

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, V. WILLIAM VILLAROS Y CARANTO, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.

G.R. No. 228779. October 08, 2018

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CAGUIOA, J:

Before this Court is an ordinary appeal[1] filed by the accused-appellant William Villaros y Caranto (Villaros or accused-appellant) assailing the Decision[2] dated June 21, 2016 of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 07650, which affirmed the Decision[3] dated February 11, 2015 of the BBB, CCC,[4] Regional Trial Court (RTC) in Criminal Case Nos. 12108 and 12109, finding Villaros guilty beyond reasonable doubt of two (2) counts of rape.

The Facts

Two (2) separate Informations were filed against the accused-appellant for the rape of minor AAA,[5] which read:

Criminal Case No. 12108

That on or about the 27[th] day of December 2009, in the Municipality of [BBB],[6] Province of [CCC], Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, with lewd design, and by means of force and intimidation, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously have carnal knowledge of complainant [AAA],[7] a minor, thirteen (13) years of age, against her will and without her consent, the said crime, having been attended by the Qualifying Circumstances of Treachery, Evident Premeditation, Abuse of Superior Strength and at Nighttime.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[8]

Criminal Case No. 12109

That on or about the 29[th] day of November 2009, in the Municipality of [BBB],[9] Province of [CCC], Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, with lewd design, and by means of force and intimidation, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously have carnal knowledge of complainant [AAA],[10] a minor, twelve (12) years of age, against her will and without her consent, the same crime, having been attended by the Qualifying Circumstances of Treachery, Evident Premeditation, Abuse of Superior Strength and at Nighttime.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[11]

The facts, as summarized by the RTC, are as follows:

On November 29, 2009, the victim went inside the bathroom beside the room of accused Villaros. She was still there when accused Villaros peeped inside. When the said victim came out from the room, the accused told her to buy cigarettes. The victim could not look at the accused when she gave the cigarette to him as he was then only wearing shorts. Upon receiving the cigarette, the accused pulled the victim inside his bedroom and closed the door. The door of the accused's bedroom is made from galvanized iron and while inside, he also closed the curtains. Accused Villaros who was then already naked told the victim to remove her clothes while he was

covering her mouth. At the said time at around 6 o'clock in the afternoon there were no other persons inside the house because the victim's mother and stepfather were at work. As the victim refuses (sic) to remove her clothes[,] accused Villaros was the one who did so. The victim tried resisting but accused Villaros covered her mouth with one hand while the other held her hands. Even when the victim was petrified, she addressed the accused "Tito" as a sign of respect. After removing the victim's clothes, accused Villaros made her lie down on foam which he used as a bed. While crying, the accused touches (sic) the private part of the victim for about twenty (20) minutes and then mounted on top of her inserting his sexual organ into her private part. When done, the accused told the victim to dress up which she immediately did so and walked out of the room.

During the incident that transpired on December 27, 2009 at 6 o'clock in the evening the victim was alone in the house when the accused again sexually abused her. The victim cried and felt hurt when accused inserted his sexual organ into her private part. One of the accused's hands covered the victim's mouth while his other hand removes (sic) his shorts. The accused remained on top of the victim for fifteen (15) minutes after the intercourse and then hurriedly left. The accused warned the victim that he would hurt the victim's siblings if she will not let him do what he wanted. The victim and her siblings were all four (4) girls. The victim's next sibling is eleven (11) years old, the third is four (4) and the youngest is one (1) year old. At the time of the incident the siblings of the victim were in school playing. The incident occurred inside the house of the victim because accused Villaros had access thereto anytime.

The victim was already three (3) months pregnant when her relatives discovered about what happened to her. The victim's belly was getting bigger when her mother noticed her pregnant condition which was confirmed positive by means of a test kit. It was then when the victim then confided to her mother about the sexual ordeal committed upon her by the accused. At present, the victim's baby girl is with her aunt in the province.[12]

A genital examination was conducted by PCI Joseph Palmero on AAA with the consent of her mother. The said examination revealed that AAA had "deep-healed lacerations at 3 o'clock and shallow-healed sealed laceration at 6 o'clock position of the hymen." Through the genital examination, it was concluded that there was "definite evidence of abuse and sexual contact." [13]

On the other hand, the accused-appellant relied on denial and alibi to establish his innocence. The version of the defense was summarized by the RTC as follows:

For the defense, only accused William Villaros testified that he knows the victim because she lives in the house of his brother [DDD],[14] [who is also the victim's] stepfather. Their houses are adjacent to one another. Accused Villaros has no family of his own and it is his nephews and nieces who live with him. Prior to his incarceration accused [was] a construction worker.

