

# **Implementation of Child Abuse Act (RA 7610) in Manila: Inputs for Policy Advocacy**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The situation of child abuse, exploitation, and discrimination in Asia remain severe, and the extent of the problem in the Philippines is alarming. The study was conducted to assess the implementation of Child Abuse Act (RA 7610) in Manila as a basis for policy advocacy. The researcher used the descriptive method of research as well as purposive sampling based on the respondents' involvement in the implementation of RA 7610. The data were gathered utilizing a validated self-constructed questionnaire which was supplemented by interview sessions. Results showed that the implementing rules and regulations of RA 7610 are not totally enforced as assessed by the five groups of respondents composed of 253 samples. Findings revealed that there is a great need for education to increase public and multi-disciplinary professional as well as parental awareness of child abuse and protection. Legislation of interdisciplinary community collaboration and professional in-service training is very important for the recognition, proper management, and prevention of child abuse and neglect. A proposed intervention scheme was offered to help in empowering communities and local partners to strengthen the protection of children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence to improve their well-being and fulfill their rights to protection.

**Keywords** — Social Science, Child Abuse, RA 7610, descriptive and qualitative research design, Manila, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a global problem with severe life-long consequences. Violence against children involving physical, sexual and emotional abuse, exploitation and neglect, has been revealed to be widely predominant in all societies (WHO, 2002; UN, 2006). In the past decade, there has been significant growth in the analysis of the incidence and consequences of maltreatment and other harsh conditions in childhood (Widom, 2009; Pereda, 2009). In life-threatening cases, child abuse and neglect can lead to death. In 2013, around 1,484 children died as a result of maltreatment or neglect. The morbidity, disability and mortality caused by juvenile abuse and neglect lead to extensive human suffering, social handicap and financial loss (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2012).

Southeast Asia has long held a known peculiarity of having one of the world's largest populations of child prostitutes. Estimates of the precise number of children involved in illicit sex trades differ, but the existence of minors in tourist establishments is eminent in countries like Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines, among which there could be roughly one million child prostitutes (Medical News Today, 2012; Tumlin, 2000). Several studies have uncovered the peril of child sex exploitation in ASEAN, associating the trade to organized crime, disease, psychiatric illness, poverty, statelessness, and corruption (Tanielian, 2013).

Child maltreatment is predominant in the East Asia and Pacific region. Inclusive prevalence rates of physical abuse range from 10% (from a study of parents in China) to 30.3% (from a study of grade six students in Thailand). Despite different questions, most studies consider physical abuse in three general categories: moderate, severe and very severe. Actions deemed being "moderate" consist of hitting, slapping, pinching, beating the child's buttocks with a bare hand or object and shaking. In the Philippines, the National Statistics Coordination Board recently confirmed the latest statistics on child abuse. The figures are stark, disturbing, alarming, heinous and telling. The number of cases of child sexual abuse and child labor handled by the Department of Social Welfare and Development remained leading problems in the country from 2009- 2010, even as the total number of child abuse cases declined during the period (PSA, 2014).

An American Ambassador to the Philippines projected that 40% of foreign tourists come to the Philippines for sex (Rosales, 2011). That figure is assumed

to be closer to 60% in Thailand where sex is “an essential economic pillar” (Shahabudin, 2012). These statistics are in spite of the statutory prohibition of all prostitution in those nations. It is found that an indication of failure to protect children leads to prostitution, which thrives openly and freely throughout the region, without substantial deterrence or enforcement by public or private sectors. There had been laws in the ten ASEAN members which prohibit sex trafficking and exploitation of minors (INTERPOL, 2010). Nevertheless, the region has turned into a prime destination for child sex tourists (Bergman, 2013).

The position of children in the Philippines is equally distinctive. The Philippines is believed to be a child-oriented society. Children are a vital portion of the fabric of the Filipino culture. Filipinos have many children, they guard them carefully, they love to talk about them in many senses. The Philippine Society earns great pride in its children. Who would not take pride in their children in a country of over 102 million in which practically 35 % of its population is children? (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, 2016). In this perspective, it becomes critical then to examine how they translated this “focus” on children into laws and policies and what this means both for children in their assertion to “have a say” and for adults in “listening” to these voices of children.

