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Research Article

Rape Incidence and Response Mechanisms in the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) of T'boli Municipality: A Public Safety and Security Study

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the rape incidence and response mechanism of Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) in T'boli Municipality. Anchored on BESTLEAPS/HE framework, this area study utilizes a qualitative method through key informant interviews (KII) to seventeen (17) informants composed of local government officials, law enforcement personnel from the Philippine National Police, community leaders, indigenous elders, healthcare providers, educators, and school counsellors to determine the public safety and security area profiles, features, or characteristics of the Municipality of T'boli in relation to rape incidence; identify the prevailing public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of the BESTLEAPS/HE domains; and to determine the primary safety and security threats concerning rape incidence and assess them through SWOC Analysis. Findings show that rape, specifically intra-familial and domestic sexual violence, is alarmingly prevalent and apparently underreported due to geographic isolation, poverty, weak infrastructure, cultural taboos, and institutional limitations. The SWOC analysis, on the other hand, underscores systemic gaps in law enforcement, justice systems, health and psychosocial services, and community safety mechanisms, particularly in indigenous communities. Cultural norms, fragmented services, unregulated transportation, and technological deficiencies further impede prevention and response. The study proposes multi-sectoral, culturally sensitive, and community-driven strategies such as enhancing police presence, establishing survivor-centered reporting mechanisms, conducting gender-sensitivity training, expanding public awareness campaigns, and investing in infrastructure and technology. At its core, the study calls for a kind of leadership and governance that listens to and works alongside the people particularly the most at-risk sectors in T'boli, anchored in the indigenous philosophy of Diwa ng Lunan, which honors the connection between people, place, and shared community spirit.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The baseline safety, security, and peace are fundamental for the growth, stability, and well-being of any society. But, in many regions, the rampant crime, violence, and insufficient policing of public order continue to threaten emerging social, economic, and political order, keeping citizens enveloped in fear and turmoil (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2023).

The realization of the Filipino people's long-term vision of a *matatag, maginhawa, at panatag na buhay para sa lahat* rests upon an environment that is safe, secure, and orderly. The government must ensure that all Filipinos feel secure to walk and travel around all places in the country, without fear of harm to themselves and their property, and can go about their business, economic, and social pursuits. Moreover, as the country pursues greater economic development, the government must safeguard national interests, territory, and sovereignty (National Economic and Development Authority, 2017).

Villafuerte (2025) attributed the emerging synergies within the public enforcement of safety policies to strong community partnerships, dedicated support from local executives, as well as effective service delivery from the police. All of these factors have greatly contributed to the enhancement of the safety culture in the region. This group tended to see the government's dedication to maintaining public safety and the cooperation between law enforcement and the community more favorably. Even with these advancements, there are still key problems that need to be solved to ensure that a safe and secure setting is fully achieved. Problems within the community engagement domain, such as a lack of representation from marginalized populations, and within organizational support, like a lack of adequate funding and poor cooperation between agencies, continue to weaken the long-term success and expansion of these projects. Furthermore, law enforcement practices in certain regions still focus on responding to crimes as opposed to preventing them, and there are still problems of a lack of training, inadequate equipment, and slow response times within policing practices. According to T'boli MPS Crime Statistics (2024), crime statistics for T'boli from 2022 to 2024 show a tendency of varying offenses, with crimes against individuals being the most alarming. With 31 recorded incidents during the three years, rape continues to be one of the most common and enduring of these crimes. The number of reported rape cases rose from 10 in 2022 to 12 in 2023 before dipping significantly to 9 in 2024. Despite this minor decline, rape remains the most frequently reported violent crime against persons, surpassing murder (10 cases in total) and homicide (2 cases in total). The absence of reported cases of rape with homicide suggests that while sexual violence is occurring, it is not frequently escalating into fatal assaults. However, this does not diminish the severity of the issue.

Additionally, there was a minor increase in acts of lasciviousness, which frequently point to a pattern of sexual violence and predatory conduct, from two cases in 2022 and 2023 to three cases in 2024, for a three-year total of seven incidents. This increasing tendency indicates that sexual offenses including non-consensual actions that may not qualify as rape under the law remain a significant issue in the community. Additionally, the data shows a substantial link between child abuse incidents

and sexual offenses. Eight occurrences of violations of the Anti-Child Abuse Law occurred between 2022 and 2024, indicating that children are still at a heightened risk of abuse and exploitation. These numbers might be connected because a sizable fraction of rape victims are children.

Nonetheless, the dearth of cases involving robbery with rape or kidnapping with rape suggests that the majority of rape cases that are reported are unrelated to other serious crimes. In line with global trends where the majority of rape cases involve acquaintances, family members, or community members rather than strangers, this shows that attackers may be known to victims rather than random assaults.

It should be highlighted that a thorough public safety evaluation is urgently needed in T'boli, South Cotabato, given the rising incidence of security issues, particularly rape instances. The municipality is known for its multicultural terrain, which includes Christian settlers and other immigrant populations in addition to indigenous groups, especially the T'boli people. Although fascinating, this cultural diversity poses problems for public safety initiatives, community cohesion, and law enforcement procedures. T'boli's Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) in particular deal with extra challenges because these isolated areas frequently have poor access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and law enforcement. Law enforcement response and crime prevention efforts are hampered by the absence of infrastructure in these regions, which increases their susceptibility to crime and violence. Furthermore, a culturally aware approach to law enforcement is necessary to ensure that indigenous practices are honored while advancing the rule of law due to the junction between traditional leadership structures and contemporary legal systems.