On November 29, 2009, the accused was at [EEE], [BBB], [CCC][15] repairing a destroyed house. [EEE] is quite far from their house but is just a walking distance away. They worked from 8 to 5 o'clock and on said date and after work, accused Villaros went straight to a friend to sometimes drink alcohol. When accused Villaros went home[,] he [cooked] dinner.

The accused denies that he had sex with the victim on November 29, 2009. He claims that the victim is just trying to ruin his reputation. The accused contends that the victim is angry with him for meddling in her fight with his nephews and nieces.

From December 27, 2009 up to January, accused Villaros was at work in a construction at [EEE], [BBB], [CCC]. While, on November 29, he was at [FFF], [GGG], [CCC], renovating a house. Thus, there is no truth that he raped the victim on December 27, 2009. The accused denies responsibility in the victim getting pregnant. The accused does not know why the victim would file a case against him.[16]

Ruling of the RTC

After trial on the merits, in its Decision[17] dated February 11, 2015, the RTC convicted Villaros of the crime charged. The dispositive portion of the said Decision reads:

WHEREFORE, judgment is rendered as follows:

1.

In Criminal Case No. 12108, finding accused William Villaros y Caranto GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of Rape (Article 266-A 1 (a) & (b), in relation to Article 266-B, 1[st] paragraph of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act 8353 and in further relation to Article 17 of the same Code) and sentencing him to suffer the penalty of Reclusion Perpetua and to indemnify the victim, [AAA], the amount of fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as civil indemnity, fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as moral damages and fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as exemplary damages.

2.

In Criminal Case No. 12109, finding accused William Villaros y Caranto GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of Rape (Article 266-A 1 (a) & (b), in relation to Article 266-B, 1[st] paragraph of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act 8353 and in further relation to Article 17 of the same Code) and sentencing him to suffer the penalty of Reclusion Perpetua and to indemnify the victim, [AAA], the amount of fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as civil indemnity, fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as moral damages and fifty thousand pesos (Php50,000.00) as exemplary damages.

No pronouncement as to cost.

Accused William Villaros y Caranto is hereby ordered to be committed to the [New Bilibid Prison] in Muntinlupa City for service of sentence.

Accused William Villaros y Caranto is to be credited for the time spent for his preventive detention in accordance with Art. 29 of the Revised Penal Code as amended by R.A 6127 and E.O 214.

SO ORDERED.[18]

The RTC found that AAA gave a substantial recount of her sexual ordeal in a candid and straightforward manner which was actually even strengthened by her cross-examination.[19] The RTC also found Villaros' defense to be "lame," considering that he was not able to raise any substantial matter that would negate the veracity of the allegations and testimony of the victim. The RTC held that Villaros took advantage of his moral authority, as he was the brother of the stepfather of the victim, and likewise employed force, threats, and intimidation to accomplish his lewd design.[20] The RTC, however, did not appreciate any of the qualifying and aggravating circumstances alleged.

Aggrieved, the accused-appellant appealed to the CA.[21]

Ruling of the CA

In the questioned Decision[22] dated June 21, 2016, the CA affirmed the RTC's conviction of the accused-appellant, and held that the prosecution was able to sufficiently prove the elements of the crime charged.

The CA did not accord weight to any of the accused-appellant's assertions which should supposedly taint AAA's testimony, namely that: (1) her demeanor during and after the alleged rape incidents, which was supposedly inconsistent with the natural reaction and behavior of a woman whose person had been violated; (2) she did not shout for help despite supposedly having the opportunity to do so; (3) there was no showing that AAA was threatened not to report the incident; (4) contrary to what was impressed upon the lower court, AAA could not have felt extreme fear as Villaros had no moral ascendancy over her; and (5) despite her claim that she developed

fear towards Villaros after the incident on November 29, 2009, AAA still went to their house and exposed herself to further abuse.[23]

The appellate court, however, modified the award of exemplary damages by decreasing the same from P50,000.00 to P30,000.00, in accordance with *People v. Ramos*. [24]

Hence, the instant appeal.

Issue

Proceeding from the foregoing, for resolution of this Court is the issue of whether the RTC and the CA erred in convicting the accused-appellant.