Knowing the occurrence of this problem in the country, the researcher assessed the implementation of “Republic Act 7610 or Child Abuse Act, which is entitled “An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination, in Manila” as perceived by the five groups of respondents. The findings served as the basis for policy advocacy as an intervention strategy focused on child protection.

## FRAMEWORK

RA 7610 is the policy that is responsible for the special protection of children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation and discrimination, and other conditions prejudicial to their development. It provides sanctions for their commission and carries out a program for prevention and deterrence of and crisis intervention. RA 7610 was signed into law in 1992 and provides the subsequently framed general framework of all child protection laws in the Philippines (Yacat, 2011).

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) describes children as “human beings below the age of 18”. While, Section

3 of Republic Act (RA) 7610, states that “Children refers to persons below 18 years old or those over but are unable to take care of themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of physical or mental disability or condition.

Child 21 or the Philippine National Strategic Framework for Plan Development for Children 2000 to 2025 is the Philippines’ road map for the implementation of the UN CRC (UNICEF Philippines, 2000). It offers a framework in all the life stages of Filipino children. It specifies the objectives and goals for each stage. These intend to give direction to policy development and program planning for the liberal implementation of the Philippine government’s commitment to the UN CRC. It proposes that children from 6 to 17 years old should undertake a valuable and pertinent education that is suitable to the child’s development stage and progressing capacity and take part in the development process. For children to take part, they will be provided with simple life skills to do their roles and persist in the community and society as well as to overcome burdens for their welfare and safety, and to progress as a happy, capable, and responsible adult. The National Framework for Children’s Participation is based on the vision of Child 21. The aim of developing this framework is to fulfill the vision that the inherent rights of the Filipino children to survival, development, protection, and participation are achieved by 2025 (Yacat, 2011).

International studies disclosed that a part of adults claimed that they had been physically abused as children, and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men averred that they had been sexually abused as a child. Furthermore, many children are prone to emotional abuse (sometimes referred to as psychological abuse) and neglect. Each year, there are an estimated 41,000 homicide deaths in children below 15 years of age. This number underestimates the real extent of the problem, as a significant number of deaths due to child maltreatment are incorrectly attributed to falls, burns, drowning and other causes. Child abuse and neglect are national issues that bother us all. The magnitude of child abuse and neglect run across the lifespan, undesirably affecting the chances of a child to succeed in school, work, and relationships. Effective early intervention and prevention efforts are less expensive to our nation and individuals than trying to solve the hostile effects of child maltreatment. Agencies, policymakers, advocates, service providers, and parents alike should discover some ways to help provide significant components of protective features to prevent child abuse and promote well-being within their families, communities, and their nation. For the first time, the Philippines has completed a National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children (VAC), a

five-year feat whose data and insights will become critical to policies and projects addressing child abuse and neglect in the country (Junio, 2015).

According to Patricia Luna, Executive Director of the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), personal interviews were also conducted with parents, children and community stakeholders. The NBS was created and executed to offer a national assessment of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in all forms and settings in the country. It would also provide data on the status of child protection in the local government units (LGUs) regarding resources and readiness to ensure deterrence effort.

Presidential Decree (PD) 603, Article 87 states that every barangay council shall encourage the organization of a Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC) and shall coordinate with the CWC in drawing and implementing plans for the promotion of child welfare. According to Prof. Ramiro, survey outcomes indicate that there is no or minimal teamwork among LCPC members. There should be an integrated platform among the LCPC, though they have diverse abilities and disciplines, they should be organized to develop an umbrella program of accomplishment, which they can propose to the local executive for funding.

