

Violence Against Children: The Philippine Experience*

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In the Philippines, children who are victims of violence are categorized as children needing special protection (CNSP). CNSP includes child labour; children-victims of sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation; abandoned and neglected or children without primary caregivers; children of indigenous cultural groups; child-victims of disasters; children in situations of armed conflict; street children; and, children in conflict with the law.

Violence against Filipino children are committed through physical and psychological abuse/deprivation that manifest in the worst forms of child labour, child prostitution, begging in the streets, abandonment, trafficking and /or recruitment as soldiers or couriers in areas of armed conflict.

Most instances or forms of violence against Filipino children are attributed to poverty. The increasing reported cases of violence against children are the social manifestations of a long history of poverty, characterized by a chronic or cyclical condition of deprivation of basic services that include basic education, health and nutrition services, livelihood or employment opportunities, durable housing and clothing. Poverty has affected several generations of a lot of Filipino families that has resulted in inadequate parental capabilities, strained family relationship and corrupted values.

Violence in the home and in the family

With 28.4 percent of Filipino families being poor in 2000, poverty has been considered a major reason for violence in the home. Though being poor does not readily result to violence, the pressure of providing for the basic needs of the family has led a lot of parents to neglect or leave their children unattended for a certain portion of the day.

In recent years, more mothers seek work in urban areas or abroad where there are more employment opportunities for female service workers. Thus, children are left to the care of their fathers who are not traditionally prepared for child rearing. These various circumstances have created strain in family relationships that often lead to domestic violence with children as the victims. Child victims of domestic violence are subjected to physical, verbal and emotional abuses. Physical abuses can even involve sexual abuses.

The number of reported incest sexual abuses had increased from 514 in 1996 to 1,681 in 2000 (DSWD). The prolonged separation from their wives or absence of mothers in the

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home has been used by some fathers to justify sexual abuse of their daughters.

Violence in the community and on the streets

In most instances, the initial experiences of violence occur at home or in the family that lead children to move on to another setting. Without proper parental care, these children move to the community at large or the street where they are susceptible to abuse and exploitation.

In urban areas, children who are forced to work to augment their family income usually spend a substantial part of their time in the streets near entertainment areas, bus terminals, ports, parks and other areas where they can find work. They engage in vending, shoe-shining, begging, watching/washing cars, making deliveries and other odd jobs. Some other children were forced in the streets because of family problems and/or peer influence.

It is difficult to get a headcount of street children since they are usually mobile or transient. A recent study conducted by Dr. Exaltacion E. Lamberte, as commissioned by UNICEF, revealed that there were about 246,011 street children in 22 major cities in the country. About 80 percent are boys and 95 percent still have parents. In the remote areas of the Philippines, there are about 2.5 million children in cultural communities who are among the most disadvantaged or marginalized sectors in the country. They live mostly in remote areas usually accessible only by foot. They have limited access to basic social services and often suffer from discrimination

Violence in schools

Information on violence against children in school is not available. Though corporal punishment is strictly prohibited in school, there are a few reported cases of physical and verbal abuses. Some of these cases involved bullying by classmates that result to injuries or even illegal hazing conducted by fraternities, some of which result to death. Other reported cases of violence in school involved the teachers who impose physical punishments or verbal abuses such as scolding in public. There are also a few reported cases of sexual abuses or harassment committed by school teachers or officials.

Violence against children in conflict with the law

A UNICEF-commissioned study entitled “Situation Analysis on Children in Conflict with the Law and Juvenile Justice System,” conducted by the Ateneo Law School in 1997, revealed that the Filipino child in conflict with the law is usually male; between the ages of 14 and 17; elementary graduate, middle child from a low-income family with four to six members; charged with property-related crimes (robbery and theft) and, exposed to drugs or gang influence.

The Progress of the Philippines toward the Year 2000 World Summit Goals for Children (UNICEF, 1997) recorded a total of 1,380 children in conflict with the law in 1996, of whom 1,254 were detained and 126 were sentenced. The situation worsened in succeeding years. The Philippine National Police (PNP) reported 4,845 cases of children in conflict with the law in 2000 and 5,905 cases in 2001.

The Center for the Prevention & Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA)

The Center for the Prevention & Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA) works for a safe world for children free from sexual abuse and exploitation. It believes that the best way to stop child sexual abuse is to prevent children today from becoming offenders tomorrow. The Center's program consists of prevention, treatment, training, resource-building and networking.

