

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. YYY, ZZZ (ACQUITTED), AND XXX, ACCUSED;

G.R. No. 264132, August 13, 2025

Ponente: ROSARIO, J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): <https://batas.org/library/g-r-no-264132/>

ROSARIO, J.:

The law punishes the mere receipt of persons, regardless of the victim's consent or knowledge, for purposes of trafficking.

This is an ordinary appeal[1] of the Court of Appeals (CA) Decision,[2] which affirmed the Regional Trial Court (RTC) Decision[3] convicting XXX of qualified trafficking in persons under Section 4(a) in relation to Section 6(a) of Republic Act No. 9208,[4] as amended by Republic Act No. 10364.[5]

I

XXX and her co-accused, YYY and ZZZ, were charged with the above crime in an Information which reads:

That on or about [July 1,] 2014, and for sometime thereafter, in the municipality of xxxxxxxxxxxx,[6] province of Isabela, Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the said accused, conspiring, confederating together and helping one another, did then and there, willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, recruit, transport, hire, receive, keep and maintain the person of [AAA], a minor of 17 years old, for the purpose of prostitution and sexual exploitation under the pretext of employing her as Guest Relation Officer (GRO) at the "xxxxx Bar", owned by the accused [XXX], located at xxxxxxxxxxxx, in said municipality.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[7]

Upon arraignment, all accused pleaded not guilty. Trial thereafter ensued.

The CA adopted the prosecution's version of the facts as summarized in the People's Brief:

On [July 1,] 2014, [AAA], who was then only [17] years old, was accompanied by her friends, BJE and [ZZZ], to xxxxx Bar located at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, Isabela. Said beer house is owned and managed by [XXX] and [YYY].

Thereat, [AAA] was introduced to [XXX], who immediately hired [her] as a [GRO]. . . tasked to oversee the bar. As a GRO, [AAA] was forced by [XXX] to entertain male customers by sitting and drinking liquors with them, with which [AAA] earns a commission of [PHP 50.00] per bottle.

Also, during her employment as a GRO, [AAA] would be peddled by [XXX] to go out to a hotel, and have sex with male customers after they pay [XXX] a "bar fine." [AAA] would refuse going out with the customers and have sex with them but [XXX] would compel her as the customer already paid for her.

[AAA] continued to work at xxxxx Bar until [July 7,] 2014, when she was rescued by police operatives. . . after receiving information that [AAA], a minor, is working in a beer house and being peddled to male customers for sex.[8]

As for the defense's version of the facts, the CA quoted the following statements from the Brief for Accused-Appellant:

[XXX] denied the charge against her. She maintained that she is not the owner, manager, or supervisor of xxxxx bar, but a [GRO] who entertains customers. On June 30, 2014, AAA and BJE went to her boarding house to drink with [YYY], the owner of the boarding house. AAA inquired where she was working, and she told her that she works in xxxxxxxxxxxx. AAA then asked her if she could also work there and [XXX] answered that she should ask [YYY]. On July 1, 2014, while she was cleaning. . . [YYY], AAA, and BJE arrived. [YYY] then told her that AAA and BJE will work at the bar, and left. On July 7, 2014, while she was sitting with a customer, policemen arrived and brought her to the Police Station.

[ZZZ] likewise denied the charge against her. She did not know anyone from xxxxx Bar. AAA was introduced to her by BJE as the latter's girlfriend [on] March 30, in a nipa hut, where they would usually hangout. The last time they met was on June 30, 2014.

[YYY] denied the charge against him and maintained that he does not own any videoke bar in xxxxxxxxxxxx. He does not know AAA and his co-accused.[9]

The RTC convicted XXX and YYY of the crime charged. The pertinent portion of its Decision reads:

Based on the definition of trafficking in persons, prostitution and sexual exploitation and the enumeration of acts of trafficking in persons, [XXX] and [YYY] performed all the elements in the commission of the offense when AAA was hired [as a GRO], but was made to sit and drink intoxicating liquor with male customers and was brought out for sex after the male customers paid the bar-fine [sic] to [XXX].