Ed Luna made it distinct that there is much to know from the study, when the outcomes are completed and more insights are drawn from them. He stated further that with the records, we can do better for children: better legislation, policies, programs, and projects, and confidently with information from the children themselves, we will turn out to be better duty-bearers because we can have knowledgeable decisions regarding budget for children, policies, plans and programs. The challenge for us is to utilize the research data into action (Junio, 2015).

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study ascertained the big gaps in the implementation of RA 7610 to offer the basis for a specific recommendation on how to improve the existing child protection law. The study also includes identifying the problems which concern the implementation of child protection related services in Manila, Philippines which is used as an advocacy tool to increase public awareness and operational delivery of services. The findings of the study can be a mechanism to stimulate better coordination among partners to augment their support to the development of the program.

Specifically, the study: 1.) determined the impact of the implementation of RA 7610; 2.) identified the extent of implementation in pursuing the rules and regulations of RA 7610 in terms of child prostitution and other sexual abuse; child trafficking; obscene publications and indecent shows; other acts of neglect and abuses; circumstances which threaten or endanger the survival and normal development of children; 3.) ascertained the problems encountered by the respondents in implementing RA 7610; and 4) proposed an intervention strategy as policy advocacy to enforce an effective and sustainable child protection program in Metro Manila.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Respondents of the study were the parents and employees composed of four institutions in Manila: Department of Education( DepEd), Local Government Units(LGU's), Attached Government Agencies (AGA's), and Non- Government Organizations (NGO's). They were chosen through stratified sampling method regardless of gender, age, location, subject/s taught, and educational qualification. Also considered was the respondents' involvement in the implementation of RA 7610.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents

Respondents	Sample Size	%
Department of Education	87	34.39
Local Government Units	31	12.25
Attached Government Agencies	35	13.83
Non-Government Organizations	50	19.76
Parents	50	19.76
	253	100

The researcher utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather information regarding the impact and implementation of RA 7610 as well as the problems hindering the implementation of the programs on child protection. The researcher employed the descriptive survey research design, which involves the use of a questionnaire, unstructured interviews and documentary analysis.

## Data Gathering Procedure

The data collected were statistically treated using percentage and weighted mean. The researcher distributed the survey questionnaires to the selected offices and local communities to determine the level of extent of the implementation of RA 7610.

Five-point Likert scale was used to assess the impact and extent of implementation in pursuing the rules and regulations of RA 7610.

Scale	Range	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.45 – 5.00	Very Great Extent
4	3.45 – 4.44	Great Extent
3	2.45 – 3.44	Moderate Extent
2	1.45 – 2.44	Least Extent
1	1.00 – 1.44	Very Least Extent

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Impact of Implementation of Child Abuse Act (RA 7610)

Variables	DepED		LGUs		AGAs		NGOs		Parents		TWM	VI	Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI			
1. Policy Advocacy	2.53	ME	2.45	ME	2.38	LE	2.44	LE	2.41	LE	2.44	LE	<b>8.5</b>
2. Governance	2.65	ME	2.45	ME	2.40	LE	2.44	LE	1.45	LE	2.28	LE	<b>10</b>
3. Responsible Parenthood	2.51	ME	2.46	ME	2.41	ME	2.43	ME	2.40	ME	2.44	LE	<b>8.5</b>
4. Implementation of the Guidelines	2.50	ME	2.55	ME	2.49	ME	2.65	ME	2.57	ME	2.55	ME	6
5. Visibility of Men in Uniform	2.49	ME	2.48	ME	2.53	ME	2.55	ME	2.58	ME	2.53	ME	7
6. Safeguard of Children's Welfare	3.48	GE	3.45	GE	3.45	GE	3.40	ME	3.43	ME	3.44	ME	1.5
7. Eradication of Child Abuse	2.60	ME	2.61	ME	2.63	ME	2.62	ME	2.61	ME	2.62	ME	5
8. Provision of periodic monitoring of the victim	3.40	ME	3.39	ME	3.28	ME	2.46	ME	2.58	ME	3.02	ME	4
9. Support to the Action Program	3.43	ME	3.40	ME	2.49	ME	3.41	ME	2.89	ME	3.12	ME	3