CPTCSA teaches children the right ideas regarding appropriate touch and empathy. The NGO also teaches children the boundaries for touch and sex in order to help them better understand their sexuality and to build respectful relationships so they will not become future offenders.

CPTCSA helps prevent child sexual abuse and provide early intervention by reaching out to children in schools and their parents. CPCTSA conducts Family Advocacy Sessions that run for 3 hours, inform family members about CSA and give them skills on how to handle a child who tells s/he has been abused.

CPTCSA is working with the Department of Education (DepEd) to mandate Personal Safety Lessons (PSL) for the protection of all Filipino children. Since the establishment of CPTCSA, it has implemented PSL in more than 100 schools, has trained more than 800 teachers, 80 school counselors and has reached more than 30,000 students from 1st grade to 4th year high school.

The CPTCSA Treatment Program provides individual and group counselling for victims of child sexual abuse, young sexual offenders, parents and families. For young sexual offenders, treatment programs are designed to deal with the children's issues of empathy, self-esteem, sexual identity and sexuality, anger and interpersonal relationships. Methodologies include journal writing, sharing, homework, activities, games, storytelling, talk therapy, sand play and role playing. CPTCSA counselors are well-trained to hold counselling sessions with individual children and groups. Depending on their cases, the counselors design a program for healing each client which will also determine healing progress.

As a resource center, CPTCSA has the largest collection in Asia of international literature of CSA prevention and treatment, books, videos, magazines, tapes, articles, games and various materials. These resources are available for use within our center.

A holistic response to CSA requires strong networking. CPTCSA liaises with government organizations and agencies (on local and national levels) to promote child sexual abuse issues.

Case Study: Violence in the Home

Witness to Incest

IN FEBRUARY 2003, 9-year old Ramona was brought to a recovery shelter for children in Metro Manila as she exhibited the following behaviours: frequent blank stares, inability to sleep, frequent nightmares, masturbation and loneliness.

She used to live in a small room with her parents and 7 other brothers and sisters. The father is a barber who drinks and gambles while the mother is a sewer whose meager income provides mainly for all 8 children.

Ramona, the 4th child among 8 siblings, is not the direct victim of incest. There has been no physical contact between her and her father or verbal conversations that have sexual undertone. But her being a witness to the rape of her sister by the father is an experience that is beyond her capacity to understand and control.

Ramona also suffered a lot of physical abuse. Except for their mother, all of them were beaten up by their father at their slightest mistake. Whenever they were not able to respond promptly when called by the father, they would be hit by any object that he could grab. The most painful beating that she received was when she was caught awake when her father sexually-abused her 15-year old sister Myrna.

According to Ramona, they (the small children) were ordered to sleep. She would close her eyes out of fear but could not sleep though she remained still. She could not count the times when she witnessed Myrna crying while their father laid on top of her and forcing himself on her sister. Ramona also witnessed her father beating Myrna with a piece of wood every time she refused to have sex with him.

Witnessing her sister being raped was very hard for Ramona, unable to understand why her father did that to her sister. The authority figure that is supposed to love and protect children from any forms of violence is the one who inflicts pain on them. She became confused about her concept of a father.

She was not surprised when finally their mother went to the authorities and her father was arrested. But life became harder after the arrest especially when the mother gave birth to another son. Her sisters were brought to Department of Social Welfare and Development for about one year. When they were reunited she volunteered to stay in any centre. What Ramona did not know up to that point is that her other sister Lourdes, 12 years old, was also abused like Myrna.

In the shelter for children, Ramona had sleepless nights, disturbed by dreams about her father and what he did to Myrna. The physical abuse plus the rape caused so much fear that even in her dreams Ramona was being haunted.

Nevertheless, Ramona still expresses love for her father and desires that he would be enlightened and change in the future.

There is also an issue of powerlessness. Ramona wanted desperately to help her sister and to stop the rape but she could not do anything, in the same manner that she could not stop her father from beating all of them.

Problems such as sleeping difficulties, blank stares and isolation are handled by the psychiatrist and given appropriate medication. Ramona's good communication skills and ability to name as well as express her feelings are her strengths that could be maximized in the treatment process.

Also, the support from the mother could be utilized for the healing of the children. In the same manner, the mother also needs psycho-social support to understand her own issues.

