

LORNA GUEVARRA Y REYES, PETITIONER, VS. PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, RESPONDENT.

G.R. No. 278542, March 03, 2026

Ponente: KHO, JR., J.

Read online (full-text search, related cases, audio case brief): <https://batas.org/library/g-r-no-278542/>

KHO, JR., J.:

Assailed in this Petition for Review on Certiorari under Rule 45[1] of the Rules of Court is the Decision[2] of the Court of Appeals (CA), which affirmed with modification the Decision[3] of , Regional Trial Court (RTC), . The RTC found petitioner Lorna Guevarra y Reyes (Guevarra) guilty beyond reasonable doubt of child abuse as defined and penalized under Section 3(b)(1) and (2) in relation to Section 10(a) of Republic Act (R.A.) No. 7610.

The Facts

This case stemmed from an Information[4] filed before the RTC, charging petitioner with child abuse. The accusatory portions of the said Information read:

That on or about February 3, 2012, in , Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the said accused, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously commit acts of child abuse against [AAA], 7 years old, by then and there uttering "Pag hindi ka nagsalita sasampalin kita" and at the same time violently clamping her mouth by her finger, pinching and pushing her and uttering "Umalis ka na sa harapan ko ayaw ko makita mukha mo", and thereafter she was made to stand up carrying her heavy bag, raise her arms with her shoes on her hands and placing an envelope in between her inner knees, causing as a consequences [sic] for the said minor child to have a school phobia and post-traumatic stress disorder as per psychological report, thereby debasing, degrading, or demeaning the intrinsic worth and dignity of the said child as a human being which is prejudicial to the child's development.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[5]

On arraignment, Guevarra entered a plea of not guilty to the charge. Pre-trial conference proceeded and trial on the merits ensued.[6] The prosecution presented AAA[**] and Dr. Ma. Lourdes Evangelista (Dr. Evangelista) as its witnesses while the defense presented the following: (1) Guevarra, (2) BBB, (3) Perlle Baclig (Baclig), and (4) Marites Sanchez (Sanchez).[7]

The prosecution alleged that at around 8:00 a.m. of February 3, 2012, Guevarra scolded her student, AAA, who was then 7 years old and a Grade 1 student at Elementary School in , in front of the class because of her unfinished seatwork. AAA tried to explain that her classmate CCC erased her answers, but Guevarra suddenly shouted and uttered "Pag hindi ka nagsalita, sasampalin kita." Afterward, Guevarra, with glaring eyes, shoved AAA's mouth with her finger (sinungaling), pinched AAA's left waist and pushed her. Guevarra then angrily said "Umalis ka na sa harap ko. Ayaw kong makita ang mukha mo." This made AAA felt scared and humiliated. Worse, Guevarra directed AAA to remain standing with her heavy backpack, both shoes on her hands while keeping her arms outstretched in the air. Guevarra likewise inserted a brown envelope in between AAA's legs and made her hold the position for three hours in front of the class. AAA went home after class, but she only told her mother about the maltreatment she suffered at Guevarra's hands the following day. This incident prompted AAA

not to return to class and was forced to transfer school.[8]

After, Dr. Evangelista, a psychiatrist at Mental Hospital, examined AAA on several occasions and found that AAA was manifesting acute stress disorder, with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and apprehension related to the trauma suffered in Guevarra's class.[9] In 2019, Dr. Evangelista again examined AAA due to behavioral changes. It was then found out that AAA developed a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which was linked to Guevarra's maltreatment of her in class.[10] Then, Dr. Evangelista put AAA on anti-depressants.[11]

In defense, Guevarra admitted calling AAA's attention in class on the date of the incident due to an unfinished seatwork, but nonetheless, denied all the other acts imputed to her. Guevarra further alleged that the filing of this case arose due to a number of misunderstandings between her and AAA 's mother i.e., Guevarra calling the attention of AAA's mother because of AAA's frequent absences and her consequent inability to comply with school requirements, and without Guevarra's permission, AAA's mother confronted AAA's classmate about a pencil allegedly taken from AAA.[12]

