noting that AAA was shaking and emotionally distraught while recounting her experiences. Lamsin recommended a psychiatric evaluation and testified that AAA was "not in a stable psychological and emotional state." [13]

Dr. Marsha Molina, a psychometrician at Medical Center, testified that her tests revealed AAA suffered from restlessness, suicidal ideation, and depressive symptoms. She attributed these disturbances to the postponed marriage and AAA's anxiety regarding her second pregnancy out of wedlock.[14]

Alberica, an LCR employee, confirmed that although he processed the couple's application, XXX returned the same day to retrieve the documents, stating the marriage would not proceed.[15]

Version of the Defense

XXX admitted to the relationship describing it as harmonious and stated that he had introduced AAA to his family. He claimed he had no negative reaction to her pregnancy. He explained that his lack of communication in May was due to being assigned to remote areas with weak cellular signals and his involvement in police operations. He claimed that he only later learned that AAA had gone to his station to complain that he was evading his obligations.[16]

XXX alleged that AAA insisted his family visit her house. He maintained that their families—not he—set the date for the marriage license application, and claimed he never expressly agreed to marry AAA despite the pregnancy. He cited his own health issues (seizure attacks) and his grandmother's illness as reasons for requesting a postponement, but claimed that AAA adamantly refused. Even though he requested for postponement, he never evaded his obligations to her and their unborn child.[17]

On June 10, 2020, he again pleaded for a postponement at the LCR, but claimed he only submitted the application because AAA became increasingly emotional. He admitted to later withdrawing his Certificate of Live Birth from the LCR, but claimed he did so to use it for a "License to Own and Possess Firearm" application. He was shocked at the subsequent warrant for his arrest but nonetheless voluntarily surrendered.[18]

XXX's parents and uncle corroborated his testimony, stating that his police duties often placed him in remote areas without signal. They further alleged that AAA's family initiated and insisted on the marriage, maintaining that XXX never gave express consent and implying that AAA's uncle, who works at the Sangguniang Bayan, was the one pushing the process forward.[19]

Ruling of the Regional Trial Court

In its Decision[20] dated December 4, 2023, the RTC convicted XXX of violation of Republic Act No. 9262, Section 5 (i). The dispositive portion reads:

WHEREFORE, finding accused [XXX], GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime charged in the Information as defined under Sec. 5, [paragraph] (i) of [Republic] Act [No.] 9262[.] Accused [XXX] is hereby sentenced to an indeterminate imprisonment of Two (2) Years, Four (4) Months and One (1) Day of Prison Correccional medium as minimum to Ten (10) Years and One (1) Day of Prison Mayor maximum, as

maximum. In addition thereto, he is hereby ordered to pay a fine of One Hundred Thousand ([PHP] 100,000.00) [p]esos and to undergo mandatory psychological counseling in any government institution, and to report to this Court within fifteen (15) days upon completion of the same.

SO ORDERED.[21] (Emphasis in the original)

The RTC ruled that the elements of the crime charged were proven beyond reasonable doubt. The act of XXX of arbitrarily withdrawing the application for marriage license resulted in psychological harm against then-pregnant AAA whom he had a romantic and sexual relationship. AAA felt ashamed, belittled, suffered sleepless nights and loss of appetite. She suffered anxiety and had signs of depression, and was overly worried on what will happen if the marriage will not push through considering that it will be her second pregnancy out of wedlock. The acts of XXX which resulted in emotional anguish on the part of AAA constituted psychological violence under the law.[22]

XXX appealed his conviction.

Ruling of the Court of Appeals

In its Decision[23] dated April 30, 2025, the CA affirmed the ruling of the RTC. The dispositive portion of the ruling reads:

ACCORDINGLY, the appeal is DENIED. [XXX] is GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of Psychological Violence, defined and penalized under Section 5 (i) of Republic Act [No.] 9262. The Decision dated December 4, 2023 of the Regional Trial Court, Judicial Region, Branch 13, in Criminal Case No. R-BAR-2021-001-CR is AFFIRMED with MODIFICATION:

- [XXX] is sentenced to suffer the indeterminate penalty of two (2) years, four (4) months and one (1) day of prision correccional medium, as minimum, to ten (10) years and one (1) day of prision mayor maximum, as maximum, and to pay a fine equivalent to [PHP] 100,000.00;
- He is also ORDERED to PAY the victim, AAA moral damages in the amount of [PHP] 75,000.00 and exemplary damages in the amount of [PHP] 75,000.00;
- Further, he is DIRECTED to undergo a mandatory psychological counselling or psychiatric treatment, and shall report his compliance to the court of origin within fifteen (15) days after the completion of such counselling.