This study assesses the current public safety and security conditions in the Municipality of T'boli, South Cotabato, with emphasis on the incidence of rape and the mechanisms in place to address it. Guided by the BESTLEAPS/HE framework, the research seeks to identify the prevailing issues, threats, and contextual challenges that contribute to rape cases, especially in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs). It further aims to determine the socio-cultural, economic, legal, environmental, and institutional dimensions influencing these incidents. The study also evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) of existing responses, proposing localized, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive strategies to enhance public safety and strengthen rape prevention and response mechanisms in the municipality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Public Safety and Security Conditions of the Area according to BESTLEAPS/HE

The study's key leaders are those who are categorized as program implementers, are recognized as data managers, and have direct access to the information required for the study. Significant figures who have played a crucial role in driving change and addressing the municipality's social, political, and economic challenges; particularly in public safety include the Municipal Mayor or the duly authorized representative, the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Municipal Social Welfare



Office, Punong Barangay, school guidance counsellors, and school heads, representative from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Municipal Health Officer, and Tribal Leaders.

2.2. Environmental condition

T'boli is situated on the hinterland plateaus and valleys surrounding Lake Maughan and Mount Parker, with a topography that is predominantly mountainous, hilly, and rolling. The municipality is geographically categorized into uplands, hilly lands, and highlands, with only 7.17% of its area classified as flat to nearly undulating land; primarily used for agriculture and considered alienable and disposable (Municipal Development Council, 2023). These environmental conditions, particularly the remoteness and inaccessibility of highland and upland communities, significantly contribute to the vulnerability of residents to sexual violence, including rape. Isolated terrains, inadequate infrastructure, and minimal surveillance provide secluded areas where such crimes may occur undetected, delaying victim assistance and law enforcement response (UN Women, 2021; CHR, 2020).

The scarcity of essential safety infrastructure, such as street lighting, secure transportation terminals, and accessible roads, further compounds the risks, especially in scattered settlements where emergency response is severely delayed or unavailable (Plan International, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2021). In addition, T'boli's agriculture-based economy often requires women and children to work in remote plantations and farms, where the absence of supervision increases their exposure to harm. The influx of seasonal and transient laborers without adequate community integration or background checks may also heighten security risks (DSWD, 2022).

Law enforcement visibility is hindered by the geographic dispersion of households, making patrolling and quick response difficult (DILG, 2022). Culture, norms and traditional mediation practices further complicate matters, as survivors often face pressure to resolve rape cases within their communities, leading to significant underreporting. Fear of social stigma, victim-blaming, and exclusion discourages many from seeking justice, perpetuating a culture of silence and impunity (Guerrero, 2022). Collectively, these factors highlight how the unique environmental and socio-cultural context of T'boli exacerbates public safety challenges, particularly in addressing and preventing rape in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas.

2.3. Socio-cultural structure

The socio-cultural structure of the T'boli community plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes, behaviors, and responses to rape and gender-based violence. As one of the indigenous groups in the Philippines, the T'boli maintain deeply rooted traditional gender norms, where men are predominantly seen as leaders and providers, while women are relegated to domestic and caregiving roles (UNICEF, 2021). This patriarchal system fosters power imbalances that increase women's vulnerability to abuse and restrict their capacity to assert their rights. Customary practices such as community-based conflict resolution, often facilitated by tribal elders, are preferred over formal legal channels. While intended to preserve harmony,

these mechanisms frequently result in informal settlements, such as financial compensation or forced marriage, rather than criminal accountability, thereby undermining survivors' access to justice (Commission on Human Rights, 2020; DSWD, 2022). Moreover, the T'boli's strong kinship networks further contribute to the cultural silence around rape, as survivors often fear social stigma, rejection, or retaliation; especially when perpetrators are relatives or influential community members (Plan International, 2020). Low levels of formal education and limited legal literacy also prevent many community members from understanding their rights and the available institutional mechanisms for redress (UN Women, 2021). Many cases go unreported due to mistrust in law enforcement and a prevailing belief that justice should be handled within the community (OECD, 2021). In addition, indigenous spiritual beliefs can influence perceptions of sexual violence, with some interpreting such incidents as fate or divine punishment, which discourages survivors from seeking legal intervention (UNICEF, 2021).

2.4. Transportation system

The transportation system in T'boli heavily relies on habal-habal (motorcycle taxis), which are the primary means of reaching remote barangays and rugged upland areas where conventional vehicles cannot easily operate due to the challenging terrain. While habal-habal provides vital mobility, especially for residents in geographically isolated communities, its informal, unregulated nature presents significant safety concerns. The absence of formal licensing, safety inspections, and passenger protection protocols exposes riders, particularly women and children to risks of harassment, assault, and sexual violence during travel (DSWD, 2022).

Although Public Utility Vans (PUVs) operate within the locality, their routes primarily connect the town center to adjacent municipalities, offering limited coverage for intra-municipal trips. As a result, many residents in upland and hilly areas have no alternative but to depend on habal-habal operators, most of whom function independently without registration or background checks (CHR, 2020). This lack of regulatory oversight creates an accountability gap, making it easier for perpetrators to evade identification or prosecution. Furthermore, the absence of streetlights, law enforcement visibility, and surveillance infrastructure such as CCTV cameras along key transportation routes further compounds the risks faced by commuters, particularly during night travels.

