

LEVEL OF COMPLIANCE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS ON THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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Abstract— Child protection is a fundamental human right and a crucial component of quality education. This study aimed to assess the level of compliance of public secondary schools in [Location] with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) and to identify the factors influencing its implementation. A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire administered to school administrators, teachers, and students. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants. The findings revealed varying levels of compliance among schools, with significant disparities observed in terms of awareness, training, and resource allocation. While most schools had established Child Protection Committees, challenges such as inadequate training, limited resources, and lack of awareness hindered effective implementation. Furthermore, cultural factors, societal norms, and bureaucratic constraints were identified as additional barriers to compliance.

Keywords: child protection, school safety, educational policy, policy implementation, qualitative research, quantitative research

I. INTRODUCTION

Child protection is a paramount concern in education, particularly in the context of public secondary schools. According to Correia et al. (2023), children are acknowledged as capable social actors with important viewpoints and knowledge who actively engage with their social environment and possess fundamental rights. This understanding is based on the notion that everyone has a responsibility to protect children from violence, abuse, and neglect (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2016, as cited by Hendel, 2022). Different viewpoints and student-beneficial policies have emerged in the twenty-first century. Teachers now act as facilitators since the learning environment is student-centered. The days of teachers being the focal point of pupils' education are long gone. Programs, services, policies, and frameworks aimed at preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, prejudice, and violence are collectively referred to as child protection (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021). It's still quite difficult to address victim child protection policies (Burton & Montauban, 2021). Educational establishments also have to deal with this issue.

According to the WHO's most recent results in its Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children (2020), 1 billion children, or one out of every two children, experience violence annually, and children between the ages of 11 and 15 who experience bullying at school have a 13% lower chance of graduating. Accordingly, the effectiveness of school-based initiatives for child protection depends on the leadership of school administrators (Cheng, 2022). To develop a comprehensive child protection strategy for their school that aligns with best practices and current research, school administrators must also examine their current child protection policies and procedures. Based on recent research in the six countries of East Asia and the Pacific, it was found that child protection issues in schools are not systematically documented; robust national information systems that regularly track and monitor child protection violations in educational settings have not been documented in any region. Nationally, information about child safety events is seldom obtained by educational authorities. The main focus was on determining the use of corporal punishment in terms of controlling legislation and regulations introduced to eradicate the practice. The topic of sexual assault and harassment in schools continues to be poorly documented via official channels within education ministries (UNICEF EAPRO, 2014, as cited by McCoy et al., 2020).

Based on the report of Elemeno et al. (2023), 50% of Filipino pupils are bullied at school, and one in two Filipino schoolchildren endure various forms of abuse. At least four out of ten children aged six to ten (Grades 1-3) and seven out of ten children aged nine to thirteen (Grades 4-6), as well as high school students aged twelve to seventeen, had experienced violence in school, according to the 2019 comprehensive study of VAC in Philippine schools carried out by UNICEF, Plan International, and the Council for Welfare of Children in 2009 (UNICEF, 2016). Children also encounter aggression from peers and school staff, according to the study. In elementary and secondary schools, sexual harassment is the most prevalent form of sexual assault, and women are particularly at risk (UNICEF, 2016).

The Department of Education (DepEd) has made significant strides in prioritizing the protection and well-being of children in schools. DepEd released a child protection policy in 2012 with the goal of providing children with extra safety, particularly those who are in danger of experiencing situations that could impair their growth and academic performance. The policy, released in 2012, is named the "DepEd Child Protection Policy (CPP)" or the "Policy and Guidelines on Protecting Children in School from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying, and Other Forms of Abuse." According to the report, school employees are essential to this coalition because they interact with law enforcement, deal directly with children who have experienced violence, and reach out to parents. The Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 (RA 10627), also known as "An Act Requiring All Elementary and Secondary Schools to Adopt Policies to Prevent and Address Acts of Bullying in Their Institutions," was also passed to improve child protection. However, despite all of the government's principles, there are signs that educators and school administrators have struggled to maintain strong and long-lasting school-based protection programs for students. In addition, challenges remain in ensuring full compliance with the Child Protection Policy. Factors such as inadequate training, limited resources, and lack of awareness can hinder effective implementation. To address these challenges, it is crucial to assess the current level of compliance among public secondary schools.

