

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. JEFFREY VICTORIA Y CRISTOBAL, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.

G.R. No. 201110. July 06, 2015

Ponente: VILLARAMA, JR., J.

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VILLARAMA, JR., J.:

Before us is an appeal from the Decision[1] dated July 28, 2011 of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR.-H.C. No. 03973 which affirmed the conviction of Jeffrey Victoria (accused-appellant) for the crime of rape.

The Information[2] dated December 5, 2006, which charged the accused-appellant with rape, reads:

That, on or about the 1[st] day of December 2006, in the Municipality of Binangonan, Province of Rizal, Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, by means of force, threat and intimidation, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously have sexual intercourse with [AAA[3]], a minor, fifteen (15) years old at the time of the commission of the offense, against her will and consent, to her damage and prejudice.

CONTRARY TO LAW.

Upon arraignment, the accused-appellant pleaded not guilty to the charge. Trial on the merits ensued.

The facts, as culled from the records, follow:

The prosecution presented three witnesses: (1) AAA, the private complainant herself, (2) Police Senior Inspector (P/Sr. Insp.) Edilberto Antonio of the Philippine National Police Crime Laboratory, the medico-legal officer who conducted the physical examination of the private complainant, and (3) BBB, the mother of the private complainant.

AAA testified that in the evening of December 1, 2006, she was at Jumil's Funeral Homes in Calumpang, Rizal to collect payments for "ending" a betting game of chance. While waiting for payments from the players, AAA saw accused-appellant sit at the opposite side of the same bench where she sat. Thereafter, Noel and Michael, friends of accused-appellant, arrived at Jumil's Funeral Homes and invited him to eat lugaw with them. Accused-appellant accepted the invitation and also convinced AAA to come with them. However, upon finding that the lugawan was closed, the group decided to return to their homes. At this point, AAA claimed that accused-appellant told her to instruct Noel and Michael to head home first. Then, AAA alleged that accused-appellant lured her to a dark place where he covered her mouth with one hand, and succeeded in having carnal knowledge with her.

BBB testified that she observed that AAA was pale and crying when she arrived at their house. Furthermore, BBB noticed the dirty clothes of AAA and the bloodstains on her buttocks and groin. When BBB asked AAA about her condition, the latter positively identified the accused-appellant as her assailant. BBB proceeded to the house of the accused-appellant, but they did not find him there. AAA and BBB reported the incident to the barangay and police authorities.

Meanwhile, P/Sr. Insp. Edilberto Antonio testified that he conducted a physical examination of AAA a day after the alleged act by the accused-appellant, and found the following injuries on AAA's genitalia: shallow fresh hymenal lacerations at 3 o'clock position, and perihymenal contusions at 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions. These findings led him to conclude that AAA suffered from a blunt force or penetrating trauma on her genitalia. Finally, he also observed that AAA had an ecchymosis (kiss mark) on her neck.

On the other hand, accused-appellant admitted that he had sexual intercourse with AAA, but claimed that such act was consensual as AAA was his girl friend. Thus, accused-appellant contended that he did not employ force, threat or intimidation in having sexual intercourse with AAA.

Accused-appellant narrated that in the evening of December 1, 2006, he was at Jumil's Funeral Homes when his girlfriend, AAA, approached him and invited him to make a bet in "ending". Instead of making a bet, accused-appellant invited AAA to eat lugaw, which the latter accepted. While they were walking towards the lugawan, they encountered Noel and Michael who invited them to visit a certain place near the highway. When accused-appellant refused their invitation, he persuaded AAA that they instead visit a vacant lot near the APS Construction Supply Store. Upon reaching the vacant lot, accused-appellant started to kiss AAA. However, when accused-appellant noticed that someone was watching them, he proceeded to the end of the vacant lot where AAA followed him. There, they had sexual intercourse.

Accused-appellant further testified that he fell asleep immediately after having sexual intercourse with AAA. When he woke up, AAA was no longer beside him, so he decided to go home.

The defense also presented the testimony of Edison Baltar who claimed that in the evening of December 1, 2006, he passed by Jumil's Funeral Homes where he saw accused-appellant sitting on AAA's lap. He also testified that AAA kissed accused-appellant on his forehead.