2.5. Legal, law, and order

In response to the need for gender equality, human rights protection, and the empowerment of individuals in choosing their life partners, the Municipality of T'boli has enacted Municipal Ordinance No. 198 s. 2023; an ordinance adopting the anti-child marriage code of the Municipality of T'boli (MO 198, 2023). This ordinance is particularly significant given the deeply rooted cultural practice of arranged marriages among indigenous communities, where family elders or tribal leaders traditionally arrange unions based on familial alliances, economic benefits, or social status rather than the free will of the individuals involved.



2.6. Economic condition

Tboli possesses significant potential to develop its tourism sector by leveraging its natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and active community engagement. Attractions such as the mountainous terrain, Bakngeb River Cave, Hidak Falls, and the picturesque Lake Holon serve as major draws for tourists, providing opportunities to stimulate local economic growth and create employment (Department of Tourism, 2020; Reyes, 2021). Furthermore, T'boli's fertile soil and favorable climate support robust agricultural productivity, which not only ensures food security but also provides a source of income for local farmers (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022).

However, an increase in tourist arrivals may impact public safety by potentially escalating criminal activities. Tourism growth can create opportunities for offenders to exploit unsuspecting visitors, with crimes such as theft, scams, and pickpocketing often reported in high-traffic areas (UNWTO, 2019; National Police Commission, 2020). It is important to note, though, that not all tourist destinations experience heightened crime rates, especially where effective security measures are implemented to mitigate such risks.

2.7. AFP, PNP, and Other LEAs/Allied Agencies

The Philippine National Police (PNP), which maintains a police station in the municipality, is principally responsible for maintaining law and order in Tboli, South Cotabato. The PNP is in charge of upholding local public safety, preventing crime, and preserving peace and order. Law and order in Tboli is largely upheld by the AFP, other law enforcement organizations, local authorities, and barangay leaders in addition to the PNP. They collaborate closely with law enforcement on matters about disaster preparedness, public safety, and crime prevention. However, the effectiveness of law enforcement and community safety may be impacted by the municipality's poor police to community ratio. The establishment of municipal executive orders and ordinances controlling public safety and anti-criminality programs helps to lessen this.

2.8. Political condition/situation

Local political rivalries can lead to political instability when competing groups prioritize their own interests over the collective well-being of the community, often disrupting governance and development efforts (Kawanaka, 2001). In T'boli Municipality, varying public perceptions about the effectiveness of the current administration reflect a complex political landscape. Nonetheless, despite these differences, there have been no reported cases of politically motivated incidents in the area, suggesting a relatively stable and peaceful political environment.

2.9. Scientific and technological

The accessibility of telecommunication services, particularly reliable cellular signals, greatly benefits law enforcement, the community, and the business sector by facilitating efficient communication networks. Recognizing the critical role of continuous cellular and internet connectivity, the Philippine National Police (PNP) can strengthen its public safety efforts by leveraging these technologies to enhance information sharing,

emergency response, and community engagement (Mendoza *et al.*, 2020).

However, some barangays in T'boli still struggle with poor reception, which hinders efficient communication and the police's ability to respond quickly in emergencies. Inadequate ICT infrastructure makes these problems worse by making it more difficult to access dependable technology services.

2.10. Health services and conditions

Despite having satisfactory healthcare access, T'boli lacks hospital facilities capable of providing specialized treatments, requiring residents to seek medical attention in nearby cities. This highlights the urgent need for advanced medical infrastructure within the municipality.

On a positive note, the municipality of T'boli boasts a high COVID-19 vaccination rate, demonstrating strong community awareness and a collective commitment to public health (Department of Health, 2023). This extensive vaccine coverage contributes to building herd immunity, effectively reducing the risk of severe illness and curbing virus transmission within the population (World Health Organization, 2021).

T'boli's healthcare system is composed of both public and private facilities, including the Moorhouse Mission Hospital, a 55-bed secondary care institution, alongside several barangay health stations and birthing clinics. The Municipal Health Center, as the main primary care provider, faces challenges due to incomplete facilities, which have led the Local Government Unit (LGU) to establish formal referral linkages with private and provincial hospitals to ensure continuity of care. Additionally, national programs such as the Doctors to the Barrio Program and the DOH Nurse Development Program have significantly enhanced healthcare delivery in the municipality by deploying skilled health professionals to underserved areas.

2.11. Education

The Department of Education (DepEd) actively supports initiatives that integrate cultural preservation with the pursuit of global competitiveness. In T'boli, this includes incorporating traditional crafts such as T'nalak weaving into the school curriculum, fostering both cultural pride and skill development among students (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2021). Alternative education programs specifically target the literacy needs of T'boli girls and women, empowering them through culturally relevant and inclusive learning approaches. These efforts underscore the community's dual commitment to academic excellence and cultural sustainability. Furthermore, comprehensive training programs have been implemented for educators, school counselors, and students focused on responding to disclosures of rape cases and promoting a safe, supportive learning environment (DepEd Tambayan, 2021).