10.	In-	3.45	GE	3.45	GE	3.48	ME	3.43	ME	3.40	ME	3.44	ME	1.5
culcate the Rights of the Children														
	TWM	2.95	ME	2.97	ME	2.80	ME	2.83	ME	2.68	ME	2.85	ME	

Table 1 shows the “least extent” of implementation, are: “governance”, ranked 10, shared rank of 8.5 are “policy advocacy” and “responsible parenthood”. Although child protection legal frameworks and mechanisms are mostly in place, gaps in the current system hindered the full and effective protection of children. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of child rights still have inadequate feedback into the development of policies, laws and approaches on children regardless of their imperative role and know-how in upholding and shielding children’s rights. Concerning the implementation mechanisms, it still lacks the necessary human, technical and financial resources to fulfill its coordinating roles.

The stakeholders suffer from inadequate funds to achieve their mandate, and are often unclear on their roles and responsibilities, have limited capacity in designing budget plans that integrate child protection issues, and it also lacks the expertise needed to identify most vulnerable children in their community.

Table 2. Extent of Implementation in Pursuing the Rules and Regulations of RA 7610

Variables	Respondents													
	DepED		LGUs		AGAs		NGOs		Parents		N= 253			
	N=87		N=31		N=35		N=50		N=50					
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	TWM	VI	Rank	
1. Child Protection against Child Prostitution and other Sexual Abuse	2.41	LE	2.43	LE	2.35	LE	2.42	LE	2.39	LE	2.40	LE	2	
2. Child Protection against Child Trafficking	2.39	LE	2.42	LE	2.43	LE	2.38	LE	2.45	ME	2.41	LE	1	

3. Child Protection against Obscene Publications and Indecent Shows	3.11	ME	3.55	GE	3.29	ME	3.50	GE	3.40	ME	3.37	ME	4
4. Child Protection against Other Acts of Neglect, Abuse, Cruelty or Exploitation and	3.52	GE	3.74	GE	3.31	ME	3.10	ME	2.90	ME	3.31	ME	5
5. Child Protection Against Other Conditions Prejudicial to the Child's Development	3.51	GE	3.74	GE	3.37	ME	3.46	GE	2.82	ME	3.38	ME	3
TWM	2.99	ME	3.18	ME	2.93	ME	2.97	ME	2.79	ME	2.97	ME	
Rank	3		1		4		2		5				

Assessed as the “least extent” is “child trafficking,” the respondents perceived this aspect of child protection was not fully enforced followed by child prostitution and other sexual abuse. In general, the implementation of RA 7610 was assessed as “moderate extent.” This finding is in consonance with (Bergman, 2013) that all ten ASEAN members have laws prohibiting sex trafficking and exploitation of minors. Nevertheless, the region has become a major destination for child sex tourists (INTERPOL, 2010). Further, there are groups of people that are promoting and developing cybersex in the Philippines, and these are the people that should be concentrated on because they prey on minors (Rosales, 2011). Increased poverty and food insecurity has made many children susceptible to trafficking (Tumlin, 2000).

Table 3. Problems Encountered in the Implementation of Child Abuse Act RA 7610

Variables	Respondents												Rank
	DepED		LGU		AGA		NGO		Parents		Overall		
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	TWM	VI	
1. Poverty	3.41	ME	3.43	ME	3.45	GE	3.40	ME	3.45	GE	3.43	ME	3
<b>2. Abuse and neglect of parents or guardian</b>	3.94	GE	4.43	GE	3.88	GE	3.86	GE	3.89	GE	4.00	GE	1
3. Cruelty and Maltreatment of parents or guardian	2.49	ME	2.48	ME	2.53	ME	2.55	ME	2.58	ME	2.53	ME	8
4. Commercial exploitation of children by parents or guardian	2.50	ME	2.55	ME	2.49	ME	2.65	ME	2.57	ME	2.55	ME	7
5. Weak capacity building actions to counter child abuse	3.43	ME	3.40	ME	2.49	ME	3.41	ME	2.89	ME	3.12	ME	4
6. Lack of support from the government and private sector to sustain campaigns against child abuse	2.65	ME	2.45	ME	2.40	LE	2.44	LE	1.45	LE	2.28	LE	11
7. Inability to accede to relevant human right instruments to measure the degree of implementing rules and regulation	2.53	ME	2.45	ME	2.38	LE	2.44	LE	2.41	LE	2.44	LE	10