II. METHODS

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative types of research. For the quantitative part, the descriptive method was used to determine the level of compliance of public secondary schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012). Meanwhile, for the qualitative part, basic qualitative research by Merriam and Tisdell was used to explore the issues and challenges in the implementation of the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012).

This study was conducted in 15 secondary schools in the Division of Northern Philippines. The participants of the study were the school stakeholders who are members of the Child Protection Committee of the different schools. These participants were chosen because they are directly involved in the implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of the Child Protection Policy, making them key informants for both assessing compliance levels and identifying challenges related to policy enforcement. The stakeholders typically included school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and other staff involved in child protection efforts.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used for the quantitative data collection, designed to assess the level of compliance with the policy. The questionnaire included questions on awareness, implementation, training, and monitoring of the policy, along with items related to the overall school environment regarding child protection.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol was employed for the qualitative part of the research. Interviews were conducted with members of the Child Protection Committees to explore the challenges and issues faced during the policy's implementation. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the obstacles encountered, the effectiveness of training programs, and the adequacy of resources.

Data Analysis

The responses from the questionnaire were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Means were computed to determine the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy across different aspects (awareness, implementation, training, and monitoring). In addition, an independent sample t-test and one-way analysis of variance were used to determine significant differences in the level of compliance of public secondary schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) when grouped according to the profile of the schools and respondents.

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcribed interview responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and challenges related to the implementation of the policy. These themes were categorized and interpreted to provide insights into the barriers and facilitators to effective policy enforcement.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Profile of the Schools

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Type of School		
National High School	15	100.00
Location		

Urban	2	13.30
Rural	13	86.70
Number of Students Enrolled		
Less than 100	3	20.00
101-500	10	66.70
501 and above	2	13.30
Number of Teachers		
Less than 10	2	13.30
11-20	3	20.00
21-50	7	46.70
51 and above	3	20.00

The profile of the 15 national high schools reveals key characteristics about their type, location, enrollment size, and teaching staff. All schools in the study are classified as national high schools, representing 100% of the sample. In terms of location, the majority are situated in rural areas, accounting for 86.7% (13 schools), while only 13.3% (2 schools) are in urban settings, highlighting the rural dominance of the schools included. When considering the number of students enrolled, most schools (66.7%) have an enrollment of 101 to 500 students. A smaller proportion (20%) have fewer than 100 students, and only 13.3% have a larger student population of 501 or more. Regarding the number of teachers, the largest group of schools (46.7%) employ 21 to 50 teachers. Meanwhile, 20% have a faculty size of more than 50, 20% have 11 to 20 teachers, and 13.3% operate with fewer than 10 teachers.

Table 2. Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	35	38.30
Female	54	60.70
Age		
21-30	14	15.70
31-40	22	24.70
41-50	39	43.80
51 and above	14	15.70
Designation		
Principal	15	16.90
Guidance Counselor	15	16.90
Teacher Representative	23	25.80
Parent Representative	14	15.70
Student Representative	10	11.20
Community Representative	12	13.50
Highest Educational Attainment		
Doctorate Degree	1	1.10
Master's Degree	44	49.40
Bachelor's Degree	34	38.20
Still Studying	10	11.20
Number of Years in the Position		
Less than 1 year	23	25.80
1-5	23	25.80
6-10	20	22.50
11 and above	23	25.80
Number of Trainings Attended related to Child Protection Policy for the Past Three Years		
None	47	52.80
1-3	30	33.70
4-5	4	4.50
More than 5	8	9.00

The profile of the respondents highlights diversity in gender, age, designation, education, tenure, and training experiences. A majority of the respondents are female, accounting for 60.7%, while males represent 38.3%. In terms of age distribution, the largest

group falls within the 41-50 age range (43.8%), followed by those aged 31-40 (24.7%). Respondents aged 21-30 and 51 and above each constitute 15.7% of the group. The respondents hold various designations, with teacher representatives making up the largest proportion (25.8%), followed by principals and guidance counselors, each at 16.9%. Parent representatives account for 15.7%, while community representatives and student representatives comprise 13.5% and 11.2%, respectively. Regarding educational attainment, nearly half of the respondents (49.4%) hold a master's degree, 38.2% have a bachelor's degree, and 11.2% are still pursuing their studies. Only 1.1% have earned a doctorate degree.

