



Strengthening School-based Child Protection through Project SHIELDS

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ABSTRACT

The project was implemented to capacitate teachers on child protection policy, on handling violence in schools, as well as capacitate teachers on promoting a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment. The said project was implemented throughout the whole division, consisting of four districts. A total of 180 beneficiaries have actively engaged in this project. They were sent to a series of workshops to craft their school policy and develop their advocacy materials. It was highlighted in the focus group discussion that they were able to come up with activities that promote a safe and inclusive environment. The beneficiaries looked to this project to be timely, relevant, and sustainable as it helped them in shielding the most vulnerable sector in their community which are the learners.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 1987 Constitution, the state shall defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development (Article XV, Section 3[2]). In line with this, the Department of Education in collaboration with its partners and stakeholders directs and ensures that all schools are conducive to the education of children. School heads, teachers, and nonteaching staff are considered second parents and are expected to discharge their functions and duties with this in mind. Thus, empowering these groups to exercise special parental authority and responsibility over the child is of paramount importance, years back and even these days.

In the year 2016, WHO reported that bullying is prevalent among 42 countries around the world and up to 11% of students have reported being involved in school bullying or victimization. Concerning this, the study of Norshidah (2014) revealed that bullying is caused by teenagers with high levels of egocentrism. Self-esteem, vengeance, enjoyment, authority, and part of prejudice were the factors that influence bullying in school. Sanapo's (2019) research also revealed that school bullying manifests in various ways—ranging from physical and verbal abuse to spreading rumors, exclusion, and rejection. It is characterized as a deliberate, ongoing effort to assert control over another person with aggressive or harmful intent. Thus, it is now acknowledged as a widespread global problem with far-reaching consequences for the social and emotional well-being of children and adolescents, as noted by Hidalgo and España (2021).

Project SHIELDS (Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive Environment of Learning and Development in Schools) emerged as a product of research in a particular school in the year 2020. It was noted that bullying and other forms of violence occurred and teachers must be equipped with timely and effective approaches for the goal of the bullying-free learning environment. Hence, it is further recommended that the reinforcement of anti-bullying mechanisms (Palco et.al., 2020) and other interventions that promote a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment of learning could be integrated with programs of the school. Through this project, the teaching and non-teaching forces in collaboration with their stakeholders were capacitated in the basics of child protection, handling and managing bullying cases and other forms of violence in schools, referral and reporting system; crafted a school-based child protection policy and created child protection committee; and develop advocacy materials on promoting safe and healthy learning environment.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

Project SHIELDS was implemented in one of the divisions of Region VIII which is the Schools Division of Maasin City. The division is divided into four districts, Maasin I, II, III, and IV. The beneficiaries of the project were all the schools in the division. However, during the series of seminar workshops, they were represented by the school heads and the child protection coordinators. During the sessions, division personnel and focal persons were also present to have a smooth flow of the activities and to facilitate some concerns. To maximize the quality of the seminar workshops, the conduct was divided into batches. It is further assured that the same set of speakers and materials as well as learning activities were delivered to observe uniformity of learning and understanding. An impact analysis was also done in the form of a focused group discussion in which representative schools were gathered. This was done 5-6 months after the conduct of seminar workshops.



Figure 1. Project Implementation Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The seminar workshops were provided to the participants for three days and the impact analysis through a focused group discussion was administered 5-6 months after the conduct. The results are chunked based on the topics of the workshop and the impact analysis being done.

Handling Bullying Cases and Violence in Schools

This emphasizes two key elements of managing violence in schools and preventing bullying. The first topic, "Teacher's Guide to Child Protection," stressed the roles and responsibilities that the school, in particular the teachers, must enact, enforce, and empower to mobilize the alarming cases of bullying-related violence that probably occur within schools. The topic also introduced preliminary safeguards and interventions to lessen the impact should these circumstances arise. The second topic, "Effects of Bullying and Violence in the

Individual's Holistic Development: Prevention and Response to Acts of Bullying and Violence in School," accentuates the significance of developing policies, their effectiveness in making ethical, student-friendly interventions, preventive programs, and a healthy and restorative well-being of the student to prevent bullying and violence within schools.