On April 29, 2009, the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Binangonan, Rizal, Branch 67, rendered its Decision[4] in Criminal Case No. 06-700 finding accused-appellant guilty of rape, to wit:

The foregoing considered, we find accused Jeffrey Victoria GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of rape under Article 266-A, Paragraph 1(a) in relation to Article 266-B, Revised Penal Code and sentence him to serve a penalty of Reclusion Perpetua. We further order him to pay P50,000.00 as moral damages and P50,000.00 as exemplary damages plus costs.

SO ORDERED.[5]

In finding the accused-appellant guilty of the crime of rape, the trial court gave full faith and credence to the testimony of AAA. According to the trial court, her testimony was straightforward, candid, unshaken by cross-examination and unflawed by inconsistencies or contradictions in its material points. Furthermore, the trial court also ruled that her testimony was supported by the medico-legal findings of hymenal lacerations which showed forcible defloration. On the other hand, the trial court struck down the accused-appellant's "sweetheart defense" which was not substantiated by any documentary evidence like mementos, love letters, notes, pictures and the like. Assuming the "sweetheart defense" can pass muster, the trial court observed that such sweetheart cannot be forced to have sex against her will.

On May 11, 2009, accused-appellant filed his Notice of Appeal[6] which was given due course by the trial court.

In his Brief filed before the CA, accused-appellant argued that his sexual intercourse with AAA was consensual. To support his argument, accused-appellant referred to the acts and omissions of AAA before and after the sexual intercourse which show her consent, to wit: (1) acceptance of the invitation of the accused-appellant to eat lugaw and to proceed to a dark place, (2) failure to display emotions after the sexual intercourse, and (3) failure to report

the incident immediately to BBB. Accused-appellant also claimed that there was no force, threat, or intimidation involved when he had sexual intercourse with AAA because at the time of the incident he was not armed with any weapon and neither did AAA sustain any abrasions on her body.

On the other hand, the Solicitor General on behalf of the State, argued that the acts and omissions of AAA before and after the sexual intercourse cannot be immediately construed as consent to the sexual act. They posited that the presence of any weapon on the part of the assailant and abrasion on the body of the victim is irrelevant in determining whether force, threat, or intimidation was involved in the act of sexual intercourse.

On July 28, 2011, the appellate court affirmed the trial court's Decision, viz:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the appeal is hereby DENIED. The assailed Decision dated 29 April 2009 of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 67 of Binangonan, Rizal is AFFIRMED.

SO ORDERED[7]

Hence, this appeal.

Accused-appellant reiterates his argument that the acts and omissions of AAA before and after the sexual intercourse reveal that she consented thereto. He also emphasizes that the absence of any abrasion on AAA's body indicate that the latter consented to the sexual intercourse.

We dismiss the appeal.

In *People v. Bautista*[8] we laid down the requirements before the accused can seek refuge behind the "sweetheart defense" to wit:

In rape, the "sweetheart" defense must be proven by compelling evidence: first, that the accused and the victim were lovers; and, second, that she consented to the alleged sexual relations. The second is as important as the first, because this Court has held often enough that love is not a license for lust.

Accused-appellant failed in both aspects.

Firstly, in order to prove that the accused and the victim are indeed sweethearts, we have ruled in a long line of cases that it is incumbent upon the accused to present documentary and/or other evidence of the relationship like mementos, love letters, notes, pictures and the like.[9] In the present case, aside from the self-serving testimony of accused-appellant and that of his friend Edison Baltasar, the defense failed to present any other documentary evidence of the alleged relationship between AAA and the accused-appellant. On the other hand, AAA clearly and categorically denied having any romantic relationship with accused-appellant.

Secondly, the evidence for the prosecution clearly shows that accused-appellant employed force, threat, or intimidation in order to succeed in having carnal knowledge with AAA.

In *People v. Flores*,[10] we ruled that in rape through force or intimidation, the force employed by the guilty party need not be irresistible. It is only necessary that such force is sufficient to consummate the purpose for which it was inflicted. Similarly, intimidation should be evaluated in light of the victim's perception at the time of the commission of the crime. It is enough that it produced the fear in the mind of the victim that if she did not yield to the bestial demands of her ravisher, some evil would happen to her at that moment or even thereafter. Hence, what is important is that because of force and intimidation, the victim was made to submit to the will of the appellant.

