

# Reviewing School-Based Child Protection Mechanism in the Philippines: A Process Analysis Grounded in 2010 Case Data

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## ABSTRACT

Creating a safe and nurturing school environment for children is a pillar in the development of happy, healthy individuals. This study endeavored to determine whether the process of reporting and referring child maltreatment cases in public elementary schools are in accordance with Anti Child Abuse Law of the Philippines, also known as Republic Act 7610. Respondents of the research are the faculty and principal of a selected resource public school located in of the second district of Davao City, Philippines. Which comprised nine public elementary schools with approximately 9,000 students.

An explanatory sequential research design was employed incorporating questionnaires, document analysis, interviews and group discussions and informants include School Principal, Guidance Counselors, teachers and students.

The study recommends that the school Principals ensure the effective implementation of child protection policies and monitor compliance with existing directives. Further, school heads should create and assemble the “Child Protection Committee” in accordance with DepEd Child Security Procedure (Luistro, 2012). Guidance Counselors should document all cases in the event of maltreatment and submit them to proper authorities concerned as input to future planning in curtailing child maltreatment cases in the school.

With this, it is recommended that all schools conduct an advocacy campaign on child security procedures in all schools so that all those involved in the case and all constituents of the community will be aware of this campaign.

**Keywords:** Social Sciences, Child Protection Policies, Mixed Method, Davao City, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment has enormous immediate and long-term repercussions. Beyond death, physical injury and disability, violence can lead to stress that impairs brain development and damages the nervous and immune systems. This in turn is associated with delayed cognitive development, poor school performance and dropout, mental health problems, suicide attempts, increased health-risk behaviors, re-victimization and the perpetration of violence. The good news is that child maltreatment can be prevented through interventions that support parents and caregivers, promote non-violent norms and values, provide education and life skills training, strengthen families’ income and economic security, offer high quality response and support services, create and sustain safe environments for children, and implement and enforce laws against child maltreatment (World Health Organization, 2019).

No maltreatment against children is justifiable and all violence against children is preventable. The comprehensive United Nation’s research on maltreatment against children strengthens that such maltreatment occurs in every country of the world penetrating across culture, race, income and various socio-economic factors. Any area in incongruity to human rights responsibility and children’s resolvable needs, maltreatment against children is approved by society, and is constantly legal and authorized by the state (UN, 2006). The UN (2006) has reported further that maltreatment against children is most prevalent in household, in the institutions of learning, in places of work, in care and justice institutions, and in communities. Specific to maltreatment and

education settings, the record pinpointed the circumstance of bodily and mental punishment; gender-based violence and discrimination; intimidating, clashing, bodily attack, and band of bad guys, slaying and physical damage, and tools to destroy in school; and weapons in school are wrongdoings of children's fundamental rights despite the number of cases or frequency these were experienced by children in schools.

In the Philippines, the government has enacted into law RA 7610 which provides to prevent a particular act from happening and to safeguard against child maltreatment, exploitation and discrimination, giving punishments for its violation, and for different purposes. Further, the educational system of the Philippines has institutionalized a Child Supportive School System with the support of UNICEF, putting children at the center of education and encourages strong community participation. This system provides a safe and friendly learning environment where all children are welcome to reach their goals in life.

However, children who come to school have diverse backgrounds and experiences. Few of them have manifested the behaviors of pupils who are abused either at home, in the community or even in school. The child supportive school system provides protocol on handling child maltreatment cases in connection with RA 7610. What are faculty and school principal's practices in reporting and referring child abuse cases? This question turns into an issue of the human rights advocates saying that most often, children's rights are violated while handling child maltreatment cases.

In Davao City, the 120 members composed of non-government organization, government organizations, academe, indigenous people, Muslims, children's associations, people's organizations and the civil society are working together in pursuing commitments in the Philippine National Strategic Framework for Plan Development for Children or Child21 "by building a Child-Friendly City where children are nurtured and allowed to grow and develop in dignity, protected from threats to their well-being and free to express themselves and participate in their development."

In the school level, child abuse in any form is still felt by the community. Some children have done demonstrations while most of them are suffering in silence keeping it with themselves. Most often, abused children are left unattended due to lack of knowledge of teachers and school administrators on the correct procedures in handling child abuse cases.

With the end view of proposing a better protocol on reporting and referring child abuse cases, the researcher would like to pursue this study. Results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on how to handle reporting and referring such cases.

**Purpose of the Study.** The purpose of the study was to determine whether the reporting and referring practices on child abuse cases in public elementary schools are in accordance with RA 7610. Particularly, it sought answers to shed light on commonly reported child abuse cases the school and how the school processes child abuse cases in terms of reporting and referring abuse. Also, the study investigated the issues and concerns encountered by the schools in processing child abuse cases to be enlightened on the aspects in which the school system could be improved in terms of handling child abuse cases.

Similarly, the main assumption of the study is that teachers and school administrators are handling child abuse cases in public schools properly in accordance with RA 7610. It was also assumed that there is collaboration between the parents, schools and government social institutions in reporting and referring child abuse cases.