The act of requiring AAA to sit and drink with male customers for a fee and the fact that [XXX] after receiving the bar-fine [sic] from male customers of the xxxxx Bar, she allowed AAA to be brought outside for flesh services. This is sexual exploitation and prostitution.

The prosecution was able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that [YYY] and [XXX] committed the offense of trafficking in persons, qualified by the fact that AAA was a child.

....

WHEREFORE... judgment is hereby rendered CONVICTING accused [YYY] and [XXX] of the crime of Qualified Trafficking in Person. . . SENTENCING each of them to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and to pay a fine of [PHP 2 million].

Further, they are hereby ordered solidarily to pay AAA [PHP] 500,000.00 as moral damages and [PHP] 100,000.00 as exemplary damages or a total of [PHP] 600,000.00 plus [12%] thereof per annum as interest from April 28, 2015 until fully paid.

For failure of the prosecution to prove her guilt beyond reasonable doubt, accused [ZZZ] is hereby ACQUITTED from the offense charged.

....

SO ORDERED.[10]

On appeal, XXX argued in her Brief[11] that the trial court gravely erred in convicting her of the crime charged despite the prosecution's failure to prove all its elements and for failing to give credence to her defense of denial in light of the weakness of the prosecution's case. As to the first element, XXX claims that she was not the owner, manager or supervisor of xxxxx Bar, but merely an ordinary employee who worked as a GRO in said establishment. Neither did she have the authority to recruit, hire, or maintain anyone. In fact, AAA admitted that it was ZZZ and BJE who invited, recruited, and helped her get a job at xxxxx Bar. She was also not employed to

work as a sex worker or for purposes of sexual exploitation, but to oversee the store. She also never stated that XXX pimped her out to customers. XXX claimed that she had nothing to do with AAA's personal decision to go out with whoever she likes.

In its Brief,[12] the Office of the Solicitor General, representing the People, contended that XXX's guilt for qualified trafficking was proven beyond reasonable doubt through the consistent, straightforward, and unequivocal testimony of the victim who testified that it was XXX, the owner and the manager of xxxxx Bar, who recruited or hired her as a GRO to allegedly oversee the bar and serve beer to its male customers. Furthermore, XXX's exploitative intent to peddle AAA was manifested when the latter declared that it was XXX who forced her to drink with male customers and go out with them to have sex after XXX received payment for the service. Thus, XXX's defense of denial must crumble in light of AAA's categorical and positive identification of XXX.

Accused YYY, on the other hand, failed to file his brief, resulting in the dismissal of his appeal.[13]

The CA affirmed the RTC Decision with modification as follows:

The appeal is DENIED. The [RTC] Decision. . . finding appellant [XXX] guilty beyond reasonable doubt of [qualified trafficking in persons]. . . is [AFFIRMED] with MODIFICATION, in that all monetary awards shall earn interest at the legal rate of [6%] per annum, from the date of finality of this Decision until fully paid.[14]

Hence, this appeal.

II

Accused-appellant was charged and convicted of qualified trafficking in persons under Section 4(a), in relation to Section 6(a), of Republic Act No. 9208, as amended by Republic Act No. 10364, which provide:

Section 4. Acts of Trafficking in Persons. – It shall be unlawful for any person, natural or juridical, to commit any of the following acts:

(a) To recruit, obtain, hire, provide, offer, transport, transfer, maintain, harbor, or receive a person by any means, including those done under the pretext of domestic or overseas employment or training or apprenticeship, for the purpose of prostitution, pornography, or sexual exploitation[.]

. . . .

Section 6. Qualified Trafficking in Persons. — The following are considered as qualified trafficking:

(a) When the trafficked person is a child[.][15]

The Court has enumerated the elements of trafficking in persons under Republic Act. No. 9208, as amended, as follows:

(1)

The act of "recruitment, obtaining, hiring, providing, offering, transportation, transfer, maintaining, harboring, or receipt of persons with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, within or across national borders;"

(2)

The means used include "by means of threat, or use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person, or, the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person;"

(3)

The purpose of trafficking includes "the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual

exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal or sale of organs."[16]

As correctly found by the RTC and affirmed by the CA, accused-appellant was the one who hired or received the victim. This was duly proven by the victim's testimony, to wit:

Q:

Who helped you to look for a job, Madam witness?