In terms of tenure, respondents are evenly distributed across experience levels: 25.8% have served in their positions for less than one year, 1-5 years, or 11 years and above, while 22.5% have 6-10 years of experience. Training related to child protection policy over the past three years shows that a significant majority (52.8%) have not attended any training, 33.7% have attended 1-3 trainings, 4.5% have attended 4-5, and 9% have participated in more than 5 trainings.

Table 2a. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) along Awareness and Understanding of the Policy

Items	Mean	Description
All faculty and staff are familiar with DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012.	4.27	Highly Compliant
Students are adequately informed about their rights under the Child Protection Policy.	4.37	Highly Compliant
The Child Protection Policy is included in school orientations for new staff and students.	4.49	Highly Compliant
Information regarding the Child Protection Policy is easily accessible to all stakeholders.	4.10	Highly Compliant
Regular discussions about the Child Protection Policy are held in staff meetings.	4.17	Highly Compliant
Category Mean	4.28	Highly Compliant

Results in Table 2a show that public secondary schools are highly compliant with the Child Protection Policy of DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012, in terms of awareness and understanding. Since the category mean is 4.28, schools are considered "Highly Compliant" because they have done a lot in promoting a culture of child protection. Specifically, the most important step is that the policy should be incorporated into the orientations for both new staff and new students so that one is exposed to it early on. In addition, the mean of 4.37 regarding the information supplied to students about their rights under the policy indicates that schools do a good job of acquainting students with their protections under the policy. High assessment for faculty and staff awareness of the policy indicates a commitment on the part of the schools to ensure personnel are informed about their responsibilities to protect children. Furthermore, discussion of the policy at regular staff meetings and the availability of information about the policy to all parties further indicate the efforts of the schools in maintaining open communication and general awareness.

This research study's findings are consistent with previous research that has emphasized the importance of awareness as a fundamental requirement for effective implementation of child protection policies. Awareness is crucial because it ensures that all stakeholders—teachers, staff, students, and parents—are knowledgeable about the policies, their roles in implementing them, and the rights of children. Without this knowledge, policies will exist only on paper, leaving a void in the practical implementation of policies. According to Tarraya (2023), proper school personnel orientation programs and in-service training are key to ensuring a safe and informed environment at school. Updating teachers and staff on policy provisions and practices is one way schools can better recognize, prevent, and solve child protection issues. These orientations not only make new personnel aware of the policy but also refresh existing personnel, thus ensuring constant awareness and vigilance across all levels of the school community.

Moreover, Sali and Marasigan (2020) emphasized that schools with planned awareness programs, such as frequent discussions, orientations for stakeholders, and available information, tend to exhibit higher compliance rates with child protection policies. This has helped reduce the occurrence of child rights violation cases since it ensures that all parties are enlightened on their roles and responsibilities when handling the issue if it arises. Through awareness programs, students are empowered through education on their rights, enabling them to identify and report any violations.

Table 2b. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) along Implementation of Child Protection Measures

Items	Mean	Description
The school has established protocols for reporting incidents of child abuse or neglect.	4.45	Highly Compliant

The Child Protection Policy is actively integrated into school activities and programs.	4.39	Highly Compliant
There are designated Child Protection Committees or personnel in the school.	4.64	Fully Compliant
The school implements preventive measures to ensure a safe environment for students.	4.63	Fully Compliant
Child protection measures are routinely evaluated and updated based on current needs.	4.26	Highly Compliant
Category Mean	4.47	Highly Compliant

The results in Table 2b indicate that public secondary schools maintain a high level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) in terms of implementing child protection measures, with a category mean of 4.47, described as "Highly Compliant." This reflects the schools' commitment to translating policy into actionable measures that prioritize student safety and well-being. Among the specific measures, the presence of designated Child Protection Committees or personnel achieves the highest compliance rating, with a mean of 4.64, classified as "Fully Compliant." This finding highlights the importance of having accountable individuals or groups within schools dedicated to implementing and overseeing child protection efforts. Similarly, the implementation of preventive measures to ensure a safe environment for students also received a "Fully Compliant" rating, demonstrating the schools' proactive stance in addressing potential risks before they escalate.