Nonetheless, Ramona's willingness to go through the therapy process, the support from the shelter and from the mother, plus the available services from the centre will facilitate her healing.

Case Study: Mean Streets in Cebu City

STREET CHILDREN are susceptible to malnutrition, vehicular accidents, injuries illnesses, drug or substance abuse, sexual exploitation, gambling and harassment by police or other extortionists. They also tend to join gangs as a form of protection.

A lot of children are also involved in drug trading in their communities by serving as runners, lookouts, barkers or by doing repacking and cleaning up of paraphernalia. Drug pushers prefer to hire children, because they are obedient and not easily detected.

Cebu City is a booming centre of trade and tourism in the Visayan region of the Philippines. In Cebu City alone, it was estimated that about 1,300 children were engaged in such activities. Respondents in the said study entitled "Children's Involvement in the Production, Sales and Trafficking of Drugs in Cebu City" reported that their environment was conducive for their involvement in drug trading particularly since their barangay officials were also involved in said illegal activities. The need for money was the major reason that drove them to work in drug trading. Most of the children-respondents were drug users themselves and about one-third of them had parents also involved in drug trading.

Some children got physically or verbally abused both by the drug leader and law

enforcers when they get caught. Some of them were imprisoned but since they were minors, they were eventually released.

Case Study: Response to Community VAC

AN UNFORESEEN event happened while Bahay Tuluyan's research project was being implemented. On the dawn of February 28, 2003, 16-year old Joel died in a Manila hospital while being treated of injuries inflicted by a member of the Barangay Police. He was one of the most active members of the Participatory Research Team.

This is the saddest and most ironic event that can happen to Bahay Tuluyan, an NGO that is one of the pioneers in giving assistance and shelter to Metro Manila's streetchildren.

Bahay Tuluyan: Streetchildren as researchers

Bahay Tuluyan's major activities include healing and recovery of children harmed by violence, provision of services and empowerment of children exposed to violence through child to child approach. It also undertakes research and advocacy in relation to all forms of child rights abuses with emphasis on community education regarding the CRC, especially among children and youth.

Bahay Tuluyan Research on Child Pimping: (2002-2004)

The project focuses on streetchildren's research and publication regarding the case of child pimping in various areas in Metro Manila, Philippines. Child pimping is an activity of the children below 18 years old which involves luring other children to engage in sexual activity in favour of money. Bahay Tuluyan have received reports involving children pimping for sexual purposes.

The first year of the project involved capacity training for 21 children who have completed the paralegal training course and trained in the basics of research like case study making, documentation, interviewing, conflict management and resolution, and counseling techniques and strategies. As part of assessing and evaluating children's capacity in research work, they were tasked to handle cases involving child pimping.

On Year 2 of the research project focused on the capacity training and education intended for the parents aiming to equip them with basic knowledge, skills and attitude in responding to the situation of the children. The documented case studies involving children doing pimping were presented to the parents to create awareness on the issues affecting the lives of children and to promote community participation in solving the problem.

Year 3 is the actual research on child pimping. It is in this period that the action research team will be organized for the actual implementation of research study by streetchildren regarding chosen respondents in selected areas in Manila.

In year 3, Bahay Tuluyan hopes to spearhead the full implementation of Barangay

Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) of 8 barangays within the barangay structure.

Responding to Violence in the Community

Tambayan: Streetchildren's Sanctuary in Davao City, Philippines

Fifteen year old Jenny Ann says she wouldn't be involved in street life if it wasn't for her broken family. Jenny Ann was arrested for sniffing glue. She recounted how the police grabbed her by the neck and hit her at the stomach. Most children experience abuse in the hands of arresting officers and she was lucky to have escaped death. In the last 4 years, over 100 street children and adults suspected as criminals have been killed by vigilantes called the Davao Death Squad. There are accusations that these summary killings are encouraged by officials as part of the anti-crime campaign.

Meanwhile, Jenny Ann's cousin Aithone, aged 14, also took to the streets to escape poverty and neglect. Her mother left for Manila to find work and she lived with her grandma in a cramped shanty where she did not even have a place to sleep.

Two hundred street girls like Jenny Ann and Aithone found that they still have options in life when they started visiting the Tambayan. Tambayan is a drop-in centre for streetchildren where they can cook food, wash clothes, have a bath and engage in creative lessons and alternative school.