The monetary awards, except fine, shall earn legal interest at 6% per annum, from date of finality of this Decision until fully paid.

SO ORDERED.[24] (Emphasis in the original)

The appellate court found no error on the part of the RTC in convicting XXX under Section 5(i) of Republic Act No. 9262. The CA rejected XXX's contentions assailing the RTC's factual findings. XXX insisted that the RTC erred in convicting him by treating a breach of promise to marry as psychological violence. He maintained that a breach of promise to marry is not an actionable wrong; furthermore, he argued that he was not the one who ultimately withdrew the application, as he only retrieved his birth certificate. However, the CA maintained that the elements of the crime were established and XXX's guilt was proven beyond reasonable doubt. The malicious act of the unexplained withdrawal of the marriage license application was the means by which AAA endured emotional and mental suffering. The CA expressly stated that XXX was not being penalized for the breach of promise to marry itself, but for the consequential effects of his actions that led to AAA being humiliated and publicly ridiculed.[25]

The CA further rejected XXX's contention that his act was innocent, considering he knew the negative emotional effects his actions would cause AAA and the scandal it would bring to her as a public school teacher. His subsequent marriage to another woman, only months after the withdrawn application, further belied his claim of innocence.[26]

The appellate court also granted moral and exemplary damages to compensate for the injury AAA suffered—specifically the emotional anguish and stress that led to the death of her baby—and by way of example for the public good. Following jurisprudence, the CA awarded PHP 75,000.00 each for moral and exemplary damages.[27]

XXX moved for reconsideration, but the CA denied the motion in its Resolution dated September 16, 2025.[28]

Hence, the present petition.

Issues

Petitioner assigns the following errors:

(1)

The CA erred in affirming the RTC's ruling despite the fact that a breach of promise to marry is not an actionable wrong;

(2)

There was no breach to speak of since the application for a marriage license was not consensual;

(3)

The CA erred in finding that the elements of the crime were proven beyond reasonable doubt, citing a lack of malicious intent in the withdrawal of his birth certificate;

(4)

The effects of his actions were not deliberate or willful, and he ought not be penalized for how AAA reacted to them;

(5)

His conviction was an improper expansion of Republic Act No. 9262 and penalizes acts that are "not abusive, but simply the unfortunate and painful consequences of incompatible expectations in a relationship"; and

(6)

He prays for acquittal based on reasonable doubt.[29]

Our Ruling

The petition is DENIED for raising factual issues, and for lack of reversible error on the part of the CA. However, the penalty imposed is modified.

In the context of a petition for review on certiorari under Rule 45, the general rule is that the Court's jurisdiction is limited to questions of law. The Court is not a trier of facts and generally accepts the factual findings of the CA and the trial courts as final and conclusive.[30] Petitions are thus strictly confined to questions of law; any attempt to revisit factual matters falls outside the Court's jurisdiction. For exceptions to apply, the petitioner must successfully demonstrate that the case falls within recognized judicial exceptions.

Here, petitioner's arguments are laced with questions of fact, attempting to circumvent the rule by seeking a recalibration of evidence already evaluated by the trial court and affirmed by the CA. He anchors his arguments on an alleged misapprehension of facts and the improper application of Republic Act No. 9262, stating that the courts a quo erred in convicting him for a breach of promise to marry and for expanding the application of the law to non-abusive or failed relationships resulting from incompatibility.[31]

The arguments of petitioner are unavailing. Republic Act No. 9262 focuses on the effect of the offender's acts—specifically the mental or emotional anguish caused to a woman with whom the offender had a sexual or dating relationship.[32] Since AAA was pregnant and the withdrawal of the marriage application was done "arbitrarily" and "publicly" at the LCR, the act transcends simple heartbreak and enters the realm of "psychological violence."

The prosecution successfully established the elements of Section 5(i), as:

- Petitioner admitted that he and AAA had a sexual or dating relationship;[33]
- Petitioner withdrew the marriage license application without notice after a public commitment;[34] and
- The acts resulted in AAA's emotional anguish, as established by her testimony and confirmed by the MSWDO and a psychometrician, who found "suicidal ideation," "depressive symptoms," and "restlessness" because of XXX's act.[35]

The argument regarding the "improper expansion" of Republic Act No. 9262 must be rejected. The law is a protective statute;[36] where an act—even one involving marriage applications—is used as a tool to inflict psychological trauma on a woman in a dating or sexual relationship, the law must be interpreted to hold the offender liable.