Within the session, some participants shared instances of bullying and violence in their schools, the responses taken, and connections to other institutions to reduce the severity and impact of the problem. The speakers' insights have aided the teachers in formulating plans of action for dealing with the issues raised, in making changes to policies and programs, and in strengthening their Child Protection Office so that it is prepared and able to deal with situations of this nature should they arise.



Figure 2. Conduct of Seminar Workshops with School Heads and the Child Protection Coordinator of Each School

Retooling of Teachers on Child Protection Policy: Basis on CPP Committee and School Based Child Protection Policy

Basing on DepEd Order No. 40, s 2012, participants were refreshed on the fundamentals of child protection, the duties and responsibilities of teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders related to child protection policy, and the preventive measures that would address cases of violence, bullying and other forms of abuse that are happening inside the school. The last two sessions caught also the interest of the participants as they found it very relatable to their school setting. The session shed light on the participants given the fact that bullying is a serious issue that affects both homes and schools, and teachers have a limited understanding of it (Hidalgo and Españo, 2021).

This session facilitated the participants in crafting their school-based child protection policy and the composition of the school child protection committee in which various stakeholders were tapped as members.



Figure 3. The School Head and the Child Protection Coordinator are Discussing Their Crafted School-Based Child Protection Policy

School Campaign on Child Protection through IEC Material Development

These helped the beneficiaries to take into account the usage of modern technology and digital arts to form educational yet creative and attention-catching information dissemination materials. Brochures and leaflets were produced at the end of the session and the participants affirmed that they were able to reproduce and distribute to different stakeholders during their school activities. Some schools have made use of display boards or bulletin boards of the school in advocating child protection while some have adopted and developed online advocacy in the form of infomercials and short video clips which were disseminated with the use of social media applications such as Facebook and Messenger.



Figure 4. Selected Participants for the Conduct of Monitoring and Evaluation (Impact Analysis), Months After the Seminar-Workshops are Done

Identified Activities Conducted Related to Child Protection

The focus group discussion served as a gateway for disclosing the different activities that the schools have done after the seminar workshops were successfully delivered. The informants have expressed that the following activities were implemented in their respective schools:

1. Restructuring of the School Child Protection Committee with orientation on their duties and responsibilities.
2. Approval and presentation of the school-based Child Protection Policy to different school stakeholders (students, teachers, administrators, parents, partner agencies).
3. Standardization of the Procedures of Management of Cases of bullying and violence.
4. Conduct Awareness on Child Protection to students, teachers, administrators, and parents which was disseminated in particular school-related activities (LAC session, PTA and Homeroom meetings, Portfolio Day and Convergence activities, Monday Flag Raising).

5. Revision of School Handbook with provisions from DepEd Child Protection Policy and Learner's Right and Protection.
6. Orientation of Immersion Partners (Secondary Schools) and Practice Teachers (Elementary Schools) on Child Protection.
7. Contextualization of bullying and violence concepts and child protection for lower grades (mother tongue-based advocacy).
8. Distribution of IEC Materials (brochures and leaflets) to different stakeholders and online advocacy about child protection.
9. Establishment of a Child Protection Desk by the division personnel during athletic and academic activities.
10. Capability building of teachers and parents on Child Protection, handling bullying cases and other forms of violence.
11. Fostering partnerships with other agencies (DSWD, PNP, LGU) to strengthen the advocacy and functionality of Child Protection in schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The beneficiaries found this project to be beneficial because there were a lot of activities done. Aside from that, the project served as reinforcement and empowerment as child protection coordinators and managers in their stations. Moreover, the participants have mentioned and affirmed that their advocacy for child protection was strengthened. They expressed that the Child Protection Policy of DepEd was not young in its existence however due to numerous activities, this was not given much attention. In fact, this project was one of a kind since most of their training and workshops are concentrated more on the content of the subjects without considering that the performance of the children is also influenced by their behavior, character, and their relationship with others inside the school. The impact of the project goes along with the study of Gonzales and Madrigal (2020) that it is crucial to develop and execute effective interventions to address the issue of bullying and other forms of violence in schools. It is in the hands of educators to foster a secure and welcoming atmosphere, enabling learners to learn and be set free from the threat of harmful conduct.

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