## METHOD

**Research Design.** This study used descriptive research design utilizing the mixed method of quantitative and qualitative type of research. Quantitative data were obtained through secondary data available in the school on child abuse case documents while qualitative data were acquired through interview and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the help of open-ended questionnaires. Four (4) open-ended questionnaires were designed for the School Principal, Guidance Counselors, faculty members, and pupils of the resource school. Principal and Guidance Counselors participated in face-to-face interviews, while teachers and students took part in Focus Groups Discussions.

**Study Participants.** The data on documented child abuse cases in this study were collected in the year 2010 from a selected resources public school in Davao City. Although, the data are over a decade old, they still reflect the state-based child protection systems and reporting mechanism during that period. Further, these insights serve as a foundational reference for examining improvements or persistent gaps in the employment of Republic Act 7610 and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic of this research, the identity of the school and the respondents are strictly held confidential. Respondents of the study are the teachers and school administrators of selected resource public school in second district of Davao City.

**Table 1. Participants of the Study.**

Participants	Number
Principal	1
Guidance Counselors	2
Teachers	5
Students	8

**Research Instruments.** Two main instruments were used to gather information for this study. First, data on child abuse cases sourced from the Guidance office and Principal's Office served as the primary sources of secondary qualitative data. These documents provided case-level information that was analyzed in relation to the school's reporting and referral practices.

Second, guided questions for interviews and group discussions were developed to gain deeper insights into the procedures followed by the faculty members and key informant interviews to the principal in reporting and referring cases of child abuse. These tools also explored the issues and concerns that the school encountered in handling such incidents, helping us to understand institutional and behavioral barriers.

In addition, the documented data on abuse cases were originally recorded in 2010. While this may not reflect present-day practices, the information offers a significant historical context and serves as a valuable foundation for evaluating the evolution of school-based child protection mechanism.

**Data Gathering Procedure.** The data gathering process involved multiple levels of coordination. Permission to conduct the study was first secured from the Schools Division Superintendent. Subsequently, letters of request were sent to the school principal and selected teachers to seek their consent in accessing existing secondary data from their offices and to invite them to participate in interviews and focus groups discussion.

The researcher visited personally the identified school to collect available data and conduct the qualitative components of the study. Interviews and discussions were held in a confidential and secure setting to ensure the comfort of participants with their voluntary consent obtained prior to participation.

**Data Analysis.** Quantitative data obtained from the study were statistically treated using the means to identify the most reported form of child abuse in schools. On the other hand, qualitative data were coded and thematically clustered to analyze how schools process child abuse cases, as well as to uncover the issues and challenges encountered in implementing these procedures.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Commonly Reported Child Abuse Cases in the School

Based on the records available in the office of the Guidance Counselor and the Principal's Office of the resource

school, the following secondary data are hereby presented:

**Table 2. Reported Child Maltreatment Cases as of June 2010.**

Type of Abuse	Number of Victims		Offender	Action Taken
	Male	Female		
Physical Abuse	6	2	Pupil to Pupil (6) Teacher to Pupil (2)	Referred to Police
Sexual Abuse	0	2	Father to Daughter (1) Cousin to Cousin (1)	Referred to DSWD
Verbal Abuse	3	0	Teacher to Pupil (1) Pupil to Pupil	Applied Conflict Resolution Process
Neglect	2	0	Parents to Son (2)	Referred to DSWD

As shown in Table 2, the most reported abuse case is physical abuse followed by verbal abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. It is also worth noting that the offenders for physical abuse are mostly the peers of the pupils while there are two (2) cases where the teachers are the offenders. Physical abuse is most common to males than females.

Verbal abuse and neglect have equal number of cases. Peers and teachers are the offenders of verbal abuse while parents are the ones neglecting their own sons.

One child expressed his sentiment during the interview,

*“Naranasan kong pinalo ng guro dahil hindi ako marunong bumasa. Sa inyong palagay dapat bang paluin ang isang estudyante kapag hindi marunong at dapat turuan?”* (“I experienced being spanked by my teacher because I could not read. Do you think it is right to spank a student who is not knowledgeable and is in need of teaching?”)

Other form of physical violence is being made to squat inflicted more on children from lower grade levels; having their hair pulled is experienced by more female children from Grades 4-6; and are being formed to stand in the public eye is reserved more for the higher grade levels.

Other forms of more severe acts of physical violence cited by the children specially those in Grades 4-6 included being kicked (*tinadyakan*), being choked (*sinakal*) and being hit at the nape/head area or having the head banged (*binatukan / inuntog ang ulo*). For some, the experience can be a combination of different forms of physical violence.

These same experiences have been documented extensively by the studies of Ney, Fung, & Wickett, (1994). They studied the impact of various kinds of abuse and neglect on the child's perception of himself and his future. Ney, Fung, & Wickett, (1994) found out that when considering physical abuse, physical neglect, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, and sexual abuse it is important to consider that these occurrences happen largely as a combination of kinds of abuse rather than a singular consistent act and that some combinations of abuse have more effects than others on victims of abuse. It was also found that an early age of onset for verbal abuse and emotional neglect was significantly associated with greater severity and frequency of mistreatment.