We give credence to the testimony of AAA before the trial court as she specifically narrated how the accused-appellant employed force, threat, or intimidation against her:

x x x x x x x x

Q - After you were informed that the lugawan was closed what happened?

A - I was ahead of them in walking, ma'am.

Q - What did the accused do when you were walking ahead of them?

A - He called me and told me to let Michael and Noel go ahead, ma'am.

Q - What happened? What did you do when you were instructed to let the two go ahead?

A - I stopped and he sat down at the ground, ma'am.

Q - Where was that when he sat down?

A - At the APS Construction Supply, ma'am.

Q - What happened while you were seated there in front of APS Construction Supply?

A - I asked him to leave APS ma'am.

Q - And what did the accused do when you asked him to leave the APS?

A - He stood up and proceeded to a dark place, ma'am.

Q - How about you, what did you do when he proceeded to the dark place?

A - He called me, ma'am.

Q - What did you do when he summoned you?

A - I came near, ma'am.

Q - When you approached him what happened next?

A - He stood up and he sat down again on the pile of gravel, ma'am.

Q - What happened after that?

A - He sat down and he pulled me and told me to sit down also, ma'am.

Q - What did you do when he pulled you down?

A - I sat down and he embraced me and he brought me to a grassy place, ma'am.

Q - How far was that from the APS Construction Supply?

A - It's also there at the APS ma'am.

Q - What was the source of illumination in that place?

A - None, ma'am.

Q - And after that, what happened after you were brought to the grassy area?

A - He undressed me. He removed my pedal shorts and he kissed me, ma'am.

Q - Why did you not run away from him when he was already removing your pedal shorts?

A - He was holding me, ma'am.

Q - Why did you not shout?

A - He covered my mouth with his hand, ma'am.

Q - After removing your pedal shorts and kissing you, what happened next?

A - He also removed his shorts, ma'am.

Q - So at that time he was removing his shorts, why did you not run away from him?

A - He was holding me tight, ma'am, (inipit niya ako)

Q - What was your position when he was holding you tight?

A - I was lying down, ma'am.

Q - After the accused was able to remove his shorts, what happened next?

A - He inserted his penis to my vagina, ma'am.

Q - What did you feel when he inserted his penis to your vagina?

A - "Ang sakit-sakit po!"

Q - After inserting his penis what kind of movement did he make?

A - Up and down po, ma'am.

x x x x x x x x

COURT:

Habang ini-spread niya iyong legs mo ano sinasabi niya sa iyo?

WITNESS:

None Your Honor.

COURT:

Ano sinasabi mo sa kanya?

WITNESS:

Nagmamakaawa po ako sa kanya na huwag gawin.

COURT:

Ano sabi niya?

WITNESS:

Wala po.

COURT:

Kung ayaw mong gawin niya iyon, bakit hindi mo siya itinulak?

WITNESS:

Hindi ko po siya naitulak kasi nakapatong po siya sa akin.[11]

The above testimony is bolstered by the medico-legal finding of hymenal laceration on AAA's genitalia which is strong evidence of penile invasion.[12] It is well to note that we have consistently declared that a rape victim's account is sufficient to support a conviction for rape if it is straightforward, candid and corroborated by the medical findings of the examining physician,[13] as in the present case.

Pertinently, accused-appellant questioned the credibility of AAA as a rape victim by referring to her acts and omissions before and after the sexual intercourse. On this score alone, our discussion in *People v. Pareja*[14] is illuminating:

A person accused of a serious crime such as rape will tend to escape liability by shifting the blame on the victim for failing to manifest resistance to sexual abuse. However, this Court has recognized the fact that no clear-cut behavior can be expected of a person being raped or has been raped. It is a settled rule that failure of the victim to shout or seek help do not negate rape. Even lack of resistance will not imply that the victim has consented to the sexual act, especially when that person was intimidated into submission by the accused. In cases where the rape is committed by a relative such as a father, stepfather, uncle, or common law spouse, moral influence or ascendancy takes the place of violence. In this case, AAA's lack of resistance was brought about by her fear that Pareja would make good on his threat to kill her if she ever spoke of the incident.