The RTC and the CA did not penalize petitioner for the breach of promise to marry itself. Section 5(i) of Republic Act No. 9262 specifically penalizes acts that cause mental or emotional suffering. The RTC, as affirmed by the CA, penalized petitioner because his "willful" withdrawal of the marriage license—knowing the victim was pregnant and had already announced the union—constitutes a form of emotional manipulation and public humiliation that fits the definition of psychological violence.

Finally, the penalties of fine and the requirement of mandatory counseling, are all proper and in accordance with the law.[37] The same applies to the grant of moral and exemplary damages, as these awards are supported by factual basis and prevailing jurisprudence. However, the penalty of imprisonment must be modified. Petitioner is sentenced to suffer the penalty of 2 years, 4 months and 1 day of prision correccional, as minimum, to nine years and four months of prision mayor, as maximum.

FOR THESE REASONS, the Petition is DENIED. The assailed Decision dated April 30, 2025 and the Resolution dated September 16, 2025 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR No. 04480 finding XXX guilty beyond reasonable doubt of violation of Section 5 (i) of Republic Act No. 9262 or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 is AFFIRMED with MODIFICATION that petitioner is sentenced to suffer the indeterminate penalty of two years, four months and one day of prision correccional, as minimum, to nine years and four months of prision mayor, as maximum.

SO ORDERED.

Gesmundo, C.J. (Chairperson), Zalameda, Rosario, and Marquez, JJ., concur.

[1] In line with the Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, as mandate/! by Republic Act No. 9262, the names of the private offended parties, along with all other personal circumstances that may tend to establish their identities, are made confidential to protect their privacy and dignity.

[2] Petition for Review on Certiorari, pp. 1-31.

[3] CA Decision, Annex I, pp. 1-14. Toe April 30, 2025 Decision in CA-G.R. CR No. 04480 was penned by Associate Justice Nancy C. Rivas-Palmones and concurred in by Executive Justice Pamela Ann Abella Maxino and Rogelio G. Largo of the Eighteenth Division, Court of Appeals, .

[4] CA Resolution, Annex K, pp. 1-3. The September 16, 2025 Resolution in CA-G.R. CR No. 04480 was penned by Associate Justice Nancy C. Rivas-Palmones and concurred in by Executive Justice Pamela Ann Abella Maxino and Rogelio G. Largo of the Eighteenth Division, Court of Appeals, .

[5] Geographical location is blotted out pursuant to Supreme Court Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015.

[6] "The identity of the victim or any information which could establish or compromise her identity, as well as those of her immediate family or household members, shall be withheld pursuant to Republic Act No. 7610, An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, Providing Penalties for its Violation, and for Other Purposes; Republic Act No. 9262, An Act Defining Violence Against Women and Their Children, Providing for Protective Measures for Victims, Prescribing Penalties Therefor, and for Other Purposes; and Section 40 of A.M. No. 04-10-11-SC, known as the Rule on Violence against Women and their Children, effective November 15, 2004." (People v. Dumadag, 667 Phil. 664, 669 [2011]).

[7] Information, Annex A, p. 1.

[8] RTC Decision, Annex F, p. 2.

[9] Id.

[10] Id. at 3-4.

[11] Id. at 3.

[12] Id. at 3-4.

[13] Id. at 6-7.

[14] Id. at 7-9.

[15] Id. at 10-11.

[16] Id. at 15-16.

[17] Id. at 17.

[18] Id. at 17-18.

[19] Id. at 12-16.

[20] Id. at 1-27. The December 4, 2023 Decision in Criminal Case No. R-BAR-2021-001-CR was penned by Presiding Judge Emelinda R. Maguilan of Branch 13, Regional Trial Court, .

[21] Id. at 26-27.

[22] Id. at 19-25.

[23] CA Decision, Annex I, pp. 1-14.

[24] CA Decision, Annex I, pp. 1-14.

[25] Id. at 8-10.

[26] Id. at 10-11.

[27] Id. at 12-13.

[28] CA Resolution, Annex K, pp. 1-3.

[29] Petition for Review on Certiorari, pp. 16-30.

[30]] Fuentes v. Court of Appeals, 335 Phil. 1163, 1167-1168 (1997) [Per J. Panganiban, Third Division].

[31] Petition for Review on Certiorari, pp. 16-28.

[32] See XXX v. People, G.R. No. 232190, August 20, 2025 [Per J. Lazaro-Javier, Second Division].

[33] CA Decision, Annex I, p. 9.

[34] Id.

[35] Id. at 10.

[36] See XXX v. People, 953 Phil. 462, 470 (2024) [Per J. Hernando, En Banc].

[37] Republic Act No. 9262, secs. 6 and 36.

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