8. Inability to network and alliance with the other inter-government private and international agencies on the issues of child abuse	2.60	ME	2.61	ME	2.63	ME	2.62	ME	2.61	ME	2.61	ME	6
9. Failure to link socio-economic development concerns with the need to prevent violations of children's right	2.51	ME	2.46	ME	2.41	ME	2.43	ME	2.44	ME	2.45	ME	9
<b>10. Inadequate resource allocation to effectively monitor the program</b>	3.45	GE	3.65	GE	3.70	GE	3.84	ME	3.69	ME	3.67	ME	<b>2</b>
<b>11. Limited program/projects that will deter child abuse and exploitation</b>	3.40	ME	3.39	ME	3.28	ME	2.46	ME	2.58	ME	3.02	ME	5
TWM	2.95	ME	2.97	ME	2.80	ME	2.83	ME	2.68	ME	2.85	ME	

The prominent problem was “abuse and neglect of parents or guardian”. The second major problem was “inadequate resource allocation to effectively monitor the program”, third, “poverty”, fourth, “weak capacity building actions to counter child abuse and poverty.” The least problem concerns “lack of support from the government and private sector to sustain campaigns against child abuse.” It is the fact that cannot be denied due to several government initiatives offered which resulted with other relevant factors.

Similar finding was stated in Child Trends DataBank (2015) which described that the rates of mistreatment are greater than those for other types of child cruelty. In 2013, 7.3 per thousand children were reported as victims of abandonment, compared with 1.6 for physical abuse, and 0.8 each for sexual exploitation and psychological or emotional cruelty.

Further, in the study of Rodriguez (2014), she also emphasized that fewer investments on public health and social services increase child abandonment. He also stressed that poorly funded and badly managed institutions can do more harm than good.

UNDP (2013) confirmed this finding that people from poorer nations are more likely to experience extremely difficult life phenomena such as human rights abuses. In turn, individuals subjected to human rights abuses are more likely stuck in deep poverty (Amnesty International, 2013). Economic essentials like secondary education, student transportation, free school lunch, social housing, food stamps, and child protective services cannot be established and maintained without dramatic changes in public budgets (Kampan & Tanielian, 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS

To satisfactorily prevent the occurrence of probable abuse, deterrence and prevention efforts and effective policies must directly address children, their caregivers and the environments in which they live in and to deal commendably with cases of abuse and neglect that have taken place. The concerted and harmonized efforts of a whole range of sectors are vital, and public health researchers and practitioners can perform a significant role by leading and facilitating the process.

### **Neglect and abuse of parents or guardian**

Household breakdown, the leading problem, within the context of single-parent families, separated parents or guardians, child-headed households or families with large numbers of children, lack of educational and viable employment opportunities which results in lack of care and support for children. Many families struggle to earn sufficient income, mostly due to the lack of work opportunities. Most children from large families are obliged to help out. Working children are commonly absent from school. Deficiency of educational attainment of parents results in scarcer work opportunities and choices resulting susceptibility to child labor exploitation. Such children are often vulnerable to exploitation because they are more likely to agree to take unskilled or lower-skilled employment, such as domestic service or factory work.

**Inadequate resource allocation to effectively monitor the program**

Less investment in social services increases child abandonment, neglect, and abuse. With the severe financial limitations faced by child protection service providers, there is very limited support and care for children and families who encounter difficulties and for those who have experienced forms of abuse and cruelty.