Throughout Southeast Asia, stories of rape emerging from remote and economically struggling communities reveal a troubling pattern, especially among Indigenous peoples. In these areas, survivors of sexual violence frequently face cold indifference or deep-seated mistrust from the very institutions meant to protect them. These barriers not only hinder their path to justice but also trap them in recurring cycles of trauma and neglect. This pervasive skepticism contributes to chronic



underreporting and heightens the risk of further victimization. International literature highlights repeated instances where Indigenous women have been overlooked or dismissed by law enforcement agencies, an entrenched issue that discourages disclosure and perpetuates a cycle of impunity (Dhar, 2022; Shaw *et al.*, 2017). Although not unique to the Philippine context, analogous patterns may be observed in the T'boli municipality, where survivors of sexual violence contend with deep-rooted cultural stigma and insufficient institutional safeguards.

Shaw *et al.* (2017) documented the significant health and justice disparities Indigenous women experience in South and Southeast Asia, with structural factors exacerbating their susceptibility to gender-based violence. Similarly, Dhar (2022) found that survivors from Indigenous and marginalized communities often face institutional neglect and a lack of culturally appropriate support mechanisms, which undermines reporting and accountability.

In the Philippine context, empirical data on sexual violence among Indigenous youth remains limited. However, anthropological and rights-based research points out that entrenched cultural traditions and dominant societal expectations frequently dissuade survivors from pursuing formal legal remedies. Studies conducted by Macdonald (2004) and Gatmaytan (2007) on customary law and indigenous rights in the Philippines have shown that while Indigenous peoples exercise autonomy in dispute resolution, these mechanisms may not always align with national human rights frameworks or ensure adequate protection for victims of gender-based violence.

Noteworthy practices from other regions offer valuable insights. In a study focusing on community-based reproductive health programs, Ramos-Jimenez *et al.* (1999) emphasized the importance of training local healthcare providers to recognize and respond sensitively to cases of sexual and gender-based violence. These culturally informed approaches have proven instrumental in improving trust and case disclosures among vulnerable populations. Furthermore, ASEAN regional frameworks have stressed the necessity of integrated, community-led strategies grounded in accurate data to address gender-based violence in a more systematic and sustainable way (UN Women, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design to analyze the current conditions in T'boli, South Cotabato in terms of rape cases. This approach is particularly well-suited for examining complex, real-world issues as it acknowledges the subjective nature of public safety concerns, recognizes the diverse experiences of participants, and presents findings in a way that closely aligns with the perspectives of those directly affected (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017). The qualitative-descriptive design is rooted in naturalistic inquiry, offering flexibility in theoretical approaches, sampling techniques, and data collection strategies, making it an effective framework for studies in public safety, criminology, and community development (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

Through this approach, the study has explored the trends, law

enforcement effectiveness, environmental risks, and socio-cultural factors that contribute to security challenges in T'boli, South Cotabato. Given the context-specific nature of public safety issues, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to gather firsthand insights from law enforcement officers, local government officials, barangay leaders, community members, and victims. These qualitative methods allow for an in-depth understanding of the barriers to crime prevention, the effectiveness of existing policies, and the community's perceptions of security and law enforcement. Furthermore, this approach ensures that the study captures the lived realities of individuals directly affected by crime and public safety concerns, making the findings more authentic, contextually relevant, and actionable.

3.2. Research participants

Primary participants on this study included seventeen (17) local government officials, such as punong barangay and municipal administrator, who play vital roles in policy implementation and community governance. Law enforcement personnel from the Philippine National Police (PNP), were also involved to provide insights on crime prevention, reporting mechanisms, and operational challenges in the area.

Community leaders and indigenous elders from the T'boli people were included to offer culturally grounded perspectives on traditional conflict resolution, social norms, and community dynamics that impact the reporting and handling of rape cases. Their participation was critical in understanding the influence of indigenous practices and beliefs on public safety.

Healthcare providers, including medical officer who have contributed their expertise on victim support, medical response, and referral systems. Educators and school counsellors participated to shed light on the experiences of youth and women in educational settings, especially regarding awareness, prevention, and reporting of gender-based violence.

3.3. Selection criteria

Participants in this study were selected based on specific criteria to ensure their relevance and ability to provide meaningful information about public safety, security, and gender-based violence in T'boli. Primarily, the participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement or experience related to the study's focus. Relatively, participants were invited based on their willingness to share information voluntarily. Practical considerations such as availability during the data collection period and accessibility were also observed.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

In pursuing this study, the researchers have followed the steps and procedures in gathering the data of this study. The researcher secured approval from the agencies concerned to conduct interview. With the approval, the researchers scheduled the interview with the identified participants. During the interview, the nature and purpose of the study were explained by the researcher. The interview was audio recorded to ensure that accuracy of the responses. The audio recorded file was then transcribed for data analysis.

In analyzing the data, the researchers used thematic analysis



modelled from Braun and Clarke (2006) which involved involved six steps such as familiarizing the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. This approach allowed the researchers to comprehensively identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning and to ensure that themes emerged inductively from participant narratives.

3.5. Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical considerations throughout the conduct of the study to ensure the safety, protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Before data collection, all informants received a comprehensive briefing on the purpose, scope, and objectives of the study.