A:

[ZZZ] and [BJE], sir.

....

Q:

And when they were not able to find you a job, what did you do next, if there be any?

A:

We rode a tricycle going to xxxxxxxxxxxx sir,

....

Q:

And can you please tell us the reason why you proceeded to xxxxxxxxxxxx[?]

A:

To work in a bar, sir.

....

Q:

And were you able to know the name of the owners of this bar, Madam witness?

A:

I know, sir.

....

A:

[YYY], sir.

....

Q:

And when you proceeded to xxxxx Bar, were you able to talk to [YYY]?

A:

No, sir, I just heard.

Q:

Can you please tell us what did you hear?

A:

They talked to each other, sir.

Q:

To whom did he talk to, Madam witness?

A:

[XXX], sir.[17]

Accused-appellant herself confirmed the victim's testimony when she testified that YYY brought the victim to her:

Q: On July 1, 2014, where were you?

A: At the xxxxx Bar, the place of Kuya [YYY], ma'am.

....

Q: What happened, if there is any[?]

A: Kuya [YYY], [AAA] and [BJE] arrived ma'am.

Q: Did [YYY] tell you anything?

A: Kuya [YYY] informed me that [AAA] and [BJE] will work with me at the bar, ma'am.[18] (Emphasis supplied.)

When cross-examined, the victim affirmed that she was introduced to accused-appellant, who eventually "employed" her:

Q:

To whom were you introduced?

A:

To [XXX], sir.

....

Q:

And it is [XXX] who employed you and not [ZZZ] and [BJE], am I correct?

A:

Yes. sir.[19] (Emphasis supplied.)

On re-direct examination, the victim reconfirmed that it was accused-appellant who hired her:

Q:

And it was [XXX] who hired you to work in xxxxx Videoke Bar , is that correct?

....

A:

Yes, sir.[20] (Emphasis supplied.)

Her testimony is corroborated by the testimony of Senior Police Officer II (SPO2) Roberto Rañeses who rescued the victim from the bar, to wit:

Q:

So, there were only [three] Police Officers who went with you in going to xxxxxxxxxxxx?

A:

Yes, sir.

....

Q:

And what happened there when you reached xxxxxxxxxxxx?

A:

Upon reaching the xxxxx Videoke Bar, we saw [AAA] sitting at a table drinking wine together with a customer, sir.

Q:

And when you have seen the minor, what did you do, Mr. Witness?

A:

When we saw her and she was identified by her mother, we asked the minor if who owns or managing the xxxxx Videoke Bar, sir.

Q:

And what was her reply, Mr. Witness?

A:

She pointed to the Manager who was then present thereat in the name of [XXX], sir.

....

Q:

And were you able to come to know who is the owner of that establishment during your investigation, Mr. Witness?

A:

We asked the Manager [XXX] who owns that bar and she answered it was [YYY], sir

Q:

How about the victim, did she identify the owner of that xxxxxx establishment?

A:

When we asked the minor, she only answered that the manager and the owner is [XXX], sir.[21]

Even assuming that accused-appellant is not the registered owner of xxxxx Bar, the same does not make her any less guilty. While We held in *People v. Villanueva*[22] that being the registered owner per se does not make one criminally liable for the acts of trafficking committed in the establishment, the acts that constitute trafficking in persons may be performed by persons who may or may not be registered owners of establishments.[23] The law punishes the mere receipt of persons, with or without the victim's consent or knowledge, for purpose of trafficking. Despite not being the owner of the bar, it is clear from the above testimonies that accused-appellant was made responsible for the hiring and supervision of the victim. In fact, the victim pointed to her as the manager of the bar.[24]

As regards the second element, while the victim agreed during cross-examination that she was not forced to work at the bar[25] and that she could say no if she did not want to work there,[26] We held in *People v. De Dios*[27] that trafficking in persons may be committed also by means of taking advantage of the person's vulnerability as a minor, as in this case. This element was further achieved through the financial gain for the illicit services that were provided by the victim to the customers.