One child shared,

*“Minsan pag ma late kami at hindi maka attend sa flag ceremony, pina palinya kami at binabatukan kami sa ulo.”* (“Sometimes when we are late and unable to attend the flag ceremony, we were made to line up, and the teacher would smack our heads.”)

These statements underscore the physical and emotional trauma inflicted under discipline pretexts, raising the questions, where does punishments cross into maltreatment?

## School Process for Reporting and Referral

The Department of Education has established a protocol in referring and reporting cases under the Department's Child Protection Program in conformity with RA 7610 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRRs) and DepEd Order No. 40 (2012). Reporting pathways varied:

1. Family-related abuse: Victims often self-report to guidance counselors.
2. Teacher or peer abuse: Reports were sometimes made by parents, other times teacher recognized abuse signs and informed counselors.

However, based on the interview with the Guidance Counselors and Principal of the resource school, the school process in handling child maltreatment cases vary depending on the type of abuse. The Guidance Counselor shared that there are cases where the victim of child maltreatment reports to them directly when the culprits are members of the family.

In other instances, it is the parents who report abuse directly to proper authorities when the offenders are teachers, school personnel or the victim's classmates or schoolmates. Sometimes, there have been cases when the victims and their families are just silent about it, but the teachers are trained to recognize the signs of bodily and sexual abuse. In this case, it is the teachers who will report the occurrence to the guidance counselors and principal. Velayo (2005) discusses that in the Philippines, some societal views and institutions in the country serve to hamper the proper reportage of abuse of children. He even goes so far as to say that some societal views and institutions in the Philippines lead to overlooking and even encouraging abuse.

Depending on the type of the case, the following procedures in processing child abuse cases at the school level are practiced by faculty and school principal.

**For Physical Abuse Case.** The process is initiated by a witness or informant reports the complaint to class adviser of the victim. Then the teacher assists the victim and the informant in making a written account of the case with the guidance counselor. The guidance counselor shall accomplish the "intake sheet" which details information in terms of the Name, Physical Abuse/Sexual Abuse/Verbal Abuse/Neglect, the names of the parents, the Name of the Plaintiff and details that are relevant to the abuse committed. The documents prepared regarding the case became the basis for the school referral to Local Welfare Social Development Officer. The principal refers the neglected child to the LSWDO. Collaborating case workers assess the condition of the child to discover the appropriate intervention and the LSWDO will take care of the child and refer him/her to the right institutions.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Implications For Theory and Practice

**Procedural complexity.** The case management flow, from detection to documentation to referral, mirrors the algorithm prescribed by the DepEd and RA 7610 (StudyLib, 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness depended heavily on the teacher vigilance and documentation quality, echoing findings by Asio, et.al. (2020) and a pilot study on teacher training where increase reporting resulted from empowerment through education.

**Capacity-building necessity.** The reported data underscores the need to boost teacher competence in identifying subtle signs of abuse denoting with Monterona (2016) that, if who advocated for training, parent awareness, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

**Institutional Leadership.** The principal's role in convening a Schil Protection Committee and coordinating referral emerged as a key as highlighted by Cervancia, er.al., (2019) that who observed that compliance with DepEd policies is clearly tied to CPC functionality and commitment.

The study gained insight into the complexity and dynamics of the child abuse detection and reporting process. Understanding this process is crucial to the development of an effective child maltreatment and child risk detection method. Enriching teachers' education with respect to child abuse issues would be an important first

step. Educational programs, including teachers' training, should focus more on specific communication skills in the perspective of legal mind and psychologist. Child maltreatment reporting policies could augment teachers' assurance to report in the occurrence. Both faculty and school principal are in want of methods for objectifying their suspicions, especially in case of circumstances in which implied rather than obvious signs of maltreatment are shown. The use of a structured approach could harden the basis of their suspicions and could improve the discovery and recounting of abuse.

The insights gained by the study have deep and continuing implications to practice and implementation of RA 7610 in schools in the Philippines. The significant role of Principals in ensuring and the vigilance of the school in compliance is manifested in the effectiveness of the school's ability to involve its members in preventing and acting on and referring cases of child abuse. School heads should create and convene the "Child Protection Committee" in conformity with DepEd Child Protection Policy. Another consideration is increasing capability among school personnel in understanding and aiding the school in handling abuse cases with increased care, sensitivity, confidentiality and efficiency for the victims.

Capability building for such cannot be done with sporadic training but should also be a continuous and long-term endeavor that allows personnel to gain continued expertise in handling cases. To do this the Department of Education (DepEd) should design and conduct strategic, long-term and continuous capacity building for the Child Protection Committee, School Heads, Guidance Counselors and Teachers at the school level. Guidance Counselors hold a vital role in documenting all cases of maltreatment and submitting them to proper authorities concerned as input to future planning in curtailing child abuse cases in the school. These records are important in the Department of Education and the government to gain a larger picture of the prevalence and extent of child abuse and be addressing such accordingly. The conduct of advocacy campaign on child protection policies in all schools is also a must among the stakeholders of the school so that pupils, parents, teachers and all constituents of the community will be aware of this campaign. Utilize the proposed enhanced protocol on reporting and referring child abuse cases.

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