The Court's Ruling

The appeal is unmeritorious. The Court affirms the conviction of the accused-appellant as the prosecution was able to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

The two elements of rape — (1) that the offender had carnal knowledge of the girl, and (2) that such act was accomplished through the use of force or intimidation[25] — are both present as duly proven by the prosecution in this case. AAA testified in detail how the accused-appellant committed the sexual abuses,[26] and this testimony was given weight and credence by both the RTC and the CA. In rape cases, the accused may be convicted on the basis of the lone, uncorroborated testimony of the rape victim, provided that her testimony is clear, convincing and otherwise consistent with human nature. This is a matter best assigned to the trial court which had the first-hand opportunity to hear the testimonies of the witnesses and observe their demeanor, conduct, and attitude during cross-examination. Such matters cannot be gathered from a mere reading of the transcripts of stenographic notes. Hence, the trial court's findings carry great weight and substance.[27]

The accused-appellant, however, makes an issue out of supposed inconsistencies in her testimony. First, the accused-appellant raised as issue AAA's demeanor after the alleged rape incidents in that it was supposedly "inconsistent with the natural reaction and behavior of a woman whose person had been violated." [28] The accused-appellant pointed out that AAA testified that she would not have filed the case if she did not get pregnant,[29] and she, in fact, only complained because her mother found out she was already pregnant. The accused-appellant added that there was no showing that AAA was threatened not to report the incident. According to the accused-appellant, "[t]he records show that the threat happened on the second incident when the accused-appellant allegedly told her that he would do the same to her siblings. It appeared that the threat was not even immediate such that she could instantly succumb to fear." [30]

The Court is not persuaded. It is well settled that delay in making a criminal accusation does not impair the credibility of a witness if such delay is satisfactorily explained.[31] In *People v. Historillo*[32] (*Historillo*), the Court held that failure of the complainant to immediately report the rape to the police authorities does not detract from her credibility. Further, the Court in the said case considered (1) the victim's age, (2) the accused's moral ascendancy over the victim, and (3) his threats against her, in excusing the delay in filing the case.

The same reasons justify the delay in the present case. Similar to the victim in *Historillo*, AAA was also just 12 years old when the first rape incident was committed, and was 13 years old when the same heinous act was repeated. Likewise, a threat was similarly made by the accused-appellant in this case which, no matter how much he tried to downplay its extent and the effect of the same on the victim, became a significant factor in both the victim's surrender to his lewd designs and her delay in reporting the crime to the proper authorities. These, along with the fact that, as will be further discussed later, the accused had moral ascendancy over the victim, the Court

holds that the delay in reporting the rapes to the authorities was justified in this case. As the Court in *People v. Pareja*[33] aptly stated:

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.[34]

Accused-appellant also questions why AAA did not shout for help when, per her testimony, her mouth was not covered as accused-appellant's one hand was supposedly removing her clothes and the other held her hands.[35]

This argument deserves scant consideration. It is important to stress that not all rape victims react the same way.[36] Not every victim of a crime can be expected to act reasonably and conformably with the expectation of mankind.[37] There is, unfortunately for accused-appellant, no typical reaction or norm of behavior that ensue forthwith or later from victims of rape.[38] It should be true, most certainly, when dealing with an innocent and immature child still of tender age.[39] As the CA correctly held:

To consider the aforesaid claim would be tantamount to saying that fear is not a natural reaction to something unfamiliar or unusual but only a reaction that can easily be summoned or controlled, and its reasonableness, dependent on the victim's relationship with the culprit; that if the rapist is someone who has no moral ascendancy over the victim, it is a must for the latter to shout at the top of her lungs for help and to struggle with all her might before her rape claim can be given credence.[40]

In this connection, the accused-appellant brazenly blames the victim for "exposing] herself to further abuse." [41] According to the accused-appellant, AAA "claimed that she developed fear towards the accused-appellant after the incident on November 29, 2009, but still went at their house and exposed herself to further abuse." [42]

This reasoning is outrageous, if not outright despicable. In his desperate attempt to exculpate himself from criminal liability, the accused-appellant turned on his victim who, to repeat, was a minor at the time the rape incidents were committed, and blamed her for putting herself in a vulnerable position in her own home. Grasping at straws, the accused-appellant not only committed the abhorrent practice of victim-blaming so prevalent in sexual abuse cases, but he also failed to recognize that he made the irrational proposition that the victim should not have been comfortable in her own abode. Worth pointing out is the fact that our laws and jurisprudence regard our homes with much respect, so much so that our criminal law punishes trespass to dwelling as an offense by itself,[43] and considers "dwelling" as an aggravating circumstance in determining the exact liability in criminal prosecutions.[44] Although it will not be used in determining accused-appellant's exact penalty in this case, it bears emphasis that:

"Dwelling" is considered an aggravating circumstance because primarily of the sanctity of privacy the law accords to human abode. According to one commentator, one's dwelling place is a "sanctuary worthy of respect" and that one who slanders another in the latter's house is more guilty than if he who offends him elsewhere.[45]

As aptly rebutted by the CA:

Likewise, We find it unacceptable on the part of the accused-appellant to even suggest that if there is any truth to [AAA]'s claim that she had been raped, she should not have stayed at the family home after the alleged first incident and exposed herself to further abuse. At the risk of being repetitive, the victim here is a minor. She cannot be expected to think and act in a rational manner. Nonetheless, it is unconscionable to blame the victim and deprive her of the comfort of her family home just because she was unfortunate enough to become the

subject of accused-appellant's unbridled lust. Why should the victim be the one to suffer for the beastly acts of accused-appellant?[46]

The accused-appellant further shifts the blame on the victim by claiming that she failed to establish that she employed significant resistance considering that she did not allege that he used any weapon during the alleged rape incidents.[47] He additionally claimed that AAA could not have felt extreme fear because he supposedly did not have moral ascendancy over her, he being only a brother of her stepfather.[48]

These arguments are downright specious. The law does not impose on the rape victim the burden of proving resistance.[49] In rape, the force and intimidation must be viewed in the light of the victim's perception and judgment at the time of the commission of the crime and not by any hard and fast rule.[50] The fact that the accused-appellant did not use any weapon is immaterial, especially since the victim in this case was just 12 or 13 years old at the time of the incidents. Moreover, this case involves a rape of a close kin. In rapes committed by a close kin, it is not necessary that actual force or intimidation be employed; moral influence or ascendancy takes the place of violence or intimidation.[51] The fact that the accused-appellant was only a "brother of her stepfather" does not diminish the fact that he exercised moral influence over the minor, much more so in this case where they actually live together in the same house.

Finally, the accused-appellant puts in issue the supposed failure of the testimony of the medico-legal officer to corroborate AAA's testimony. According to the accused-appellant, the "laceration was not traced with certainty to have been sustained on the date the [rapes incidents] were allegedly committed. The [allegation] that AAA was raped on November 29, 2009 and December 27, 2009 remains as a mere possibility."[52]

The above contention is clearly without merit. The Court has held numerous times in the past that a medical examination is not indispensable in a prosecution for rape.[53] As the Court held in *People v. Docena*: [54]

Medical findings or proof of injuries, virginity, or an allegation of the exact time and date of the commission of the crime are not essential in a prosecution for rape. This is so because from the nature of the offense, the only evidence that can oftentimes be offered to establish the guilt of the accused is, as in the cases at bar, the complainant's testimony. (Emphasis supplied)[55]

Further, as correctly found by the CA, the medico-legal officer's responsibility is only limited to finding out whether or not there is enough evidence to conclude that AAA was sexually abused.[56] The medico-legal officer was not tasked to point to specific dates on when exactly the victim was abused, but merely to ascertain that she was indeed abused.

In a last-ditch effort to cast doubt on his guilt, accused-appellant offers alibi and denial to prove that he did not rape AAA. According to him, he was working in other villages within the same province at the dates of the alleged rape incidents.[57] He contended that the victim filed the case only because she was angry at him for meddling in her fight with his nephews and nieces.[58]

The Court has oft pronounced that both denial and alibi are inherently weak defenses which cannot prevail over the positive and credible testimony of the prosecution witness that the accused committed the crime. Thus, as between a categorical testimony which has a ring of truth on one hand, and a mere denial and alibi on the other, the former is generally held to prevail.[59] Further, the continuing case law is that for the defense of alibi to prosper, the accused must prove not only that he was at some other place when the crime was committed, but also that it was physically impossible for him to be at the scene of the crime or its immediate vicinity through clear and convincing evidence.[60]

In the present case, accused-appellant was within the immediate vicinity of the place of the crime. Even if the

accused-appellant's explanation is to be accepted as true, he was still within the same province as the place of the crime. By his own admission, the village he was supposedly working at during the time of the commission of the crime was "far from their house but is just a walking distance away." [61] As it was not physically impossible for him to be at the place of the crime, his defense of alibi must thus necessarily fail.

With regard to the amount of damages, the Court deems it proper to adjust the award of damages in consonance with *People v. Jugueta* [62] Thus, the accused-appellant is hereby ordered to pay AAA, the amount of seventy-five thousand pesos (P75,000.00) as civil indemnity, seventy-five thousand pesos (P75,000.00) as moral damages, and seventy-five thousand pesos (P75,000.00) as exemplary damages. Interest at the rate of 6% per annum on the monetary awards reckoned from the finality of this decision is likewise imposed to complete the quest for justice and vindication on the part of AAA. [63]

WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, the appeal is hereby DENIED. The Decision dated June 21, 2016 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 07650 is hereby AFFIRMED WITH MODIFICATION by increasing each of the awards for civil indemnity, moral damages, and exemplary damages from fifty thousand pesos (P50,000.00) to seventy-five thousand pesos (P75,000.00) for each case. Accordingly, accused-appellant William Villaros y Caranto is hereby CONVICTED of the crimes charged.