Guevarra's former student and AAA's classmate, BBB, testified that on the date and time of the incident, Guevarra talked to AAA about her unfinished seatwork. When AAA did not answer, Guevarra told AAA to sit down. Thereafter, the entire class proceeded with their lesson.[13]

Bacilig, the principal of Elementary School from November 2007 to January 2012 and Sanchez, the President of the General Parents-Teachers Association in Elementary School on the date of the incident, both attested to the good moral character of Guevarra as a teacher.[14]

The RTC Ruling

In a Decision[15] dated February 21, 2022, the RTC found Guevarra guilty beyond reasonable doubt of child abuse, and accordingly, sentenced her to suffer imprisonment for an indeterminate period of seven years, four months and one day to eight years; and ordered to pay PHP 10,000.00 fine with subsidiary imprisonment. Furthermore, Guevarra is ordered to pay AAA PHP 20,000.00 as moral damages.[16]

In convicting Guevarra, the RTC found that the clear, categorical and unequivocal testimony of AAA, bolstered by Dr. Evangelista's testimony, has established beyond reasonable doubt that Guevarra did the acts complained of with the intention to debase, demean and degrade AAA's integrity and worth as a child which constituted emotional and psychological trauma. The RTC further observed that AAA was able to spontaneously demonstrate in open court how Guevarra perpetrated the acts. While AAA may not have suffered physical injuries, Dr. Evangelista observed that she was scarred for life. In imposing the penalty in its maximum period, the RTC considered Guevarra, being a public teacher, as a public employee.[17]

Guevarra moved for a new trial but the same was denied in an Order[18] dated April 5, 2022. Dissatisfied, Guevarra appealed to the CA.[19]

The CA Ruling

In a Decision[20] the CA affirmed the RTC's conviction with the following modifications: (a) lowered the indeterminate period of imprisonment to four years, two months and one day of prision correccional, as minimum, to six years, eight months and one day of prision mayor, as maximum; (b) additionally imposed the penalty of fine of PHP 15,000.00; (c) decreased the award of moral damages to PHP 10,000.00; (d) further awarded PHP 30,000.00 as civil indemnity; and (e) imposed 6% interest per annum to all the monetary awards, including the fine, from the finality of decision until full payment.[21]

In upholding the RTC findings, the CA held that the physical and emotional maltreatment suffered by AAA was not only degrading, debasing, and demeaning to her worth and dignity, but also equally prejudicial to her

development as a human being. The CA, thus, held that the RTC aptly gave credence to the testimonies of AAA and Dr. Evangelista.[22] Nonetheless, the CA held that the RTC erroneously imposed the penalty as it failed to conform to the Indeterminate Sentence Law, there being no modifying circumstance present. The CA, however, decreased the award of moral damages in accordance with *Patulot v. People*.[23] The award of civil indemnity was based on *Fernandez v. People*[24] and the imposition of fine was based on Section 31(f) of R.A. No. 7610.[25]

Guevarra sought reconsideration which was denied in a Resolution[26] dated November 26, 2024. Hence, this Petition.

The Issue Before the Court

The issue before the Court is whether the CA correctly upheld Guevarra's conviction for child abuse.

The Court's Ruling

The Petition is without merit.

Section 10 of R.A. No. 7610 reads:

Section 10. Other Acts of Neglect, Abuse, Cruelty or Exploitation and Other Conditions Prejudicial to the Child's Development. –

(a) Any person who shall commit any other acts of child abuse, cruelty or exploitation or to be responsible for other conditions prejudicial to the child's development including those covered by Article 59 of Presidential Decree No. 603, as amended, but not covered by the Revised Penal Code, as amended, shall suffer the penalty of prision mayor in its minimum period.