To safeguard confidentiality and privacy, responses were anonymized by assigning coded identifiers instead of using real names. Any personally identifiable information (PII) was removed from transcripts and reports to prevent potential risks of identification. Sensitive data were securely stored in encrypted digital files and password-protected systems, ensuring restricted access to authorized research personnel only (Patton, 2014). Additionally, interviews were conducted in private, neutral locations to create a safe and comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences openly. This study adhered to international and national ethical guidelines, including the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and the ethical standards outlined by research institutions and ethics review boards.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Prevailing public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of the BESTLEAPS/HE Domains

There are four (4) primary domains identified with has prevailing public safety and security issues, threats, and challenges related to rape cases. They are Environmental Conditions, Transportation System, Economic Conditions, and Scientific and Technological Factors.

4.2. Prevalence of domestic rape in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs)

Prevalence of domestic rape in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) indicates a significant rate of rape incidents occurring within homes in secluded, hard-to-reach communities.

Participants describe Prevalence of Domestic Rape in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) as environmental condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases. Rape incidents in GIDAs often involve intra-familial abuse, particularly incest, which is exacerbated by poverty, parental neglect, and the geographic isolation of households. These are considered enabling conditions where girls and women are much more prone to sustained violence, typically at the hands of relatives. The isolation characteristic of countryside regions allows such crimes to escape detection and remain unresolved. The sexual abuse of children and women within families is

reportedly a large, concealed violence, especially within rural and indigenous people due to a lack of infrastructure to report violence and the social silence surrounding these abuses (UNICEF Philippines, 2021). In a similar vein, Guerrero (2022) emphasizes that isolation, along with entrenched patriarchal values, creates an environment where domestic rape can continue unchallenged.

4.3. Geographical isolation and poor accessibility contribute to underreporting and increased vulnerability

The theme describes the way physical isolation and scarcity of infrastructure in certain areas; particularly in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) provide significant public safety challenges related to rape incidence.

Participants describe geographical isolation and poor accessibility contribute to underreporting and increased vulnerability as environmental condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases.

This implies that low reporting rates of rape in GIDAs are caused by geographic obstacles such steep terrain, a lack of accessible roads, and inadequate communication networks that make it difficult to reach law enforcement and support services. Here, victims, due to the potential for embarrassment, retribution, or a lack of knowledge about help resources, are likely to remain mute. Commission on Human Rights noted that lack of physical presence in a region as a direct result of an insufficient infrastructure for transcendence is linked to gender-based violence, which serves as a hurdle to solving in-depth sociocultural problems crippled by silence. The OECD observed this form of systemic invisibility, drawing attention to the fact that underreporting is a norm among marginalized populations due to entrenched suspicions of institutions and logistical barriers to obtaining legal or social aid available.

4.4. Dimly lit and scattered residences increase risk, especially for left-behind children

This theme emphasizes how the physical surroundings of rural or isolated places make people more susceptible to rape and other types of abuse, especially for kids who are frequently left alone.

Participants describe dimly lit and scattered residences increase risk, especially for left-behind children as environmental condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases.

In GIDAs, homes are often scattered across vast, poorly lit areas, making it difficult to monitor the movement of individuals, especially children left unsupervised at night. The absence of adults, usually as a result of labor migration or long work hours, exacerbates this environmental vulnerability. The likelihood of sexual violence is increased by these circumstances. According to a 2020 Plan International study, inadequate housing and lighting conditions raise the risk of abuse, especially when kids are left unattended. Furthermore, urban-rural studies by UN Women (2021) confirm that inadequate street lighting and isolated dwellings correlate with increased fear and actual incidence of sexual violence in rural communities.



4.5. Inconsistency and limited reach of community safety programs and awareness campaigns

This theme refers to the irregular implementation and insufficient coverage of initiatives aimed at preventing sexual violence and promoting public safety in remote or vulnerable communities.

Participants describe inconsistency and limited reach of community safety programs and awareness campaigns as environmental condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases when they said:

"I'm not very... well-informed about the specific areas... but there are occurrences, at the barangay level." (Translated) Participant 2.

"We talk about the problems in the community... parents should watch over their children so that rape cases can be prevented." (Translated) Participant 6.

"The barangay doesn't know if it happened inside the home... only when the DSWD reports it... that's how it is, ma'am." (Translated) Participant 9.

Many barangays in GIDAs lack consistent implementation of safety awareness campaigns and rape prevention programs. Coordination between local authorities, schools, and families is poor, and efforts are frequently reactive rather than preventive.

These gaps let abuse go unnoticed by delaying detection and intervention. Barangay-level interventions are frequently underfunded and irregular, especially in areas that are difficult to reach, according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD, 2022). This is consistent with research by the Asian Development Bank (2019), which noted that the effectiveness of community-based protection depends heavily on sustained training, supervision, and inter-agency collaboration, elements often missing in GIDA settings.

Table 1 shows the themes generated from the responses of the participants on the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of environmental condition.

It was revealed that prevalence of domestic rape in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs); geographical isolation and poor accessibility contribute to underreporting and increased vulnerability; dimly lit and scattered residences increase risk, especially for left-behind children; and inconsistency and limited reach of community safety programs and awareness campaigns were the description of the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges in the context of environmental condition related to rape cases in T'boli, South Cotabato.