AAA's conduct, i.e., acting like nothing happened, after being sexually abused by Pareja is also not enough to discredit her. Victims of a crime as heinous as rape, cannot be expected to act within reason or in accordance with society's expectations. It is unreasonable to demand a standard rational reaction to an irrational experience, especially from a young victim. One cannot be expected to act as usual in an unfamiliar situation as it is impossible to predict the workings of a human mind placed under emotional stress. Moreover, it is wrong to say that there is a standard reaction or behavior among victims of the crime of rape since each of them had to cope with different circumstances.

In the case at bar, the lack of resistance on the part of AAA or her unusual behavior after the sexual intercourse has no impact on her credibility as a witness.

As a final note, we reiterate our ruling in *People v. Galido*[15]:

Time and time again, we have said that a rape victim — especially one of tender age — would not normally concoct a story of defloration, allow an examination of her private parts and thereafter permit herself to be subjected to a public trial, if she is not motivated solely by the desire to have the culprit apprehended and punished. Thus, when a woman — more so if she is a minor — says that she has been raped, she says in effect all that is necessary to show that rape was committed. And as long as the testimony meets the test of credibility, the accused may be convicted on that basis alone.

As regards the civil liability, however, the Court finds the need to correct the awards made by the RTC and the CA. In line with prevailing jurisprudence,[16] AAA is entitled to P50,000 as civil indemnity, P50,000 as moral damages and P30,000 as exemplary damages. Additionally, the Court imposes interest at the rate of 6% per annum on all damages awarded, in accordance with current policy.

WHEREFORE, the appeal is DISMISSED and the July 28, 2011 Decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR.-H.C. No. 03973 is AFFIRMED with MODIFICATIONS. Accused-appellant is ordered to pay AAA P50,000 as civil indemnity, P50,000 as moral damages and P30,000 as exemplary damages. Interest at the rate of six percent (6%) per annum on all damages awarded in this case reckoned from finality of this Decision until fully paid shall likewise be paid by appellant.

With costs against accused-appellant.

SO ORDERED.

Peralta,[*] (Acting Chairperson), Perez,**] Perlas-Bernabe,[***] and Leonen,[****]JJ., concur.

[*]Designated Acting Chairperson per Special Order No. 2071 dated June 23, 2015.

[**] Designated additional Member in lieu of Associate Justice Francis H. Jardeleza, per Raffle dated January 5, 2015.

[***] Designated Acting Member in lieu of Associate Justice Presbitero J. Velasco Jr per Special Order No. 2072 dated June 23, 2015.

[****] Designated Acting Member in lieu of Associate Justice Bienvenido L. Reyes, per Special Order No. 2084-B dated June 29, 2015.

[1] CA rollo, pp. 74-83. Penned by Associate Justice Samuel H. Gaerlan, with Associate Justices Rosmari D. Carandang and Ramon R. Garcia concurring.

[2] Records, p. 1.

[3] The victim's real name and personal circumstances or any other information tending to establish or compromise her identity as well as those of her immediate family are withheld per *People v. Cabalquinto*, 533 Phil. 703, 709 (2006).

[4] CA rollo, pp. 16 to 16-A. Penned by Presiding Judge Dennis Patrick Z. Perez.

[5] *Id.* at 16-A.

[6] *Id.* at 19.

[7] *Id.* at 82.

[8] G.R. No. 140278, June 3, 2004, 430 SCRA 469, 471.

[9] See *People v. San Antonio, Jr.*, 559 Phil. 188, 201-202 (2007).

[10] 423 Phil. 687, 698-699(2001).

[11] TSN, September 13, 2007, pp. 8-11, 33.

[12] See *People v. Galido*, G.R. Nos. 148689-92, March 30, 2004, 426 SCRA 502, 515.

[13] *People v. Gabawa*, 446 Phil. 616, 633 (2003); *People v. Cañaveral*, 435 Phil. 48, 60 (2002).

[14] G.R. No. 202122, January 15, 2014, 714 SCRA 131, 153-154.

[15] *Supra* note 12, at 516.

[16] *People v. Manigo*, G.R. No. 194612, January 27, 2014, 714 SCRA 551, 563-564.

July 27, 2015

NOTICE OF JUDGMENT

Sirs / Mesdames:

Please take notice that on July 6, 2015 a Decision, copy attached hereto, was rendered by the Supreme Court in the above-entitled case, the original of which was received by this Office on July 27, 2015 at 11:30 a.m.

Very truly yours,

(SGD.)

WILFREDO V. LAPITAN

Division Clerk of Court

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