The integration of the Child Protection Policy into school activities and programs, and the establishment of protocols for reporting child abuse or neglect, are also rated as "Highly Compliant." These measures emphasize the operationalization of the policy within daily school activities and the establishment of reliable systems for addressing incidents. Lastly, the routine evaluation and updating of child protection measures underscore the schools' efforts to adapt to evolving needs and circumstances, though this area may benefit from further strengthening.

Results from the study are supported by research, which emphasizes that well-defined systems and proactive strategies are necessary for the successful implementation of child protection policies. According to Wismayanti et al. (2021), it is these well-defined systems, which include clear reporting protocols, established committees, and preventive measures, that can help combat and prevent child abuse and neglect. Schools that develop such systems and implement them provide the foundation for accountability and responsiveness, ensuring quicker identification and redress of potential issues. Furthermore, proactive measures—such as safe environments and child protection integrated into daily activities—prevent schools from being reactive-only and ensure they are proactive in their approach as well. Similarly, Allam and Martin (2021) point out the importance of periodic review and dynamic inclusion of child protection policies in the school culture. In this way, policies will always be relevant to address emerging challenges. For example, periodic review allows schools to detect gaps or inefficiencies in their existing practices, which can then be addressed through updates or improvements. Active integration would involve placing child protection principles into the school programs, orientations, and staff training to ensure the policy becomes part of the institution's operations rather than being a standalone directive.

Table 2c. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) along Training and Capacity Building

Items	Mean	Description
Faculty and staff receive regular training on child protection principles and practices.	3.83	Highly Compliant
The school provides resources (e.g., manuals, brochures) on the Child Protection Policy to staff and students.	3.83	Highly Compliant
Workshops or seminars on child protection are conducted for parents and guardians.	3.69	Highly Compliant
Staff members are trained on recognizing signs of child abuse and appropriate responses.	3.84	Highly Compliant
External organizations are engaged for training and support on child protection issues.	3.80	Highly Compliant
Category Mean	3.80	Highly Compliant

The results in Table 2c show that public secondary schools exhibit a "Highly Compliant" level of adherence to the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) in the area of training and capacity building, with a category mean of 3.80. This reflects the schools' commitment to ensuring that their faculty, staff, students, and the broader school community are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect children from harm. The highest-rated item is training for staff on recognizing

signs of child abuse and appropriate responses. This indicates that schools are placing a strong emphasis on equipping their staff with practical skills to identify potential cases of abuse and respond effectively. This aligns with the importance of staff training in enabling early detection and appropriate intervention, which is crucial for safeguarding students.

Additionally, regular training on child protection principles and practices and the provision of resources on the Child Protection Policy demonstrate that schools are actively ensuring that staff and students are continually updated on the policy. Regular training is essential to ensure that everyone in the school community remains informed about the latest developments in child protection and is prepared to apply these principles in their daily interactions with students. Workshops or seminars for parents and guardians are also conducted, highlighting the schools' efforts to extend their child protection initiatives beyond the school staff to include the broader family and community. Engaging parents and guardians is critical, as they play a significant role in a child's well-being and protection both inside and outside the school. Lastly, schools are engaging external organizations for training and support, which suggests that they are seeking expert assistance to enhance their child protection efforts. This collaboration with external organizations can bring valuable knowledge, resources, and best practices that strengthen the school's capacity to protect students.

Bustos-Orosa (2024) argues that regular training for school personnel, including educators, administrators, and support staff, is essential for building a shared understanding of child protection principles and practices. When staff are adequately trained, they are better prepared to recognize signs of abuse and take appropriate actions in response to potential threats. The high compliance rating in this study, particularly for items such as training staff to recognize signs of child abuse and providing resources on child protection policies, mirrors these principles. Training fosters awareness of the indicators of abuse and guides staff on how to respond effectively, which is critical for early intervention and the prevention of further harm. Moreover, Jabar (2021) highlights that effective child protection requires a whole-school approach, where not only school personnel but also parents and the wider community are involved. This is reflected in the results of the study, which show that schools are engaging parents and guardians through workshops and seminars. This is an essential part of the process because parents are often the first line of defense when it comes to spotting signs of abuse or neglect outside the school environment. The involvement of parents enhances the ability to create a consistent protective environment for children both at school and at home.