Table 1. Public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of environmental condition

Organizing Theme	Global Theme
Rape incidents in GIDAs often occur within households and involve incest, driven by poor living conditions, parental absence, and geographic isolation. Such cases often include intimate male family members, revealing the concealed and persistent issue of domestic sexual abuse in isolated regions.	Prevalence of Domestic Rape in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs)
In GIDA communities, rape incidents frequently remain unreported because of difficult access, limited educational resources, and the scarce presence of law enforcement. In these remote areas, victims might not recognize the abuse, and incidents are rarely documented, exposing structural barriers to justice and protection.	Geographical Isolation and Poor Accessibility Contribute to Underreporting and Increased Vulnerability
Inadequate lighting, indifference to the needs of children, and feelings of isolation are common problems in GIDA communities, which can lead to dangerous circumstances. Vulnerability is increased, especially after dark, by the absence of adult supervision and the isolation of some areas, which increases the risk of abuse and violence.	Dimly Lit and Scattered Residences Increase Risk, Especially for Left-Behind Children
The prompt detection and prevention of rape cases may be hampered by a lack of awareness and cooperation within the barangay. These incidents often go unnoticed until they are reported by outside groups, highlighting shortcomings in parental watchfulness and community supervision.	Inconsistency and Limited Reach of Community Safety Programs and Awareness Campaigns

4.6. Limited evidence of transport-related rape incidents but recognized risk in remote areas

This theme refers to the discrepancy between official records and the perceived risks that people, particularly women and children, face when traveling in remote and unregulated areas. Participants describe limited evidence of transport-related rape incidents but recognized risk in remote areas as transportation system condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases.

Table 2 shows the theme generated from the responses of the participants on the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of transportation system.

It was revealed that limited evidence of transport-related rape incidents but recognized risk in remote areas; was the description of the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges in the context of transportation system related to rape cases in T'boli, South Cotabato.



Table 2. Public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of transportation system

Organizing Theme	Global Theme
Key informants recognize the possible risk even though there aren't any official reports or records of rape incidents involving transportation, particularly in isolated or loosely regulated areas where unofficial transportation services like "habal-habal" operate. This highlights the vulnerability of female commuters in remote or unsupervised areas and suggests a potential discrepancy between recorded data and community realities.	Limited Evidence of Transport-Related Rape Incidents but Recognized Risk in Remote Areas

While there is limited statistical data explicitly linking public or informal transport in remote areas to rape incidents, qualitative evidence suggests that the risk remains significant, especially in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). Particularly in isolated or mountainous areas, unregulated van services and habal-habal (motorcycle taxis) are examples of informal transportation methods that frequently function without supervision, putting women and children at risk while in transit (Asian Development Bank, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). There is a discrepancy between official crime records and community experiences, which can be caused by a lack of trust in authorities, fear of reprisals, or the normalization of risk (Commission on Human Rights, 2020).

Moreover, studies have pointed out that in rural or low-income settings, women often travel alone or during odd hours due to work or schooling, increasing their exposure to predatory behavior in isolated routes (Plan International, 2020; UN Women, 2021). The informal nature of rural transportation means that safety protocols, driver vetting, or tracking systems are often absent, unlike in urban public transport networks. Although these risks are frequently acknowledged in interviews and community dialogues, the absence of comprehensive monitoring systems in GIDAs contributes to a significant underestimation of transport-related gender-based violence.

4.7. Poverty as a root factor in sexual violence vulnerability

This theme refers to how economic hardship increases the risk of individuals; especially women and minors being exposed to sexual abuse or exploitation. In impoverished communities this often leaves people more vulnerable to predators.

Participants describe poverty as a root factor in sexual violence vulnerability as economic condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases when they said:

"...there are incidents... I can't directly say they are 'prostitutes,' but those working in red spot areas are minors... one of the factors why they enter that kind of livelihood is because of poverty..." (Translated) Participant 1

"Poverty is really the root cause... we have minor clients who are often just given money or food... they are brought to the banana plantation, and that's where they are exploited." (Translated) Participant 3

"It's possible; poverty has a huge impact... if the perpetrator offers them something, they can be easily persuaded." Participant 5

Poverty is a fundamental driver of vulnerability to sexual violence, particularly among women and minors in marginalized communities. Lack of access to protective environments, work opportunities, and education can force people especially young

girls into abusive situations like early marriage, transactional sex, or abuse by authority figures. According to UNICEF (2021), poverty is strongly associated with increased rates of sexual abuse and other forms of violence against children because it frequently reduces parental supervision and exposes children to more dangerous situations. According to the World Bank (2020), gender-based violence frequently becomes accepted in low-income households because victims may not have the financial resources to report, resist, or flee abusive situations.

It was revealed that poverty as a root factor in sexual violence vulnerability; economic dependence discouraging case reporting; and gaps in local implementation of economic empowerment for women; were the description of the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges in the context of economic condition related to rape cases in T'boli, South Cotabato.

4.8. Economic dependence discouraging case reporting

The theme on economic dependence discouraging case reporting refers to how victims of sexual violence, particularly within families or close relationships, often rely financially on the perpetrator. This dependence creates fear of losing financial support, or basic needs, leading many victims to remain silent or withdraw complaints rather than pursue legal action.

