

FIRST DIVISION

[A.C. NO. 6711, July 03, 2007]

MA. LUISA HADJULA, COMPLAINANT, VS. ATTY. ROCELES F. MADIANDA, RESPONDENT.

DECISION

GARCIA, J.:

Under consideration is Resolution No. XVI-2004-472 of the Board of Governors, Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), relative to the complaint for disbarment filed by herein complainant Ma. Luisa Hadjula against respondent Atty. Roceles F. Madianda.

The case started when, in an *AFFIDAVIT-COMPLAINT*^[1] bearing date September 7, 2002 and filed with the IBP Commission on Bar Discipline, complainant charged Atty. Roceles F. Madianda with violation of Article 209^[2] of the Revised Penal Code and Canon Nos. 15.02 and 21.02 of the Code of Professional Responsibility.

In said affidavit-complaint, complainant alleged that she and respondent used to be friends as they both worked at the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) whereat respondent was the Chief Legal Officer while she was the Chief Nurse of the Medical, Dental and Nursing Services. Complainant claimed that, sometime in 1998, she approached respondent for some legal advice. Complainant further alleged that, in the course of their conversation which was supposed to be kept confidential, she disclosed personal secrets and produced copies of a marriage contract, a birth certificate and a baptismal certificate, only to be informed later by the respondent that she (respondent) would refer the matter to a lawyer friend. It was malicious, so complainant states, of respondent to have refused handling her case only after she had already heard her secrets.

Continuing, complainant averred that her friendship with respondent soured after her filing, in the later part of 2000, of criminal and disciplinary actions against the latter. What, per complainant's account, precipitated the filing was when respondent, then a member of the BFP promotion board, demanded a cellular phone in exchange for the complainant's promotion.

According to complainant, respondent, in retaliation to the filing of the aforesaid actions, filed a COUNTER COMPLAINT^[3] with the Ombudsman charging her (complainant) with violation of Section 3(a) of Republic Act No. 3019,^[4] falsification of public documents and immorality, the last two charges being based on the disclosures complainant earlier made to respondent. And also on the basis of the same disclosures, complainant further stated, a disciplinary case was also instituted against her before the Professional Regulation Commission.

Complainant seeks the suspension and/or disbarment of respondent for the latter's

act of disclosing personal secrets and confidential information she revealed in the course of seeking respondent's legal advice.

In an order dated October 2, 2002, the IBP Commission on Bar Discipline required respondent to file her answer to the complaint.

In her answer, styled as COUNTER-AFFIDAVIT,^[5] respondent denied giving legal advice to the complainant and dismissed any suggestion about the existence of a lawyer-client relationship between them. Respondent also stated the observation that the supposed confidential data and sensitive documents adverted to are in fact matters of common knowledge in the BFP. The relevant portions of the answer read:

5. I specifically deny the allegation of F/SUPT. MA. LUISA C. HADJULA in paragraph 4 of her AFFIDAVIT-COMPLAINT for reason that she never WAS MY CLIENT nor we ever had any LAWYER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP that ever existed ever since and that never obtained any legal advice from me regarding her PERSONAL PROBLEMS or PERSONAL SECRETS. She likewise never delivered to me legal documents much more told me some confidential information or secrets. That is because I never entertain LEGAL QUERIES or CONSULTATION regarding PERSONAL MATTERS since I know as a LAWYER of the Bureau of Fire Protection that I am not allowed to privately practice law and it might also result to CONFLICT OF INTEREST. As a matter of fact, whenever there will be PERSONAL MATTERS referred to me, I just referred them to private law practitioners and never entertain the same, NOR listen to their stories or examine or accept any document.
9. I specifically deny the allegation of F/SUPT. MA. LUISA C. HADJULA in paragraph 8 of her AFFIDAVIT-COMPLAINT, the truth of the matter is that her ILLICIT RELATIONSHIP and her illegal and unlawful activities are known in the Bureau of Fire Protection since she also filed CHILD SUPPORT case against her lover. . . where she has a child . . .

Moreover, the alleged DOCUMENTS she purportedly have shown to me sometime in 1998, are all part of public records

Furthermore, F/SUPT. MA. LUISA C. HADJULA, is filing the instant case just to get even with me or to force me to settle and withdraw the CASES I FILED AGAINST HER since she knows that she will certainly be DISMISSED FROM SERVICE, REMOVED FROM THE PRC ROLL and CRIMINALLY CONVICTED of her ILLICIT, IMMORAL, ILLEGAL and UNLAWFUL ACTS.

On October 7, 2004, the Investigating Commissioner of the IBP Commission on Bar Discipline came out with a *Report and Recommendation*, stating that the information related by complainant to the respondent is "protected under the attorney-client privilege communication." Prescinding from this postulate, the Investigating Commissioner found the respondent to have violated legal ethics when she "[revealed] information given to her during a legal consultation," and accordingly recommended that respondent be reprimanded therefor, thus: