

**THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY IN THE CENTRAL SCHOOLS OF THE SCHOOLS DIVISION OF MISAMIS ORIENTAL:
SUPPORT OF THE SCHOOL CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated into the support of the School Child Protection Committees as an enabling environment for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the Central Schools of the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental. A stratified sample of 246 public school teachers from a sample 8 central schools in the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental participated in the survey, a researcher-made questionnaire adopting the roles and responsibilities and emerging functions of the SCPCs as stipulated in DepEd Order 40, s.2012 – Section 10. Employing a descriptive research design, the results show that the SCPCs well supports to a highly enabling environment for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy. The hallmark finding articulates the SCPCs have performed most on ensuring that the children’s right to be heard are respected and upheld in all matters and procedures affecting their welfare. However, the least rated are on policy review in every 3 years; a system for identifying students who may be suffering from significant harm based on signs; and facilitating the identification and referral to the appropriate offices. The SCPCs critical role in ensuring that child protection work in schools involves in reviewing and continually improving and developing systems and mechanisms that provide meaningful protection for all children in the longer term. Collaboratively, with internal and external stakeholders through the concerted efforts of individuals and groups, adults as well as children, that child protection can become effective and sustainable to ensure the children’s rights to survival, development and well-being in all settings at all times, in schools and in the communities.

Key Words: Child Protection Policy, School Child Protection Committee, enabling environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing worldwide concern on child welfare and child protection focuses on the human growth and social development. Therefore, ensuring the wellbeing of children is crucial to setting up future societies for prosperity, sustainability, and inclusivity. For this reason, many of the targets of the Seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are explicitly directed toward infants and children. During the Millenium Summit in September 2000 and reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit, world leaders pledged a commitment to fulfill children’s rights to survival, health, education, protection and participation, among others.

Failing to fully protect children from such issues as violence in schools is at the forefront among the priorities in the Philippine basic education. The 1987 Constitution states that the State shall defend the right of children to assistance, including sufficient care, proper nutrition, and diverse

forms of protection against all types of child neglect, abuse of children, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions that are adverse to the development of the child (Article XV, Section 1).

In order to achieve this goal and objective, DepEd, D.O. No. 40, s. 2012 also known as Child Protection Policy (CPP) was created and being implemented in all schools in the Philippines a decade now. All teachers and school officials to uphold the rights and the welfare of the students, citing the department's policy and guidelines for the prevention of abuse of children, assault, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of maltreatment against children in schools (Child Protection in Schools, DepEd).

However, even with the global concern and action for child protection, the number of cases in the world related to child protection continue to rise (OECD, 2019). Millions of cases of child abuse and neglect are reported to various children's protective service organizations each year (UP, UE, CPNF, and UNICEF Philippines, 2016). It is estimated globally that "150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 have experienced forms of child abuse and violence involving physical contact" (U.N. World Report on Violence against Children, 2007, p.33).

In the Philippines, the government committed to child protection in its Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence against Children (Congress of the Philippines, 2013). However, according to UNICEF, there are more than 50% of Filipino children experience violence during their childhood, with boys twice as likely to become victims of abuse. Children abused tend to develop low self-esteem, feel sad and fearful, avoid interaction with other people, and experience anxiety attacks (Cervancia et al., 2019). The Commission of Human Rights reported bullying and child abuse cases in school in the years 2013 and 2014 which showed that out of 1,711 cases related to child protection policy, 70% are cases in bullying and 30% are cases in child abuse. The 521 cases in 2014 have doubled in just two years, at 1,045 cases (Open Stat Database, PSA 2016; Roche, 2017); and from the reported 69 cases of sexually-abused children in 2013 to twice the number at 149 cases in 2016. The report on cyber victimization, 45.8% of those also disclosed their experiences of the usual types of victimization wherein less than half (46.5%) of the victims were boys and 45.3% were girls across all countries (Chester et al, 2015).

In another data source, the high rates of child victims of violence reported by the NEDA-UNICEF Summary Report (2018) show that there are three in five (61.7%) children who experienced psychological violence; one in four (25%) children experienced sexual violence; two in three (67%) children experienced peer violence; and two in three (67%) children experienced physical violence. In particular, Region X has reported 35 cases, the highest among the non-conflict regions in Mindanao, of which 30 are cases on school bullying and five (5) cases on child abuse; but this could be much more with the unreported cases (NEDA-UNICEF Summary Report, 2018).

The study strongly premises that the physical, emotional, social and psychological effects of a less effective implementation of the Child Protection Policy on learners' academic performance can be devastating on the learners. When not addressed, more and more children may continue to be exposed to multiple types of abuse and suffer a myriad of symptoms; and long-term, the future of the society is endangered (Cornell et.al 2013).

All forms of child abuse have the potential for long-term impact on the victims, and can affect the victim's ability to function as a well-balanced and fully functional individual (Sidanius, Pratto and Mitchell, 1994). Child abuse impacts the self-value, self-esteem, and sense of worth of those who experience it rendering the victim children hopeless, helpless and unable to live a meaningful life.

To date, there is no study yet in Region X specifically on the support of the School Child Protection Committees to the implementation of Child Protection Policy. The study then pursues the focus on the implementation of the Policy as a crucial aspect in contributing to the child's well-being and welfare in society as the mandate that primarily delegates the unique parental authority and duty for the young child while under their supervision, instruction, or custody to the school, its administration, and teachers, or to the person, business, or institution engaging in child care (The Family Code of the Philippines, EO 209, s.1987. Article 218, p.51). The authority and responsibility "shall apply to all authorized activities whether inside or outside the premises of the school, entity or institution"

applies to all the activities approved by the school regardless of the location, i.e. in the school premises or outside the school confines (The Family Code of the Philippines, EO 209, s.1987. Article 218, p.51).

2. FRAMEWORK

Child Protection Policy is a statement of commitment to safeguard children from harm that clarifies what is required to protect children that create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the organization is performing its duty and responsibility of care seriously. The DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, also known as the "Policy and Guidelines on Protecting Children in School from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying and Other Forms of Abuse," is primarily referenced from the different legal bases, namely, the Philippine Constitution, Presidential Decree 603 or "Youth and Children Code", Republic Act No. 7610 Special Protection Against Child Abuse, the Republic Act No. 10627 or Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, Republic Act No. 9344, as amended or Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, and Republic Act No. 10630 RIRR of RA 9344.

It is categorically indicated in the CPP that shall ensure that all schools become enabling environment that are conducive to education. In the Department of Education, a school-wide approach is adopted to implement the Child Protection Policy to include the school administration, teachers and school personnel, learners or students, parents and/or guardians, visitors and guests, and all those in the school for one reason or another are aware of the policy and their responsibility as indicated or implied in the policy.

Enabling Environment. Literature indicates that there is 32% of the population referring to those fourteen (14) years old and below (32% of 101 million is slightly over 32million children), with 7,000,000 cases of sexually-abused children every year in the Philippines. More than "70% of abused children are between 10 and 18 years old; and among those victims, 20% are under 6 years old" (Chameleon Association). In the schools in the Department of Education, Region X, a guidance counselor of an elementary school in the Schools Division of Cagayan de Oro City, the school has recorded an average of fifty (50) cases of bullying in the campus and more cases with the many unreported bullying incidents primarily by teachers' derogatory terms (PSA, 2020).

The above disturbing context necessitates a strongly enabling environment as the context or the setting that consists of elements or components that support the goals and outcomes that the environment intends to achieve. Schools as enabling environments are settings vital and crucial for development, most especially for the well-being and learner development (Osher et. al, 2014, p. 1). The goal of schools is to protect children by preventing child abuse. To build and maintain a proactive environment, school could also ensure its earliest possible detection, intervention and reporting. Effective schools create strong conditions for learning, where students feel and are

protected from physical and emotional harm; connected to and supported by their teachers and the school; challenged by expectations and are engaged in learning; and where their friends and the adult members in the school possess and demonstrate enabling social and emotional competence (Osher, Dwyer & Jackson, 2004).

The School Child Protection Committee (SCPC) is a mandated support component established in all public and private elementary and secondary schools. There are six members of the CPC, namely:

The school head is the chairperson; the guidance counselor/teacher as the vice chairperson; a representative of teachers designated by the faculty club; a representative of parents selected by the Parents-Teachers Association; a representative of students named by the Supreme Student Council; and a community representative assigned by the barangay head, preferably a member of the barangay council for the protection of children. (D.O. 42 s. 2012 p.17)

The SCPC members have their specified duties and responsibilities under child protection procedure. The names of those carrying out these responsibilities for this current year are listed on the cover sheet of a mandatory document. The Child-Protection Policy Committee to ensure that the child protection procedures are followed within the school; hence they should attend training about child protection. The school head as the chairperson shall be the first focal point of contact for parents, pupils, teaching staff and external agencies in the various concerns related to child protection. In place of the school head, when necessary and applicable, the vice-chairperson can act upon all suspicion belief and evidence of abuse reported to her. The committee also submits an annual report on the relevant issues and incidences of child abuse to the Schools Division Office. The SCPC also reviews the policy annually. The same should provide the General Parents Teachers Association the same policy document of the School-Based Child Protection Policy.

3.OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to answer the following question:

1.What is the extent of support of the Child Protection Committee as an enabling environment for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the Central Schools of the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental?

The result of this investigation is important primarily as a contribution to the growing body of knowledge in understanding the research engagement and challenges experienced by teachers as significant implementers of the research mandate and their critical primordial role in the improvement in teaching and learning.

4.Methodology

The study employed the quantitative non experimental descriptive research design to characterize the extent of support of the School Child Protection Committee as an enabling environment for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the Central Schools of the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental. The researcher-made questionnaire indicated 15 items adopted from the DepEd Child Protection Policy (DO No.40, s2012), specifically on the duties and responsibilities of the School Child Protection Committee (DO No.40, s2012 - Section 10). The recommended sampling process using the stratified sampling yielded eight (8) central schools with 246 public school teachers. Descriptive statistics with the means and standard deviations determined the central tendency of responses to items based on the stipulations and requirements of the Child Protection Policy in the Department of Education.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research study presented in Table 1 indicate that there is a highly enabling environment ($M = 4.06$, $Sd = .70$) for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy demonstrated in the Central Schools of the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental specifically on the support provided by the School Child Protection Committee. The result implies that the school provides all it could possibly can and performs most effectively and efficiently its duties and responsibilities with high standards for the implementation of the Child protection Policy. The school exceeds some expectations of the stakeholders.

The highest rated indicator among the highly enabling indicators is “Ensure that the children’s right to be heard are respected and upheld in all matters and procedures affecting their welfare” ($M = 4.21$, $Sd = .78$). The next three highest (3) indicators are, namely, “Coordinate closely with the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO)” ($M = 4.14$, $Sd = .82$); “Coordinate closely with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP)” ($M = 4.13$, $Sd = .83$); and “Draft a local school child protection policy with a code of conduct and a plan to ensure child protection and safety” ($M = 4.13$, $Sd = .81$). The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is first in the list of these agencies whose role is to set standards, accredit and provide consultative services to the public and private institutions, organizations and persons involved in social welfare programs, supervise relevant organizations, and enforce compliance to the standards (Yacat, 2011).

The above favorable results most likely could be attributed to the compliance of the public schools to the issuance of the DO No.40, s.2012. The highly enabling environment is within the scope of the policy wherein All DepEd schools are duly mandated to implement the DEpEd’s Zero Tolerance Policy for any form of child abuse as indicated in DO No.40, s.2012, DO No.55, s.2013, and other issuances. Specifically, the DepEd schools are expected to achieve a highly enabling environment with the support of the School Child Protection Committee. In fact, an enabling environment is required of the schools to support the Child Protection Policy as mandated by the DO No.40, s.2012 and strongly emphasized in other relevant issuances of the DepEd and supported in the agenda of other directly relevant government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs).

In fact, the SCPC members affirmed that they follow the mandatory instructions that they closely coordinate with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP), The Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), other relevant government agencies, and applicable non-governmental organizations (NGOS). They also closely observe and regulate the implementation of positive mechanisms and programs in providing all necessary for the child and for those responsible for the learners; and ensure that the children have the right to be heard; their rights upheld.

The SCPC chairs further expressed of emerging added functions of the CPC. With the increasing number of bullying cases, the SCPC conducts more frequent activities. The mechanisms include programs increasing awareness among the school stakeholders. In addition, the SCPC also ensures that the anti-bullying policy duly implemented. The SCPC strongly stressed that they monitor all cases or incidents related to bullying reported or referred by the teachers. Subsequently, the guidance counselor or coordinator or by any relevant person designated handles the prevention and intervention measures mentioned by the preceding sections of the IRR. The responsible persons also make the necessary referrals to appropriate agencies, offices or persons depending on the circumstances.

The other members of the SCPC discussed that they work with and in-behalf of school children or pupils; and the SCPCs are mandated with a responsibility to protect them. The members explained that they have specific roles and responsibilities under child protection procedure; i.e., it is the role of the Child-Protection Policy Committee to ensure that the child protection procedures are followed within the school. The school head as the chairperson shall be the first focal point of contact for parents, pupils, teaching staff and external agencies in all concerns regarding child protection. When the school head is unavailable, the vice-chairperson can act upon all suspicion, belief and evidence of abuse reported.

The School Child Protection Committee (SCPC), after its creation and constitution of its members, is required by DepEd issuances, to prepare and submit the school's Action Plan for Child Protection Policy. In the preparation of the Action Plan, the school, spearheaded by SCPC, invites significant stakeholders to discuss problems and issues; and contribute to the proposed internal policies, programs and activities. The Action Plan also includes most of the following such as the proposed objectives, activities and/or strategies, materials needed, estimated amount/needed budget, sources of funds, persons needed, expected outputs/expected outcomes. In many of the schools, the objectives stated in their Action Plans are aimed to successfully implement the DO No.40, s. 2012. The Action Plans are expected to cascade information relative to the DepEd Child Protection issuances, localization of child protection and anti-bullying policies of the school and capacity building of Child Protection and Anti-Bullying Committees per school.