SO ORDERED.

Carpio (Chairperson), Perlas-Bernabe and A. Reyes, Jr., JJ., concur.
J. Reyes, Jr.,[*] J., on wellness leave.

[*] Designated additional Member per Special Order No. 2587 dated August 28, 2018; on wellness leave.

[1] See Notice of Appeal dated July 14, 2016; rollo, pp. 14-15.

[2] Rollo, pp. 2-13. Penned by Associate Justice Franchito N. Diamante with Associate Justices Japar B. Dimaampao and Carmelita Salandanan Manahan concurring.

[3] CA rollo, pp. 42-47. Penned by Presiding Judge Josephine Zarate Fernandez.

[4] The names of the Municipality and the Province are replaced with fictitious initials pursuant to SC Administrative Circular No. 83-2015 dated July 27, 2015.

[5] The name of the victim is replaced with fictitious initials pursuant to SC Administrative Circular No. 83-2015 dated July 27, 2015.

[6] See note 4.

[7] See note 5.

[8] CA rollo, p. 42.

[9] See note 4.

[10] See note 5.

[11] CA rollo, pp. 42-43.

[12] *Id.* at 43-44.

[13] *Id.* at 44.

- [14] The name of the victim's stepfather is replaced with fictitious initials pursuant to SC Administrative Circular No. 83-2015 dated July 27, 2015.
- [15] See note 4.
- [16] RTC Decision, pp. 3-4 (CA rollo, p. 44 to next consecutive page with no pagination).
- [17] CA rollo, pp. 42-47.
- [18] *Id.* at 46-47.
- [19] *Id.* at 45.
- [20] *Id.*
- [21] *Supra* note 1
- [22] *Supra* note 2.
- [23] *Id.* at 6.
- [24] 743 Phil. 344 (2014).
- [25] *People v. Soronio*, 281 Phil. 820, 824 (1991).
- [26] See Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo, pp. 32-33, where the accused-appellant cited TSN dated April 25, 2012 when the victim testified regarding the rape incidents.
- [27] *People v. Alemania*, 440 Phil. 297, 304-305 (2002).
- [28] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo p. 35.
- [29] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, *id.*, citing TSN dated July 30, 2011.
- [30] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, *id.* at 36.
- [31] *People v. de la Peña*, 406 Phil. 640, 647 (2001).
- [32] 389 Phil. 141, 148 (2000).
- [33] 724 Phil. 759 (2014).
- [34] *Id.* at 778-779.
- [35] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo, p. 36.
- [36] *People v. Soriano*, 560 Phil. 415, 420 (2007).
- [37] *People v. Gecomio*, 324 Phil. 297, 315 (1996).
- [38] *People v. Deleverio*, 352 Phil. 382, 400 (1998).
- [39] *Id.*
- [40] CA Decision, rollo p. 9.
- [41] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo, p. 36.
- [42] *Id.*

- [43] REVISED PENAL CODE, Arts. 280 and 281.
- [44] REVISED PENAL CODE, Art. 14(3).
- [45] *People v. Balansi*, 265 Phil. 614, 622 (1990).
- [46] CA Decision, rollo p. 9.
- [47] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo, p. 36.
- [48] *Id.*
- [49] *People v. Fabian*, 453 Phil. 328, 337 (2003).
- [50] *Id.*
- [51] *People v. Padua*, 661 Phil. 366, 370 (2011).
- [52] Brief for the Accused-Appellant, CA rollo, p. 37.
- [53] *People v. Campos*, 394 Phil. 868, 872 (2000).
- [54] 379 Phil. 903 (2000).
- [55] *Id.* at 913-914.
- [56] CA Decision, rollo, p. 10.
- [57] RTC Decision, p. 4 (CA rollo, no pagination).
- [58] *Id.*
- [59] *People v. Piosang*, 710 Phil. 519, 527 (2013).
- [60] *People v. Desalisa*, 451 Phil. 869, 876 (2003).
- [61] RTC Decision, p. 4 (CA rollo, no pagination).
- [62] 783 Phil. 806 (2016).
- [63] *People v. Arcillas*, 692 Phil. 40, 54 (2012).

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