Taking part in these worthwhile activities changes the children's outlook in life. Jenny Ann now enjoys learning math at the Tambayan, a drop-in centre for street children. She sees herself as a cashier in a store someday. Aithone's drawings were exhibited in public that developed her self-confidence. She now thinks she can go back to school and have a better life away from the dangers of the streets.

Bobby's Story

Bobby was an affectionate and obedient child to his mother and siblings. He was the third of 5 children and was enrolled twice but never finished grade one because he had to help his mother earn a living. Bobby's father deserted them when he was 6 and they were forced to live in a shack beside a wall of Bangkerohan Market in Davao City. He did odd jobs like carrying sacks of vegetables for vendors, peddling vegetables or working as dispatcher for public

vehicles. Soon, Bobby made friends with street smart children and learned to sniff rugby.

In 2001, Bobby's two brothers were stabbed one after the other in 3 months time, allegedly by the Davao Death Squad. The following year, Bobby, then 14, was arrested by police officers as a suspect in necklace snatching. He never met his complainant nor was there any warrant of arrest. Through the mediation of Kabataan Consortium, he was released the next day.

Bobby's mother received rumours that Bobby and his other siblings might be the next targets of the Davao Death Squad so she sought the help of the Tambayan centre to shelter Bobby. Later, he was referred to Marcellin Foundation in General Santos City where he stayed with his younger sister, brother and nephew for better security. However, Bobby left Marcellin center because he was not used to living in a rural-based shelter.

In a few weeks time, Bobby was arrested again for illegal possession of deadly weapon (knife), detained for two months but was transferred to the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth (RRYC). Bobby pleaded with his mother to take him back home.

Back in their shack, Bobby could not resist the invitation of friends to join them in their escapades till the wee hours of the morning. Bobby's mother wanted to bring Bobby back to RRYC but a court order was needed. While waiting for a court order, Kabataan Consortium became Bobby's temporary shelter. Bobby exhibited good behaviour at the Kabataan Consortium like obeying rules, cooperating in counseling and therapeutic sessions and making friends with staff and visitors.

The court order never came so Bobby thought it was better for him to stay with his mother. In October 2002, Bobby was arrested again for allegedly snatching a cell phone. His mother looked for him but all the precincts she went to denied custody of Bobby. After two days, a police car brought Bobby to the marketplace. Bobby said he was electrocuted, battered and drowned in a drum of water.

His mother became very concerned about his safety and forbade him to hang out with friends. Bobby obeyed his mother and diligently helped her in selling vegetables until one night, his friends assured his mom that they would just be out for a while. That was the last time she saw Bobby alive. At 11 PM of November 2, he was fatally stabbed with his friends in the market.

The **Kabataan Consortium** consistently opposed violence against children in Davao City, Philippines from the late 1990's to the present. The Kabataan Consortium persistently lobbied for policies favourable to children. A product of that advocacy was amendment to the legislation of a local ordinance known as the Davao City Children's Welfare Code of 1994. Mainly instigated by child focused NGOs, the ordinance was the first of its kind in Mindanao.

In 2001, 9 NGOs with programs for children bonded as a consortium called Kabataan Center for Human Rights of Children and Young People. The Kabataan Consortium has been lobbying for the amendment of the code to make it more attuned to the fast changing times, The consortium has been in the forefront of the campaign against

various atrocities on children like the summary killings by vigilante forces, prostitution of children, trafficking and pornography.

Young People Stop Violence Against Children in Davao City

Children in Davao become key actors participating in various youth programs through the help of the Kabataan Consortium. Strengthening Coordination and Participation of Children and Young People in Advancing UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Davao City, Philippines. This is a project that started in July 2004 until June 2007.

As part of the Training of Children and Young People, a total of 46 alternative training and education sessions were conducted participated in by 589 children and youth. Also, 642 prostituted girls and children in situations of armed conflict participated in 24 socio-therapeutic counselling meetings with leadership skills training. Eighty-six children and 64 toddlers also joined 2 children and youth. They also conducted 8 livelihood training courses for 116 children and youth.

Nineteen young people who have been developed as leaders are already reliable in conducting sessions with fellow children and youth and even among adult professionals.

A total of 36 multi-sectoral meetings with parents of human rights victims resulted in the formation of a city-wide multisectoral juvenile justice group called the Coalition Against Summary Execution and Task Force for Street Children.

The activities developed 44 Children and Youth Organizations (CYOs) spread out in 3 districts of Davao City.