Examples of the objectives stated in the Action Plans are, namely, ensuring that school discipline is consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; respect for all rights of children as operationalized in school programs, procedures and activities; and conduct awareness programs with stakeholders in presenting and addressing bullying.

Very common among the schools' Action Plans are activities which are identified by involving diverse internal and external stakeholders. The activities include the launching and orientation of the policy; capacity building and in-service training on classroom discipline and management; capacity building for the detention, handling and reporting of child protection cases according to the legal and ethical procedures; monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the policy; responsible parenthood and positive discipline; and close coordination activities and strategies with external partners or stakeholders primarily with the CPP service front liners such as the Women & Child Protection Desks, Philippine National Police (PNP) and barangay clinics and other medical facilities. The same committee furnishes a copy of the School-Based Child Protection Policy to the General Parents Teachers Association.

It is also equally important that with the Action Plan, the same committee periodically reviews the policy implementation; and annually prepares and submits a report to the Schools Division offices regarding the implementation of the policy indicating the accomplished targets and achieved expected outcomes. The report also indicates relevant issues and incidences of child abuse. The report is submitted with appropriate documentary evidences such as records of proceedings and narratives.

Some members of the SCPCs also mentioned that they are responsible for their submission of their narrative reports to their respective Schools Divisions on a quarterly basis with narratives on the major violations that occurred and also indicating their disciplinary measures/actions and

disciplinary recommendations. In their quarterly reports, the narratives include diverse programs and activities.

Further discussions of the results also point to those needing attention are the three least ratings for an enabling environment, namely, review of the localized child protection policy every three (3) years ($M = 3.89$); a system to early recognize learners with physical, emotional or behavioral signs of abuse ($M = 3.98$); and an efficient referral mechanism ($M = 3.98$).

In summary, among the tasks of the SCPCs include that the learners follow their localized code of conduct in schools and that schools have their localized child protection policy; to conduct a school-based referral and monitoring system of cases of all forms of child abuse. The SCPCs also ensure mechanisms to identify, refer and report cases of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination and bullying to relevant agencies and offices. Through the school child protection policy, the SCPCs emphasize close coordination with the concerned external agencies or partner individuals and organizations; monitor the implementation of positive measures and effective procedures; and ensure that the children's right to be.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the highly enabling environment contributed by the support provided by the School Child Protection Committee for the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the Central Schools of the Schools Division of Misamis Oriental indicates that the central schools provides all they could possibly can and perform most effectively and efficiently its duties and responsibilities with high standards for the implementation of the Child protection Policy. The school exceeds some expectations of the stakeholders creating and establishing the context that consists of elements or components that support the goals and outcomes that the environment intends to achieve; and as the setting for learner development. The schools as proactive environments protect the school children by either preventing child abuse before it occurs or by ensuring its earliest possible detection, intervention and reporting. With the ultimate aim, effective schools create strong conditions for learning, where students feel and are physically and emotionally safe; connected to and supported by their teachers and the school; challenged by expectations and are engaged in learning; and where their peers and the adults in the school practice good social and emotional skills.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing findings and conclusions, the researchers therefore recommend the following to strengthen the support of the School Child Protection Committees in improving the enabling environment for an effective implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

1. For those functions rated least, the SCPC and the schools in close coordination with relevant external stakeholders shall review their school policy on child protection every 3 years or earlier as applicable; and may improve their system in detecting physical, emotional or behavioral signs among learners suffering from critical harm; and an efficient facilitating in the identification and referral to the appropriate offices on cases of child abuse, exploitation, violence.

2. For those functions of the SCPCs rated second to the least, the SCPC and the schools in close coordination with relevant external stakeholders may establish other mechanisms and conduct more effective activities.

Most importantly attention to the periodic review of the localized school child protection policy, early identification and expeditious referral systems.

3. For the SCPC and the schools in close coordination with relevant external stakeholders to institutionalize a mechanism on an express system for interventions for child abuse, discrimination and against children, child exploitation, violence against children in school, corporal punishment and any related incidents.

4. For the SCPC and the schools in close coordination with relevant external stakeholders to identify expert practitioners in other functionalities of government and in the private sector, for individual and entities in the academe, physicians and facilities of medical institutions and behavioral clinics, Barangay and Purok associations for a wider engagement in ensuring the safety and protection of the school children both in school and in the communities.

It is the further perspective of the researcher that the School Protection Committees envisions their role and responsibilities to contribute to the global Human Rights Watch and play a critical and impactful role in providing support for those with psychosocial disabilities and mitigation in the increase thereof and the care and protection of learners from any forms of child abuse and armed conflict.

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