The third element was likewise duly established by the prosecution. The victim's testimony reveals that the purpose of the trafficking was prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, to wit:

Q:

Aside from overseeing the store, can you please tell us what other job did you do there, Madam witness?

A:

"Pa-table", sir.

Q:

When you say "pa-table", what do you mean by that, Madam Witness?

A:

To sit with the customers, sir.

Q:

Who asked you to sit with a customer?

A:

[XXX], sir.

Q:

When did that happen, Madam witness, if you can recall?

A:

On July 1, 2014, sir.

....

Q:

And you said that you sat with a customer, is that correct?

A:

Yes, sir.

THE COURT:

Q:

What was that customer doing when you sat beside him?

A:

He placed his arm around my shoulder, sir.

....

Q:

Can you please tell us where did he go?

A:

He brought me to a hotel, sir.

Q:

[W]hy did he bring you to a hotel, Madam witness?

A:

To use my womanhood, sir.

Q:

And how did he do that, Madam witness?

A:

He forced me, sir.

....

INTERPRETER: Make it of record that the witness is crying.

....

Q:

So, you were brought from xxxxx Bar to xxxxxxxxxxxx by your customer, Madam witness?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

Did your employer know that you were with your customer to [sic] the hotel, Madam witness?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

Who is that owner you are referring to who knows that you will be brought to a hotel. Madam witness?

A:

[XXX], sir.

....

Q:

[W]hy do you know that [XXX] knows that you will be brought to a hotel?

A:

They talked with each other, sir.

Q:

Who talked to each other, Madam witness?

A:

My customer and [XXX], sir.

....

Q:

[W]hat did they talk about, Madam witness?

A:

My customer told her that he will take me out, sir.

....

Q:

Can you please tell us the reply of [XXX]?

A:

She just instructed him to return me, sir.

....

Q:

And what happened there, Madam witness?

A:

We had a [sic] sex, sir.

Q:

And did you gain anything in going to your customer in a hotel, if any[?]

A:

[PHP 1,500.00], sir.

Q:

Who gave you that amount of [PHP 1,500.00]?

A:

The customer handed to my employer, sir.

Q:

To whom in particular, Madam witness?

A:

To [XXX], sir.

....

Q:

You were there in the xxxxx Bar for how many days?

A:

[One] week, sir.

Q:

And you did not receive any salary, is that correct?

A:

None, sir.

Q:

But your services were not free according to you, is that correct?

A:

No, sir.

Q:

Will you please explain to us why you claimed that [your] services were not free and yet you do not receive any salary?

A:

Every time I earned commission, the Manager will take hold of it, sir.

Q:

What commission?

A:

Bar fine, sir.

....

Q:

What is that "bar fine"?

A:

They will take you out and bring you to a hotel, sir.

....

Q:

You mentioned about commission. Where do you get that commission?

A:

From the manager, sir.

Q:

Where will the manager get the commission given to you?

A:

From the customers, sir.

....

Q:

And you never received your commission from [XXX], is that correct, Madam witness?

A:

None, sir.

Q:

Because your friends were the ones who took you out from the bar, is that correct, Madam witness?

....

A:

Yes, sir.[28]

Accused-appellant's claim that she never pimped the victim out to customers and had nothing to do with her personal decision to go out with them is clearly belied by the fact, that the victim's customer first spoke to accused-appellant before taking the victim to the hotel, and accused-appellant instructed him to return her to the bar afterward. Even more telling is that fact that accused-appellant received the supposed commission or bar fine

that the customer paid for the victim's services.

ACCORDINGLY, the appeal is DISMISSED. The July 2, 2020 Decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 10297 is AFFIRMED. Accused-appellant XXX is found GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of qualified trafficking in persons. She is sentenced to suffer the penalty of life imprisonment and to pay a fine of PHP 2 million. She is further ORDERED to pay the victim PHP 500,000.00 as moral damages and PHP 100,000.00 as exemplary damages, both of which shall earn legal interest at 6% per annum from the finality of this Decision until fully paid.

