

Level of Legal Awareness on Bullying and Oral Defamation Among Residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur: Basis for a Community Education Program

Rheyman P. Anor

Central Ilocandia College of Science and Technology

Publication history: Received: April 10, 2026; Revised: May 11, 2026; Accepted: May 15, 2026

Email of Corresponding Author: rheymananor05141991@gmail.com

Abstract

This study determined the level of legal awareness on bullying and oral defamation among residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur and used the findings as a basis for a proposed community education program. Specifically, the study assessed respondents' awareness of common behaviors such as teasing, spreading rumors, public humiliation, joking insults, and whether these are recognized as punishable acts under existing laws. The study was anchored on legal awareness and legal literacy concepts which emphasize the importance of understanding laws in promoting responsible social behavior. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed involving thirty (30) residents selected through convenience sampling. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire composed of demographic information and a legal awareness assessment measured through a four-point Likert scale. Frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were utilized to analyze the data. Findings revealed that respondents were generally only slightly aware of bullying and oral defamation. While some respondents recognized that bullying can cause psychological harm, many failed to identify teasing, spreading rumors, public humiliation, insulting remarks, jokes, and name-calling as behaviors that may already constitute punishable acts under Republic Act No. 10627 and the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines. The study concluded that there is a gap between legal provisions and community practices, resulting in the normalization of harmful behaviors due to limited legal awareness. Consequently, the study recommended the implementation of a structured community education program, barangay seminars, information drives, and the distribution of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials to improve legal literacy and promote responsible communication among residents. The study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions by promoting legal awareness, responsible citizenship, and peaceful community relationships. The findings contribute to social and community sustainability by encouraging respectful communication, reducing harmful social behavior, and strengthening legal and civic responsibility within the community.

Keywords: Bullying, Community Education Program, Legal Awareness, Oral Defamation, Public Humiliation, Responsible Communication, Rural Communities, Slander, Social Behavior, Verbal Abuse

1. Introduction

Bullying and oral defamation are common social issues that continue to exist in many communities, particularly in rural areas where informal communication and traditional social norms strongly influence daily interactions. Behaviors such as teasing, public shaming, insulting remarks, and spreading harmful statements are frequently perceived as ordinary or harmless without full recognition of their legal implications. In the Philippines, bullying is addressed under Republic Act No. 10627 (2013), which protects individuals, particularly students, from severe or repeated acts that may cause physical or emotional harm. Likewise, oral defamation or slander is punishable under the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines (Philippines, 1930) for statements that damage a person's reputation. Despite the existence of these legal provisions, community awareness remains limited, especially in municipalities such as Alilem, Ilocos Sur. Anecdotal observations in Barangay Poblacion suggest that many residents do not fully recognize that certain everyday interactions may already constitute punishable acts under the law. Related literature emphasizes that bullying and oral defamation are frequently misunderstood or normalized, especially in communities with limited legal awareness. Republic Act No. 10627 identifies bullying as severe or repeated written, verbal, or electronic acts that cause physical or emotional harm. Acts such as teasing, name-calling, and public humiliation are included within the scope of bullying. These behaviors are often normalized within communities despite their harmful psychological and social effects (Villanueva, 2018). The Revised Penal Code of the Philippines penalizes oral defamation or slander, referring to spoken statements that damage a person's dignity or reputation. Legal scholars explain that insults, jokes, and casual remarks may already be considered defamatory when they harm another person's honor. However, public awareness of these legal provisions remains low among ordinary citizens.