Corollary, Section 3(b) of R.A. No. 7610 provides that "child abuse" refers to the maltreatment, whether habitual or not, of a child which includes any of the following:

Section 3. Definition of Terms. –

. . . .

(b) "Child abuse" refers to the maltreatment, whether habitual or not, of the child which includes any of the following:

- (1) Psychological and physical abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment;
- (2) Any act by deeds or words which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being;
- (3) Unreasonable deprivation of his basic needs for survival, such as food and shelter; or
- (4) Failure to immediately give medical treatment to an injured child resulting in serious impairment of his growth and development or in his permanent incapacity or death.

In *XXX v. People*,[27] the Court reiterated that to be held liable for child abuse, the infliction of physical injuries against a minor intended to discipline or correct the wrongful behavior of the child must be attended by the specific intent to debase, degrade, or demean the intrinsic worth and dignity of the child. The circumstances of the case, or the reasonableness of the disciplinary measures employed to correct a child's misbehavior may be considered in determining the presence of such intent to debase, degrade or demean the intrinsic worth and dignity of the child.[28] Debasement is defined as the act of reducing the value, quality, or purity of something; degradation, on the other hand, is a lessening of a person's or thing's character or quality; while demean means to lower in status, condition, reputation, or character.[29]

Based on the foregoing, the Court is convinced that the CA aptly upheld Guevarra's conviction. The Court notes that AAA was punished only because of her unfinished seatwork. AAA, in fact, explained to Guevarra that it was CCC, AAA's classmate, who erased her seatwork. However, Guevarra still imposed an unreasonable disciplinary measure on AAA thereby causing her PTSD. To repeat, Guevarra suddenly shouted and uttered "Pag hindi ka nagsalita, sasampalin kita." Thereafter, Guevarra, with glaring eyes, shoved AAA's mouth with her finger (sinungalngal), pinched AAA's left waist and pushed her. Guevarra then angrily said "Umalis ka na sa harap ko. Ayaw kong makita ang mukha mo." Guevarra's utterances and physical maltreatment was coupled by directing AAA to remain standing with her heavy backpack, both shoes on her hands while keeping her arms outstretched in the air, and a brown envelope inserted in between AAA's legs for three hours in front of class[30] which worsened the situation.

These, to the Court's mind, establishes Guevarra's intent to debase, degrade and demean AAA's worth and dignity. Indeed, if Guevarra's only intention is to discipline AAA, Guevarra could have resorted to other commensurate means. Being scolded, shoved in the mouth, and told to stand for three hours with both shoes on her hands while keeping her arms outstretched in the air for almost three hours is undeniably not only humiliating, more so, a traumatizing experience, especially for a seven-year-old minor like AAA. Guevarra's maltreatment is undeniably prohibited under the Family Code,[31] which has expressly banned the infliction of corporal punishment by a school administrator, teacher, or individual engaged in childcare exercising special parental authority.[32]

Given the foregoing, the Court finds no reason to deviate from the findings of the RTC, as affirmed by the CA, as there is no indication that it overlooked, misunderstood, or misapplied the surrounding facts and circumstances of the case. In fact, the RTC was in the best position to assess and determine the credibility of the witnesses presented by both parties, and hence, due deference should be accorded to the same.[33] As such, Guevarra's conviction for child abuse must be sustained.

As regards Guevarra's proper penalty, suffice it to say that the CA correctly sentenced her to suffer the penalties of imprisonment for an indeterminate period of four years, two months and one day of prision correccional, as minimum, to six years, eight months and one day of prision mayor, as maximum, and a fine of PHP 15,000.00 pursuant to Section 31(f) of R.A. No. 7610.[34] However, the Court deems it proper to delete the imposition of legal interest on the fine. This is considering that while fine is among the pecuniary liabilities which may be imposed against a convict, it is not considered as a civil liability from which an award of interest may spring.[35]

As to civil liability ex delicto, the Court rules that pursuant to prevailing jurisprudence,[36] Guevarra should be ordered to pay AAA PHP 20,000.00 as moral damages, PHP 20,000.00 as exemplary damages, and PHP 20,000.00 as temperate damages, all of which shall earn legal interest at the rate of 6% per annum from the finality of this decision until full payment.