Participants describe economic dependence discouraging case reporting as economic condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases. One of the biggest obstacles to reporting sexual violence is financial reliance on offenders, especially in familial contexts. Victims may keep quiet or stop filing complaints out of fear of losing access to basic necessities, housing, or financial support. Financial insecurity deters many victims, particularly women, from seeking legal justice because they fear reprisals or destitution, according to research by the Commission on Human Rights (2020). Reporting the abuser may jeopardize the family's means of subsistence in cases of family-based abuse, trapping victims in a cycle of tolerance and silence. This pattern is reinforced by studies such as UN Women (2021), which emphasize that economic empowerment is essential in breaking the silence surrounding sexual violence.

4.9. Gaps in local implementation of economic empowerment for women

This theme refers to the lack or inconsistency of community-level programs aimed at improving women's financial independence. While national initiatives like 4Ps and SLP exist, some barangays still lack localized, fully implemented efforts; such as skills training, livelihood support, or access to capital limiting women's ability to escape abusive environments and



assert their rights.

Participants describe gaps in local implementation of economic empowerment for women as economic condition which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases when they said:

“None in LGU, it's like they are being reorganized... but no projects have been implemented yet. Nothing at the local level yet.” (Translated) Participant 2

“Actually ma’am, here in our area, the barangay rarely receives

incoming funds... what the barangay can only manage, sir, is feeding programs.” (Translated) Participant 17

“We have women’s associations and 4Ps... but mostly, the support comes from the national government.” (Translated) Participant 6

Table 3 shows the themes generated from the responses of the participants on the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of economic condition.

Table 3. Public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of economic condition

Organizing Theme	Global Theme
Respondents widely recognize poverty and unemployment as indirect yet significant drivers that increase the vulnerability of individuals, especially minors and women, to sexual exploitation and violence. The lack of opportunities pushes some into risky environments.	Poverty as a Root Factor in Sexual Violence Vulnerability
Due to financial constraints or their reliance on abusers, especially in families, victims frequently choose not to report sexual violence. Fear, inaction, and silence are caused by this economic barrier.	Economic Dependence Discouraging Case Reporting
While national programs like 4Ps and SLP exist, some barangays still lack localized, fully implemented economic initiatives tailored to empower women. There’s an ongoing need to build and sustain these programs.	Gaps in Local Implementation of Economic Empowerment for Women

4.10. Limited and uneven deployment of safety-related technology

This theme refers to the disparity in access to technologies like CCTV cameras, streetlights between central or urban areas and remote barangays. In geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs), the absence of these safety tools due to budget constraints, lack of infrastructure, or electricity access leaves communities more vulnerable to crime, including sexual violence.

Participants describe limited and uneven deployment of safety-related technology as scientific and technological factor which is a public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases.

Even though technological solutions like CCTV cameras and street lighting have been shown to be successful in preventing crime and facilitating quick responses in urban areas, their use in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) is still very limited. The main causes of this discrepancy are poor local funding, unstable electricity, a lack of technical staff, and inadequate infrastructure (Asian Development Bank, 2020). While rural and marginalized areas are frequently last in line for such investments, UN-Habitat (2021) asserts that fair access to safety infrastructure is essential to guaranteeing community security.

While central barangays in the Philippines enjoy the

advantages of contemporary surveillance systems and street lighting, many outlying areas are left in the dark, both literally and figuratively, making them more susceptible to crimes like theft and sexual assault (DILG, 2022). In addition to limiting law enforcement's capacity to prevent or adequately respond to incidents in GIDAs, this technological divide adds to a disproportionate sense of insecurity.

The risks for women and children in rural areas are further increased by the unequal distribution of safety technologies. According to a Plan International (2020) study, women are more afraid of violence when there are no streetlights or surveillance tools available, especially when

they are traveling or moving around their communities at night. In addition to technical fixes, addressing this gap calls for focused funding for rural development and gender-sensitive safety planning.

Table 4 shows the themes generated from the responses of the participants on the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the context of scientific and technological factor.

It was revealed that limited and uneven deployment of safety-related technology was the description of the public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges in the context of scientific and technological factors related to rape cases in Tboli, South Cotabato.

Table 4. Public safety and security issues, threats, or challenges related to rape cases in the scientific and technological condition

Organizing Theme	Global Theme
While safety technologies like CCTV and streetlights exist in central areas (e.g., Poblacion), deployment in remote barangays is hampered by budget constraints, lack of infrastructure, and poor electricity access. This discrepancy highlights a serious lack of equitable protection, particularly in GIDAs (geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas).	Limited and Uneven Deployment of Safety-Related Technology

Even though there are national programs like the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) and the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), their local implementation is frequently poor or uneven, especially in GIDAs. Targeted programs that specifically address women's economic needs like job placement assistance, microcredit availability, or vocational training are lacking in many barangays. Although national gender policies exist, there is still a significant gap in their conversion into locally tailored, sustainable interventions, according to the Asian Development Bank (2019). Women's capacity to defend their rights, leave abusive relationships, and actively engage in community defense systems is weakened by this lack of economic empowerment.

4.11. Primary safety and security threats concerning rape incidence and through SWOC analysis

The frequency of rape incidents, especially in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs), highlights pressing security and safety issues that call for thorough comprehension and calculated action. The main risks to victim safety are caused by the intricate interactions between systemic flaws, transportation, economic conditions, and environmental vulnerabilities. Through a SWOC analysis, this study identifies the internal strengths and weaknesses existing in T'boli, South Cotabato, as well as external opportunities and challenges that influence the effectiveness of prevention and response mechanisms of rape cases.