Studies on legal awareness further indicate that knowledge of laws significantly influences human behaviors (Santos, 2019; Ylagan, 2021). Individuals who understand legal consequences are less likely to engage in harmful or unlawful acts, while lack of awareness contributes to the normalization of gossiping, public shaming, verbal abuse, and other negative social behaviors. Community-based studies also reveal that rural communities often treat teasing and joking insults as part of ordinary social interaction even when such behaviors may already constitute bullying or oral defamation. Literature additionally highlights the importance of legal literacy programs in promoting social responsibility (Torres & Cruz, 2020). Seminars, information campaigns, and educational materials improve public understanding of legal consequences and encourage respectful communication practices. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines also emphasizes community education in protecting human dignity and preventing harmful behaviors such as verbal abuse and public humiliation (Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, n.d.). At the local level, residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur experience social interactions shaped by traditional communication practices where teasing, rumors, and joking insults are commonly tolerated. Such practices contribute to limited recognition of behaviors that may already violate legal standards. Nationally, the Philippines has established legal mechanisms to address bullying and oral defamation through Republic Act No. 10627 and the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines. These laws reflect the government's effort to protect individuals from emotional, psychological, and reputational harm. However, the effectiveness of these laws depends greatly on the public's level of awareness and understanding. Globally, bullying, verbal abuse, and defamation are recognized as social problems that affect mental health, social relationships, and community well-being. Many societies continue to promote legal literacy and responsible communication as essential strategies for reducing conflicts and protecting human rights. The persistence of these issues highlights the universal need for education programs that strengthen awareness of respectful and lawful social behavior. The study is conceptually anchored on the principle that legal awareness influences individual behavior and social responsibility. Literature in criminology suggests that individuals who understand the legal consequences of harmful actions are less likely to engage in unlawful conduct. Conversely, lack of legal knowledge contributes to the normalization of behaviors such as gossiping, public humiliation, teasing, and verbal abuse. The study also reflects the concept of legal literacy, which emphasizes educating communities about laws that protect human dignity and social harmony. Educational interventions, including seminars, workshops, and information campaigns, are viewed as effective approaches for improving awareness and encouraging responsible communication practices (Ylagan, 2021). Although laws addressing bullying and oral defamation already exist in the Philippines, literature indicates that awareness at the community level remains insufficient. Many residents in rural communities continue to perceive teasing, public shaming, and insulting remarks as normal social behaviors despite their possible legal implications. Existing studies largely focus on educational institutions or general legal awareness, leaving limited localized research concerning community understanding of bullying and oral defamation in rural barangays. This gap highlights the need for localized assessment of legal awareness among residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur. Determining the extent of awareness can provide a basis for developing a community education program that promotes legal literacy, responsible communication, and prevention of harmful social behaviors.

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on its focus on legal awareness, responsible communication, and community well-being. SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being is relevant because bullying, verbal abuse, and public humiliation may negatively affect psychological and emotional health. Increasing awareness can contribute to safer and healthier social environments. SDG 4 – Quality Education is reflected through the proposed community education program aimed at improving legal literacy and public understanding of bullying and oral defamation. Educational initiatives can strengthen responsible citizenship and informed decision-making. SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions is also applicable because the study promotes awareness of laws, protection of human dignity, and prevention of behaviors that may lead to interpersonal conflict or legal violations. Enhancing legal literacy supports peaceful communities and respect for justice systems. The study contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainability by promoting awareness, responsible communication, and social accountability within the community. From a public health sustainability perspective, improved awareness of bullying and oral defamation may help reduce emotional distress, psychological harm, and social conflict among residents. In terms of educational sustainability, the proposed community education program supports continuous learning and legal literacy, enabling residents to better understand the consequences of harmful behavior and the importance of respectful communication. The study also contributes to socio-economic and community sustainability by encouraging harmonious social relationships and reducing conflicts that may disrupt community cooperation and development. Additionally, it supports policy and governance sustainability by reinforcing the importance of implementing laws and community-based educational initiatives that protect human dignity and promote responsible citizenship.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive quantitative research design to determine the level of legal awareness among respondents regarding bullying and oral defamation. The design enabled the researcher to describe and assess the respondents' level of awareness based on their responses to the survey questionnaire.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur. The locale was selected to assess the community's level of legal awareness regarding bullying and oral defamation within a rural setting where traditional communication practices and informal social interactions are common.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consisted of thirty (30) residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur. Participants included both male and female residents who were 18 years old and above.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The respondents were selected through convenience sampling. Residents who were available and willing to participate during the data collection period were included in the study. The sampling procedure allowed the researcher to gather data efficiently from community members who met the study's criteria.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of two parts: the demographic profile of respondents, which included age and gender, and the legal awareness assessment containing ten statements related to bullying and oral defamation or slander. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert Scale with the following interpretations: 4 for Highly Aware, 3 for Aware, 2 for Slightly Aware, and 1 for Not Aware.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from barangay officials prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents before the administration of the questionnaire to ensure voluntary participation and proper understanding of the study's purpose.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean to determine the respondents' level of legal awareness regarding bullying and oral defamation. The weighted mean was interpreted using the following scale ranges: 3.25–4.00 as Highly Aware, 2.50–3.24 as Aware, 1.75–2.49 as Slightly Aware, and 1.00–1.74 as Not Aware.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Legal Awareness on Bullying and Oral Defamation

3.1.1 Awareness on Bullying

The findings revealed that respondents were generally only slightly aware of bullying, with an overall mean of 2.37. Respondents showed awareness that bullying can cause psychological harm, but many demonstrated limited recognition that teasing, spreading rumors, and public humiliation are forms of bullying and may be punishable under Philippine law. The results indicate that many residents continue to perceive behaviors such as teasing and public humiliation as normal or socially acceptable interactions rather than harmful acts. This limited awareness reflects a gap between legal definitions and community practices. Despite the existence of Republic Act No. 10627, many individuals still fail to recognize these behaviors as bullying, particularly outside educational settings. The findings support literature emphasizing that lack of legal awareness contributes to the normalization of harmful social behavior.