SO ORDERED.

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

[*] In line with SC Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, as mandated by Republic Act No. 9208 in trafficking in persons cases, the names of the parties and their relatives, and other personal circumstances that may tend to establish their identities, are made confidential to protect their privacy and dignity.

[1] Rollo, pp. 3-5.

[2] Id. at 8-27. The July 2, 2020 Decision in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 10297 was penned by Associate Justice Walter S. Ong and concurred in by Associate Justices Mariflor P. Punzalan Castillo and Victoria Isabel A. Paredes of the Fifth Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

[3] CA rollo, pp. 54-60. The December 8, 2017 Decision in Criminal Case No. 23-2530 was penned by Judge Bernabe B. Mendoza of Branch 23, Regional Trial Court, xxxxxxxxxxxx, Isabela.

[4] Republic Act No. 9208 (2003), Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003.

[5] Republic Act No. 10364 (2012), Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012.

[6] Geographical location is concealed pursuant to SC Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015.

[7] RTC Records, p. 1.

[8] Rollo, p. 11.

[9] Id. at 12.

[10] CA rollo, pp. 58-60.

[11] Id. at 40-53.

[12] Id. at 66-78.

[13] Rollo, p. 8, n.1.

[14] Id. at 26.

[15] Republic Act No. 9208, sec. 3(b), as amended, defines a child as "a person below [18] years of age or one who is over [18] but is unable to fully take care of or protect himself/herself from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition."

[16] People v. Casio, 749 Phil. 458, 472-473 (2014) [Per J. Leonen, Second Division].

[17] TSN, AAA, May 24, 2016, pp. 11-13.

- [18] TSN, XXX, September 5, 2017, p. 8.
- [19] TSN, AAA, August 25, 2016, p. 13.
- [20] Id. at 29.
- [21] TSN, SPO2 Roberto Rañeses, November 8, 2016, pp. 7-8.
- [22] People v. Villanueva, 795 Phil. 349 (2016) [Per J. Perez, Third Division].
- [23] Id. at 361.
- [24] TSN, AAA, September 5, 2017, p. 13.
- [25] TSN, AAA, August 25, 2016, p 12.
- [26] Id. at 13.
- [27] 832 Phil. 1034, 1044 (2018) [Per J. Reyes, Jr., Second Division].
- [28] TSN, AAA, May 24, 2016, pp. 15-34.

ABOUT BATAS.ORG

Study smarter at BATAS.org

The Philippine bar review and law-school companion built around how your brain actually remembers.

The complete Philippine law library - free for everyone.

More than 100,000 Supreme Court decisions, Republic Acts, and executive issuances - full-text searchable, browsable by category and year, and always free. No paywall, no login. This PDF came from it.

Audio case-brief lectures.

Any decision becomes a podcast-style lecture - facts, issues, ruling, and doctrine - with read-along highlighting and a hands-free presentation mode. Study while commuting, working out, or resting your eyes.

Bar review built on the science of memory.

Complete, sequenced courses for all eight bar subjects, narrated like podcasts and reinforced with retrieval practice and spaced review - the study techniques with the strongest evidence behind them.

The full law-school curriculum.

One subscription unlocks the entire J.D. curriculum - every subject, every lesson, with your progress tracked down to the paragraph so you can pick up exactly where you left off, on any device.

Mock exams that tell you where you stand.

Timed multiple-choice exams graded instantly, with per-subject score breakdowns and focus suggestions that point you at your weakest topics first.

A study planner that keeps you on pace.

Set your schedule and BATAS tells you every day whether you are on track for bar day - and exactly which lesson to take next.

Start free at <https://batas.org>

The law library is free forever - and your first lesson is one click away.

The text of this document is an official public record and remains in the public domain. Formatting, presentation, and compilation © 2026 batas.org.

Downloaded free from the batas.org Law Library. Share it freely - the library is free for every law student, bar reviewee, and practitioner.