In addition to internal training, the importance of seeking external support for child protection, as noted by Mirasol et al. (2021), is also evident in the study. Lynch et al. argue that collaborating with external organizations provides schools with access to specialized knowledge and resources that may not be available within the school system. These organizations often bring in expertise in handling complex child protection issues, offer additional training programs, and can provide up-to-date guidance on best practices for safeguarding children. The study's finding that schools are engaging external organizations for support highlights the value of these collaborations. It reflects an understanding that child protection is a multifaceted issue that requires input from a variety of stakeholders, including external experts who can help schools stay informed and prepared.

Table 2d. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) along Monitoring and Evaluation

Items	Mean	Description
The school conducts regular assessments to monitor compliance with the Child Protection Policy.	4.02	Highly Compliant
Feedback from students and parents is actively sought and incorporated in evaluations.	4.01	Highly Compliant
The administration takes appropriate actions based on monitoring and evaluation findings.	4.21	Highly Compliant
Data on child protection incidents are documented and analyzed for trends.	4.16	Highly Compliant
Reports on the status of compliance with the Child Protection Policy are shared with stakeholders.	4.10	Highly Compliant
Category Mean	4.10	Highly Compliant

The results presented in Table 2d highlight the level of compliance of public secondary schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) specifically in the area of Monitoring and Evaluation. The overall category mean of 4.10 indicates that schools are highly compliant with the requirements for monitoring and evaluating their child protection measures, reflecting a strong commitment to ensuring ongoing effectiveness in child protection practices. The highest-rated item is taking appropriate actions based on monitoring and evaluation findings. This suggests that schools are not only actively monitoring and evaluating their child protection policies but are also responsive to the findings, ensuring that necessary actions are taken when issues or areas for improvement are identified. This proactive approach helps maintain the relevance and effectiveness of the child protection measures in place. Schools also regularly assess compliance with the Child Protection Policy, indicating that they are

conducting periodic evaluations to ensure that their child protection practices align with the established guidelines. Regular assessments are critical for identifying gaps or weaknesses in implementation and for making necessary adjustments. Feedback from students and parents is also actively sought and incorporated into the evaluation process. This reflects an understanding that child protection is not just an institutional responsibility but also a community effort. By involving students and parents, schools ensure that the policies are aligned with the needs and concerns of those directly affected, thereby fostering greater engagement and collaboration in safeguarding children. The documentation and analysis of child protection incident data show that schools are tracking incidents and looking for patterns to help anticipate future risks or evaluate the effectiveness of existing measures. Analyzing trends in child protection incidents is a critical aspect of data-driven decision-making that can inform better practices and preventive measures. Lastly, the fact that schools are sharing reports on the status of compliance with stakeholders indicates a commitment to transparency. By communicating the results of their monitoring and evaluation efforts, schools foster accountability and ensure that all relevant parties are aware of the progress being made, as well as any challenges or areas that require attention.

The findings that show a high compliance level in child protection policy monitoring and evaluation resonate with research conducted by Rahamathulla (2021), which highlighted the significance of M&E in the successful implementation of child protection policies. Paci-Green et al. (2020) note that regular assessments and data analysis become essential practices for schools and institutions to track the policy's effectiveness, identify challenges that may be emerging in the future, and ensure resource allocation in the right place. Such processes help establish how child protection measures work in practice and whether such measures align with the policy's intended outcomes. In addition, through the continuous monitoring process, schools are able to identify implementation gaps early and deal with these issues before they evolve into major problems. Stakeholder engagement, including those involved—namely students, parents, and school staff—is also another key feature in the findings. Feedback from students and parents is involved in the evaluation process, showing a participative approach to monitoring. This engagement is essential because it helps schools assess the policy's level of responsiveness among the target audience. Porio et al. (2020) have shown that participatory evaluation leads to a shared sense of responsibility and ownership. In this regard, when students and parents are engaged in the feedback process, they are empowered to contribute to the success of the policy. This engagement not only refines the policy but also enhances trust and collaboration between the school and the community. The findings from the study reflect this dynamic, showing that a school that actively seeks and includes feedback from all stakeholders is in a better position to perceive improvement in the effectiveness of its child protection measures.