ACCORDINGLY, the instant petition is DENIED. The Decision dated March 20, 2024 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR No. 47117 is hereby AFFIRMED with MODIFICATIONS. Petitioner Lorna Guevarra y Reyes is found GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of child abuse as defined and penalized under Section 3(b)(1) and (2) in relation to Section 10(a) of Republic Act No. 7610. She is sentenced to suffer the penalties of four years, two months and one day of prision correccional, as minimum, to six years, eight months and one day of prision mayor, as maximum, and to pay a fine of PHP 15,000.00; and is ordered to pay the victim, AAA, the amounts of PHP 20,000.00 as moral damages, PHP 20,000.00 as exemplary damages, and PHP 20,000.00 as temperate damages, all with 6% interest per annum from the finality of this decision until full payment.

SO ORDERED.

Leonen, SAJ. (Chairperson), Lopez, and Villanueva, JJ., concur.

Lazaro-Javier,[*] J., on official business.

[*] On official business.

[1] Rollo, pp. 12-25.

[2] Id. at 136-160. The March 20, 2024 Decision in CA-G.R. CR No. 47117 was penned by Associate Justice Marie Christine Azcarraga-Jacob and concurred in by Associate Justices Bonifacio S. Pascua and Raymond Joseph G. Javier of the Sixteenth Division, Court of Appeals, Manila.

[3] Id. at 31-59. The February 21, 2022 Decision in Criminal Case No. DH-3167-14 was penned by Presiding Judge Ma. Lourdes Eltanal-Ignacio of , Regional Trial Court, , .

[**] In line with Amended Administrative Circular No. 83-2015, as mandated by Republic Act No. 7610, 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.

[4] Id. at 29.

[5] Id.

[6] Id. at 99.

[7] Id. at 100-103.

[8] Id. at 32.

[9] Id. at 138.

[10] Id. at 139.

[11] Id. at 34.

[12] Id. at 139.

[13] Id. at 139-140.

[14] Id. at 140.

[15] Id. at 31-59.

[16] Id. at 59.

[17] Id. at 39-58.

[18] Id. at 61-66.

[19] Id. at 68-69.

[20] Id. at 136-160.

[21] Id. at 159.

[22] Id. at 147-155.

[23] 845 Phil. 439 (2019) [Per J. Peralta, Third Division].

[24] 843 Phil. 745 (2018) [Per J. Leonen, Third Division].

[25] Rollo, p. 159.

[26] Id. at 170-172.

[27] 956 Phil. 237 (2024) [Per J. J. Lopez, Second Division].

[28] Id. at 248.

[29] See *Calaoagan v. People*, 850 Phil. 183, 194 (2019) [Per J. Gesmundo, First Division].

[30] Rollo, pp. 100-103.

[31] See FAMILY CODE, art. 233:

The person exercising substitute parental authority shall have the same authority over the person of the child as the parents.

In no case shall the school administrator, teacher or individual engaged in childcare exercising special parental authority inflict corporal punishment upon the child. (n)

[32] *Rosaldes v. People*, 145 Phil. 77, 86 (2014) [Per J. Bersamin, First Division].

[33] *Peralta v. People*, 817 Phil. 554, 563 (2017) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, Second Division].

[34] A fine to be determined by the court shall be imposed and administered as a cash fund by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and disbursed for the rehabilitation of each child victim, or any immediate member of his family if the latter is the perpetrator of the offense.

[35] *People v. Dapitan*, 911 Phil. 114, 124-125 (2021) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, Second Division].

[36] *XXX v. People*, 956 Phil. 237, 252 (2024) [Per J. J. Lopez, Second Division], citing *Rosaldes v. People*, 745 Phil. 77, 93 (2014) [Per J. Bersamin First Division].

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.