3.1.2 Awareness on Oral Defamation

The study also revealed that respondents were only slightly aware of oral defamation, with an overall mean of 2.18. Many respondents did not fully recognize that insulting statements, jokes, false remarks, and name-calling may already constitute punishable acts when they damage a person's reputation. Awareness regarding the legal consequences of oral defamation remained low among the respondents. These findings suggest that many residents lack sufficient understanding of the legal implications of verbal expressions, particularly when used casually or humorously. Although the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines penalizes oral defamation or slander, community awareness remains insufficient. The findings support existing literature which explains that verbal abuse and defamatory remarks are often normalized within traditional communication practices, especially in rural communities (Villanueva, 2018).

3.2 Community Understanding of Harmful Social Behaviors

The findings showed that respondents had limited understanding of behaviors such as teasing, spreading rumors, joking insults, and public humiliation. Many residents failed to identify that these common interactions may already fall under bullying or oral defamation as defined by law. The results reflect a disconnect between existing legal provisions and everyday social behavior within the community. Cultural norms and habitual communication styles appear to contribute to the acceptance and normalization of verbal insults, gossiping, and public shaming. The findings further suggest that

residents may unintentionally engage in acts that could lead to interpersonal conflicts or legal consequences due to insufficient legal knowledge and awareness.

3.3 Implications for Community Education and Legal Awareness

The study revealed a clear need for increased legal awareness among residents regarding bullying and oral defamation. The low level of awareness observed among respondents highlights the necessity for interventions that can improve understanding of responsible communication and lawful social behavior. The findings support the implementation of a structured and localized community education program focused on legal literacy. Educational activities such as seminars, information campaigns, and community discussions may help residents better distinguish between acceptable social interaction and punishable conduct. Increased awareness may also contribute to promoting respect, accountability, and responsible communication within the community while reducing the risk of harmful behavior and legal violations.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that residents of Barangay Poblacion, Alilem, Ilocos Sur have a low level of legal awareness regarding bullying and oral defamation. Although respondents demonstrated some understanding of the harmful effects of bullying, many remained unaware that behaviors such as teasing, spreading rumors, joking insults, and public humiliation may already constitute punishable acts under Republic Act No. 10627 and the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines. Similarly, awareness of oral defamation was limited, indicating that many residents do not fully recognize that verbal expressions, even when intended as humor or casual remarks, may have legal consequences when they damage a person's reputation. The findings reveal a disconnect between existing legal provisions and community practices, resulting in the normalization of harmful behaviors due to insufficient legal awareness.

The study recommends the implementation of a structured community education program to improve awareness of bullying and oral defamation, including their legal definitions, examples, and consequences. Barangay officials are encouraged to conduct seminars, workshops, and information drives to educate residents about the legal implications of teasing, public shaming, and defamatory statements. The development and distribution of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials written in simple language are also recommended to strengthen public understanding. Collaboration between local schools, youth organizations, and barangay officials may further promote awareness among young individuals, while residents should be encouraged to practice respectful and responsible communication to prevent harmful behavior and possible legal violations. Future studies may also expand the number of respondents and include other barangays in Alilem to further validate the findings of the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

REFERENCES

- Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines. (n.d.). *Human rights education and promotion*. <https://chr.gov.ph/>
- Philippines. (1930). *Revised Penal Code of the Philippines* (Act No. 3815). The Lawphil Project. https://lawphil.net/statutes/acts/act1930/act_3815_1930.html
- Republic Act No. 10627. (2013). *Anti-Bullying Act of 2013*. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/09/12/republic-act-no-10627/>
- Santos, J. P. (2019). Legal awareness and social behavior among rural communities in the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Criminology*, 14(1), 45–58.
- Torres, M. L., & Cruz, R. A. (2020). Community legal literacy and responsible communication practices. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9(2), 112–120.
- Villanueva, C. D. (2018). Bullying, verbal abuse, and community awareness: A criminological perspective. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 7, 88–96.
- Ylagan, E. F. (2021). Legal literacy programs and their impact on community behavior. *Philippine Social Science Review*, 73(2), 130–145.