**Inadequate program/projects that will prevent child abuse and exploitation**

Insufficient attention on current services and programs for youth and family welfare that will respond to children in crisis - after mistreatment has occurred - with limited focus on preventing child maltreatment which is cost-effective. The approach of current services and programs is focused on the individual child - not on the family as a whole. As a result, fundamental aspects causative to the problem within the family structure are not successfully addressed.

**Weak capacity building actions to counter child abuse**

While the usage of non-professional caregivers as house parents have impartially alleviated the case load of social workers, these paraprofessional caregivers need to undertake regular seminars and training to warrant competence in service which could be professionally responsive to the needs of the children as well as to afford the necessary protection to the children. Inadequately trained or burdened caregivers may do more harm than good.

The breakdown of systems of support and care may be a function of poverty. Poverty appears to be the most important catalyst which is aggravated by other factors of child abuse. The interplay of these causes results in situations favorable to abuse, exploitation and discrimination of children within the country and across boundaries. While it may be true that poverty is not essentially the cause of the children's susceptibilities, poverty serves as the element for the host of other issues and problems. For example, the experience of poverty has pushed children to leave their communities in the search for better livelihood and employment opportunities, making them victims of child abuse. The sense of ostracism and inequality due to the experience of poverty makes it easier for armed groups to recruit children. The hardest hit is the underprivileged communities in times of natural disasters, who suffer the longest period to recuperate from the damage and loss. Poverty forces parents to abandon and desert their children who in most cases wind up in residential care facilities.

## **Proposed Intervention Strategy as Policy Advocacy on Child Abuse Prevention and Protection**

Preventive measures include information dissemination and awareness campaign as well as training on child rights and child protection, inspection and monitoring services, support to parents and caregivers. Espouse a method that comprises actions and interventions that will (i) inform families, communities and LGUs; (ii) expedite operative access of children at risk to appropriate early education and vocational training; (iii) furnish children with facts and life skills to guard and defend themselves; (iv) encourage accountable and operative parenting education among families; (v) provide livelihood activities and enable access to credit and employment opportunities; (vi) establish effective built-in screening and monitoring strategies for children at risk within fundamental social services at local community, city, and municipal levels; (vii) create, stimulate, and reinforce local councils for the protection of children (LCPC) particularly at local community level; (viii) upgrade technical competencies of program managers, supervisors, social workers, and other service benefactors in aiding children.

A multi-disciplinary approach is indispensable to prevent and manage child maltreatment. An efficient and effective system of identification, detection, reporting and processing/managing among the key members of society (government, non-government, business, church, media, community) on the incidence of child abuse/maltreatment is vital to lessening or eradicating this problem. An organized, standard, cohesive and inclusive approach is, therefore, dynamic to address the case of child abuse effectively.

Several communities have had success in managing child protection activities that produce comprehensive prominence and provision for the importance of the early child years. Conduct awareness-raising and capacity-building training and seminar. Practice media work on care issues, including in emergencies, to influence public awareness and support for institutional and family-based care. Host or sponsor events to build awareness and support for care reform, to raise awareness of the UN Guidelines, to increase government and donor support for the family- and community-based care and supports, and to share best practices. Strengthen civil society and community motivation and capacity to care and protect children, including support for an enriched training for social workers, paraprofessionals, and volunteers, as well as parenting education and support to avoid family separation. Provide tools and assistance for capacity building of professionals working with children (teachers, social workers, police, etc.) on the protection issues confronting victim-survivors of child abuse. Conduct training

and other educational activities to help prepare institutions, organizations, groups and individuals to address child abuse and to correctly deal with the victim-survivors.

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The outcome of this study may be translated into use in the community and institutions by sending the information to the Department of Education, Local Government Units, Attached Government Agencies, and Non- Government Organizations. Information dissemination at the community level with the help of the academe through public awareness as well as further analyses of the implementation of child protection program and identifying relevant problems that beset RA 7610 may lessen if not eradicate the grave conditions of child abuse in the Philippines. This information will assist Philippine government and partners to raise access and develop the quality of service delivery for vulnerable children.

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