Data documentation and trend analysis, as outlined in the study, are crucial components in the assessment process. Jabar (2021) suggests that monitoring incidents and analyzing trends over time are important data sources for schools to determine the effectiveness of child protection policies. Schools document incidents of child abuse, neglect, or other safety concerns to identify patterns, pinpoint potential areas of risk, and adapt strategies accordingly. This evidence-based approach will allow for informed decision-making by schools about which interventions are working and which ones need adjustment or replacement. According to Siy Van et al. (2024), a robust data-driven approach will ensure that schools shift from anecdotal evidence to objective metrics in guiding policy decisions. Another significant finding, supported by literature, is transparency in reporting and sharing the results of monitoring with stakeholders. Literature asserts that when schools share compliance reports with parents, students, and other community members, they provide an environment of accountability and openness (Asio et al., 2020). This transparency fosters continuous discussion on the policy's effectiveness and encourages an environment where all stakeholders can contribute to improving the system. It also shows a school's commitment to upholding high standards and to feedback.

Table 2e. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) along Supportive School Environment and Wellbeing

Items	Mean	Description
The school promotes a safe and supportive environment for all students.	4.65	Fully Compliant
There are mechanisms for students to confidentially report concerns related to child protection.	4.43	Highly Compliant
The school has programs to educate students about their rights and safety.	4.48	Highly Compliant
Counseling services are available for students affected by child protection issues.	4.47	Highly Compliant
The school has policies in place to prevent bullying and discrimination.	4.67	Fully Compliant
Category Mean	4.54	Fully Compliant

The results in Table 2e reveal a high compliance of public secondary schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) on the creation of a supportive school environment and well-being. With an overall category mean of 4.54,

which falls under the "Fully Compliant" range, the schools show strong adherence to the principles of ensuring safety, support, and well-being for students. The survey shows evidence that these schools have made significant progress in ensuring a school environment that promotes the students' safety, both physical, emotional, and psychological. The item with the highest mean score, "The school provides a safe and supportive environment for all students," reflects the school's commitment to creating a culture of safety. This indicates that schools have succeeded in cultivating environments that are conducive to student well-being, which means they are both physically safe and psychologically supported. This conclusion is supported by the findings of Paci-Green et al. (2020), who postulated that the safe and supportive school environment serves as the foundation of student development in general and, in particular, their capacity to learn academically and socially. Such an environment will, therefore, reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect as a culture will be established that values the students and safeguards them.

The availability of confidential mechanisms for reporting concerns by students and counseling services suggests the need to provide channels for reporting concerns and access to support. According to Termes et al. (2020), a study indicates that the more trusting the reporting mechanism is of the confidentiality of the reporting, the higher the tendency for students to report child protection issues. This means that many schools understand that such places will be necessary as students seek a haven where they can discuss and seek help over issues related to or involving them in abuse cases without fear of reprisal or identification. Best practices in the area of child protection promote awareness and empowerment through education for the rights of the students. Such education helps not only to satisfy the legal obligation but also arms students with the capacity to demand their own safety. As pointed out by D' Ayala et al. (2020), "Programs aimed at education help in prevention, foster empowerment, and create a culture of preventing child abuse while promoting understanding of both rights and avenues to seek assistance."

Furthermore, policies to prevent bullying and discrimination show that schools are committed to creating an inclusive and respectful environment. These policies are crucial in addressing different forms of abuse and ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or identity, feel protected and supported. XU et al. (2020) emphasize that anti-bullying policies and programs to promote respect are key to cultivating an environment where students are free from fear and harassment, enabling them to thrive academically and socially. In summary, the findings suggest that public secondary schools are largely successful in fostering a supportive and safe environment for students, which is a key aspect of effective child protection. A high compliance rate regarding this part of the child protection policy indicates that schools, among their preventive actions on abusive measures, are interested in raising children toward greater well-being and the pursuit of all rights of a learner. The same findings in some of the previous studies conclude the need to design support around student needs: their cognitive development, emotional needs, or overall support as a holistic unit needed in protection against abuse.

