

Interview 21: PHILIPPINES: Josie Obugia

Ms. Josie Obugia is a Bachelor of Arts major in Mass Communications (AB Mass Com) from the University of Mindanao, Davao City. She now lives in Manila working as an out-sourcing agent.

What do you think of the policing system of your country?

Based on my personal experience, most policemen lack a sense of urgency, especially if your complaints are about a robbery or something like that. If you know someone in their office (police station), they might treat you a bit better. Most of them would act better if there was a (video) camera, for instance in investigative TV shows like 'XXX' or 'Imbestigador' (two popular local television shows), they behave better during those times or when they are interviewed. My first experience (with the police) was when my necklace was snatched. The police showed no interest about my complaint. The second time was when I accompanied a friend who was complaining about a woman (an overseas job recruiter) to whom she had done business with. This woman was the one processing her visa for Qatar. After my friend gave her payment to her, she did not show up. So we had to report this to the police. It so happened that a mutual friend was close to someone at the police station where we reported so we were accommodated nicely. Yes, I think it has to be different. For me, they (the police) should treat all complaints seriously.

What do you think of the police's use of torture?

I saw in the news that there are some policemen who torture accused robbers and snatchers. There was even a policeman who was caught on video beating an accused person. He did not know that the neighbor of the accused had a video camera (and recorded the incident while he was beating the victim). This was reported to his chief officer who promised to investigate.

I don't think any kind of torture is good. It does not show respect for human life. A little force may be necessary, especially for stubborn guys; those who are accused of having weapons, or are physically stronger than the policemen, but not to the point of hurting them.

What is your idea of a good relationship between the police and citizens?

My idea of a good relationship between policemen and citizens is that the police officers have changed their image and that people can see that they can be trusted.

Follow-up question: How do you think they can "change their image"; how should the trust of the people be gained?

To be honest, I don't know how changing their image can be achieved. Maybe this could be done after a massive change of the whole police system, or maybe it should also start for the government. I'm not sure where to start. For me, the trust of the people can only be gained if we see even a little improvement.

If you have a problem, would you feel safe going to the police to complain?

To be honest, I'm not sure. I think I'd still go to the police just to have it (the complaint) documented. With the police themselves, yes, I still feel safe with them, especially when I go out at night to work (out-sourcing center agents like her work during nighttime or as they call it, the 'graveyard shift.')

When there is more police visibility, there is less crime! But I just don't have enough trust with them when it comes to investigating a complaint or solving murders.

Follow-up question: How would you reconcile, while you do not trust them in terms of investigating complaint, but you still report to them?

Maybe I am still hoping that there will come a time that these policemen will be fully equipped to solve cases and that is why I will still report to them for a police blotter (local term of recording complaints at the police station).

Is there a law against domestic violence in your country? If yes, is it well implemented? If not, what are the problems?

I'm honestly not aware if there is domestic violence law. But I'm aware that there is a women and children's helpdesk in every police station. They say that this is a helpdesk for abused women and children.

Follow-up question: Do you know of any rape victims, victims of sexual abuse or assault who made complaint to the police? What happened to their case/complaint?

I don't know anyone personally but I have seen victims on TV documentary shows. Most of the cases are solved with the help of those who are behind the show.

Follow-up question: When you say "solve", what do you mean?

Meaning the suspects was caught or convicted for their acts.

Finally, do you have any thoughts about the police that I have not asked?

I'm hoping that with the new administration (the Philippines held its general elections in May 2010 and has elected a new President, and appointed new officials in national and local positions), there will be improvement. I hope there will still be some good policemen.