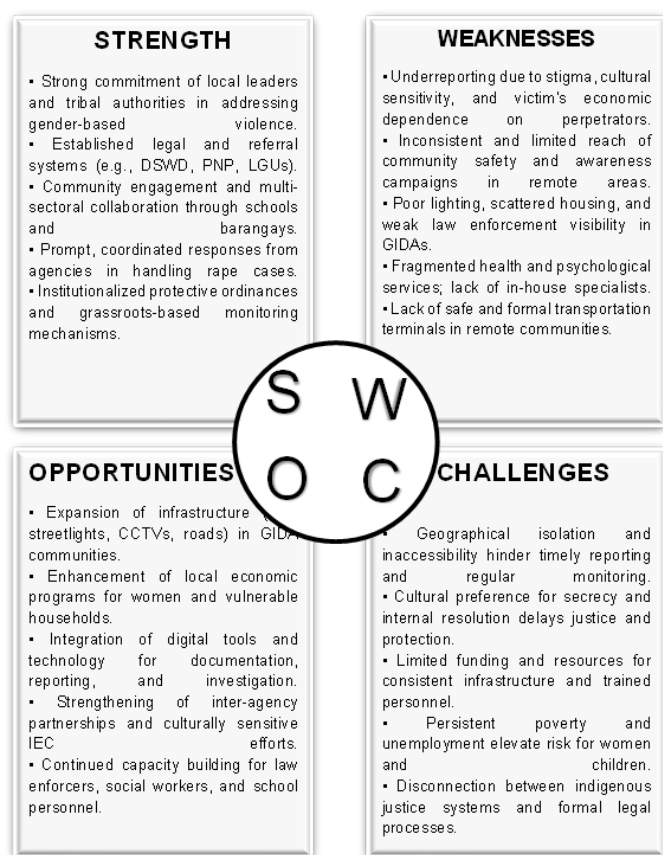


Figure 1. SWOC Analysis

The primary safety and security threats in the Municipality of T'boli related to rape case revealed underreporting remains a significant issue, driven by stigma, cultural sensitivity, and victims' economic dependence on perpetrators, which suppresses disclosure and justice-seeking behaviors. In remote and geographically isolated areas (GIDAs), where dispersed housing and inadequate lighting jeopardize safety and diminish law enforcement visibility, community safety and awareness campaigns frequently have a limited and irregular reach. Victims receive insufficient assistance during crucial stages of recovery due to fragmented health and psychological services and a lack of in-house specialists. Furthermore, the lack of official and secure transportation terminals in isolated communities raises risk exposure, exposing infrastructure deficiencies that have a direct impact on victim safety.

There are still issues that prevent prompt reporting and routine case monitoring, particularly geographic remoteness and limited accessibility, which let abuse go unchecked. Deep-rooted cultural preferences for secrecy and internal resolution delay formal justice and protection mechanisms, often leaving victims vulnerable. Limited funding and resources restrict the consistent deployment of necessary infrastructure and the hiring of trained personnel, weakening institutional capacity. Persistent poverty and unemployment elevate vulnerability among women and children, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation. Furthermore, the disconnection between indigenous justice systems and formal legal frameworks complicates case handling and victim support, underscoring the need for respectful integration of traditional and modern approaches to justice.

5. CONCLUSION

The main public safety and security problems associated with rape cases in T'boli are complex and include issues with the environment, the transportation system, the economy, and technology. Environmental elements that increase vulnerability, especially for women and children, include dispersed homes, poor lighting, and geographic isolation. The risks associated with the transportation system, particularly the unofficial and loosely regulated forms in rural areas, are generally recognized by the community but are mainly unknown. Economic factors, such as poverty and financial reliance on abusers, deter victims from reporting abuse, which feeds the cycle of impunity and silence. Timely detection, reporting, and investigation of cases are further hampered by technological gaps, such as the fragmented use of digital tools for evidence handling and the limited deployment of safety devices. An insufficient systemic response to sexual violence and widespread underreporting are caused by these interrelated factors.

Both the strengths such as dedicated local leadership, well-established legal frameworks, and active community engagement and the weaknesses such as cultural stigma, a lack of awareness campaigns, and inadequate infrastructure are highlighted by the SWOC analysis. There are chances to strengthen protective measures through interagency cooperation that is culturally aware, infrastructure upgrades, economic empowerment programs, and technology integration. Geographical barriers,

resource limitations, sociocultural norms that favor secrecy, and the gap between the formal and indigenous justice systems continue to be major obstacles, though.

It is advised that a multi-sectoral, culturally aware strategy be used to improve public safety and combat rape in GIDAs. Increasing police presence, enhancing transportation and infrastructure, and setting up community-based reporting and emergency response systems are important steps. The recommendations also emphasize the necessity of implementing safety features like safe community areas and solar-powered lighting, increasing education and gender-based violence prevention initiatives, regulating unofficial transportation, and offering survivors all-encompassing support. The use of digital tools like safety apps and hotlines to enhance reporting and response in remote areas is encouraged, as is economic empowerment through livelihood programs and regional women's initiatives.

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