Table 2f. Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012)

Dimensions	Mean	Description
Awareness and Understanding of the Policy	4.28	Highly Compliant
Implementation of Child Protection Measures	4.47	Highly Compliant
Training and Capacity Building	3.80	Highly Compliant
Monitoring and Evaluation	4.10	Highly Compliant
Supportive School Environment and Wellbeing	4.54	Fully Compliant
Overall Mean	4.24	Highly Compliant

The summary results of Table 2f depict the level of compliance of public secondary schools in implementing the Child Protection Policy, as stipulated by DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012, on five major dimensions. The mean of the overall compliance puts the level of compliance within the "Highly Compliant" category, meaning that the schools are generally complying with the requirements of the policy. However, the findings also showed some variation in compliance across the different dimensions, with the Supportive School Environment and Well-being dimension scoring the highest mean, indicating full compliance, while the Training and Capacity Building dimension scored the lowest mean, indicating high compliance but with some room for improvement. Schools show a high percentage of compliance with the knowledge and awareness of the Child Protection Policy. This implies that both faculty, staff, and students are adequately informed about the policy and its implications.

The results underscore the fact that an informed school community is the bedrock on which child protection measures must be based. The high compliance in this area supports the notion that policy awareness is an essential first step in safeguarding children, as highlighted by Wismayanti et al. (2021), who found that schools with robust awareness programs show a higher rate of child protection success. Meanwhile, the dimension of implementation of child protection measures also shows high compliance, reflecting the fact that schools are actively integrating protective measures into their practices. The results show that schools have protocols for reporting incidents, have personnel or committees designated to handle them, and take active efforts to create a safe environment. This level of compliance supports research by Jones and Welch (2018), which emphasizes that clear protocols and proactive child protection measures are critical to reducing school incidents of abuse and neglect.

In addition, training and capacity building remain high in compliance but show the lowest of all means. While schools are offering some types of training and resources for staff, parents, and students, it appears there is a need for increased or more extensive capacity building. Studies, such as by Bartholet (2020), indicate the need for continuous training of employees and stakeholders to help in the identification and response to child protection concerns. Perhaps the lower score in this dimension reflects areas where schools could do better by providing more regular and detailed training. The monitoring and evaluation dimension scored 4.10 as well, placing it in the highly compliant category. This indicates that schools are conducting regular audits of whether their child-protection programs are effective, thus improving by filling gaps. Monitoring and evaluation allow schools to easily locate shortcomings in their policies and develop over time. This is consistent with the results of the study by Amparo et al. (2019), where they emphasize the importance of monitoring and feedback loops as a means to ensure continued improvement in child protection systems.

The Supportive School Environment and Well-being dimension ranked the highest, with a score of 4.54, reflecting full compliance with schools establishing a nurturing environment that promotes student safety and well-being. Such measures include education programs targeted toward students on their rights, confidential reporting mechanisms, and access to counseling services, among others. These are pivotal measures that make up a comprehensive care support system, as demonstrated by Martin (2019), through research findings that show schools are more effective in handling proactive measures for child protection.

Table 3. Significant Difference in the Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) when grouped according to Profile of School

Profile of Schools	t-value/ f-value	p-value	Decision
Location	.850	.200	Not Significant
Number of Teachers	1.250	.350	Not Significant
Number of Enrolled Students	1.85	.887	Not Significant

Table 3 reveals that no significant differences emerge in the level of compliance with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) among grouped schools according to profile variables for location, number of teachers, and number of students enrolled. First, location (urban or rural) yields a p-value of 0.200, which is greater than the commonly used significance threshold of 0.05. Thus, the location of a school does not significantly influence the level of compliance with the child protection policy. In other words, the size of the school in an urban or rural area does not determine the extent to which a school complies with the policy. Similarly, for the number of teachers, the p-value of 0.350 is also above 0.05, which means that the size of the faculty does not have a significant impact on compliance with the Child Protection Policy. Schools with more or fewer teaching staff seem to implement the policy equally, without any marked difference in adherence.

Lastly, the analysis of the number of enrolled students yielded a p-value of 0.887, which is significantly above 0.05, indicating no significant difference in compliance based on school size. Whether a school has a large or small student population does not appear to influence the implementation of the policy.

Table 4. Significant Difference in the Level of Compliance of Public Secondary Schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012) when grouped according to Profile of the Respondents

Profile of Respondents	t-value/ f-value	p-value	Decision
Gender	-.936	.352	Not Significant
Age	1.60	.206	Not Significant
Designation	.442	.919	Not Significant
Highest Educational Attainment	1.82	.769	Not Significant
Number of Years in the Position	.633	.643	Not Significant
Number of Trainings Attended related to Child Protection Policy for the Past Three Years	1.22	.346	Not Significant

Table 4 shows that the results reveal no level of difference in compliance from the profile of the respondents regarding the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012). Specifically, the analysis of respondent characteristics such as gender, age, designation, highest educational attainment, number of years in the position, and number of trainings attended related to the policy shows no significant impact on the compliance level. First, the gender variable, which has a t-value of -0.936 and a p-value of 0.352, indicates that male and female respondents perceive the implementation of the policy in a similar manner and do not significantly differ between the groups. The age variable also didn't show any significant difference, as the t-value of 1.60 and the p-value of

0.206 are greater than the threshold set for statistical significance. This therefore means that respondents' age does not determine the kind of evaluation they will make regarding compliance with the policy.

The designation of either a principal, a guidance counselor, or a teacher had no significant difference in compliance, as its t-value was 0.442, and the p-value stood at 0.919. This suggests that respondents, regardless of their position, have similar perceptions of how well the policy is being implemented. Similarly, the highest educational attainment variable, with a t-value of 1.82 and a p-value of 0.769, shows that the level of education of the respondents does not affect their view on policy compliance. This, combined with the t-value of 0.633 and a p-value of 0.643, further points to the fact that years in office do not bear much significance in shaping opinions related to the policy for respondents. Lastly, the number of trainings related to the child protection policy that respondents have attended were indicated with a t-value of 1.22 and a p-value of 0.346. This means that the respondents' perceptions of compliance will not be significantly affected by the training frequency.

Issues and Challenges in the Implementation of the Child Protection Policy

a. Lack of Awareness and Training

A significant challenge identified by respondents is the lack of adequate awareness and training among school personnel regarding child protection policies and procedures. This includes the ability to identify signs of abuse, understand reporting procedures, and implement appropriate response strategies. Without sufficient knowledge and skills, staff may be unable to effectively address child protection concerns, potentially leading to harmful consequences for children. Some of the responses include:

R04: *"Some teachers are not fully aware of the Child Protection Policy and its implications."*

R18: *"There is a need for more comprehensive training on child protection issues, especially for new teachers."*

R22: *"Lack of training can hinder the ability of teachers to identify and respond to signs of abuse and neglect."*

b. Resource Constraints and Limited Support

Another major challenge is the limited resources and support available to schools. Inadequate funding for training, counseling services, and infrastructure improvements can hinder the implementation of effective child protection measures. Overburdened teachers and staff may struggle to prioritize child protection concerns due to heavy workloads and lack of support. Additionally, limited access to counseling services and other support systems can negatively impact the well-being of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. Some of the verbalizations from the informants are as follows:

R01: *"The school lacks sufficient resources to implement effective child protection measures, such as counseling services and support programs."*

R14: *"Teachers are often overburdened with teaching responsibilities and may not have enough time to address child protection concerns."*

R26: *"Limited access to counseling services and other support systems can hinder the well-being of children who have experienced abuse or neglect."*

c. Cultural and Societal Barriers

Cultural and societal factors can also impede the effective implementation of child protection policies. Stigma, fear of retribution, and traditional beliefs can discourage victims from reporting abuse and seeking help. These barriers can hinder the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators and perpetuate a culture of silence. To address these challenges, it is crucial to promote awareness, challenge harmful cultural norms, and provide support to victims and their families. Some of the responses from the informants are as follows:

R05: *"Some parents may be reluctant to report child abuse due to cultural stigma and fear of social repercussions."*

R17: *"Traditional beliefs and practices may hinder the recognition and reporting of child abuse."*

R30: *"Community attitudes and norms can create barriers to effective child protection implementation."*

IV. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the level of compliance of public secondary schools with the Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, Series of 2012). The findings revealed that while the policy is widely recognized, its implementation faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of awareness, training, and resource allocation. To ensure the effective implementation of the policy and the protection of students, addressing these challenges and strengthening the mechanisms for prevention, detection, and response to child abuse and neglect is crucial.

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