



Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of Department of Education's Child Protection Policy: Perspectives of Selected Guidance Counselors and Guidance Personnel in Metro Manila Schools

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Department of Education (DepEd) Child Protection Policy (CPP) from the perspectives of guidance counselors and guidance personnel in Metro Manila schools. Using qualitative research design, data were collected from seven (7) informants through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes across informants' accounts. Findings revealed that CPP implementation was shaped by themes on stakeholder collaboration and engagement, organizational support, policy awareness and understanding, resource constraints, and role clarity among informants. Challenges included limited resources, inconsistent policy understanding, implementation gaps, and cultural factors influencing parental attitudes and responses to child protection concerns. Meanwhile, opportunities emerged in strengthened collaboration, support oriented practices, and institutional support systems. The study underscores the need for sustained professional development and stronger policy implementation mechanisms.

Keywords: child rights, child abuse, Child Protection Policy, DepEd CPP, guidance and counseling



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INTRODUCTION

Violence against children remains a persistent concern in the Philippines despite the implementation of child protection frameworks. The consequences of abuse are severe and long-lasting, affecting academic performance, mental health, and social functioning, including risks of depression, PTSD, and suicidal behavior (AlDosari et al., 2025; Chitiyo & Pietrantoni, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024; Usakli, 2012; Puno et al., 2024). Studies also highlight structural vulnerabilities in low- and middle-income countries where protective systems are weaker and stigma is higher (Puno et al., 2024). Guided by the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of a Child, which defines violence as any form of physical or mental abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the Department of Education (DepEd) instituted the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in 2012 to enforce a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, exploitation,

violence, discrimination, and bullying in schools (DepEd, 2012). However, despite these measures, child abuse cases continue to rise, with 13,240 cases reported in 2025, indicating persistent gaps in protection and enforcement (Child Protection Network, 2025).

In urban contexts such as Metro Manila, children are especially vulnerable due to poverty, family breakdown, and migration, with estimates of street children ranging from 250,000 to as high as one million (A Ray of Hope for Street Children in the Philippines, 2018). These conditions expose children to risks such as exploitation, abuse, early pregnancy, and mental health concerns including depression and anxiety. Institutional reports further highlight the severity of the issue, with the Philippine General Hospital-Child Protection Unit recording 1,755 cases of violence against children in 2025, the highest among Women and Children Protection Units nationwide (Child Protection Network, 2025). Moreover, news

reports have highlighted the continuing prevalence of child abuse cases in schools. According to Hernando-Malipot (2022), the Department of Education's Learner Rights and Protection Office recorded 1,871 child abuse cases from 2019 to 2020. Meanwhile, Servillos (2023) reported that the Learner's Telesafe Contact Center Helpline, launched in November 2022, received approximately 1,709 reports, emphasizing the ongoing need for effective child protection mechanisms. While community-based interventions have improved awareness of child rights and self-protection strategies, structural limitations continue to hinder full protection (A Ray of Hope for Street Children in the Philippines, 2018).

Within educational settings, Registered guidance counselors serve as support service providers in addressing students' academic, social, and emotional needs, including identifying and responding to child abuse (Goldman & Padayachi, 2000; Mathews & Kenny, 2008). In Philippine schools, school heads are the chairperson of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) while counselors often act as vice-chairpersons of the said committee (DepEd, 2012), yet prior studies report limited training, institutional support, and systemic barriers that hinder effective implementation (Goldman & Padayachi, 2000; Abdulraof, 2025). Exploring their experiences can uncover specific challenges, such as balancing mental health support with policy enforcement, navigating resource constraints, and addressing diverse student needs. By focusing on counselors and personnel, this study aims to fill the gap in understanding how CPP is operationalized on the ground, identify opportunities for professional development, and support the creation of safer, more responsive educational environments. Overall, guidance counselors remain underrepresented in CPP literature despite being frontline implementers, highlighting a significant research gap (Glariana, 2022; Peralta & Poja, 2025).

Galvez and Villocino (2025) and Sahijuan et al. (2026) found that awareness of the Child

Protection Policy among teachers and parents does not always translate into consistent implementation and compliance. This gap highlights the need for stronger institutional support, adequate resources, clear guidelines, and continuous education and monitoring to ensure effective child protection practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence Against Children and School-Based Protection Needs. Violence against children remains a pervasive global and national concern, taking forms such as physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and neglect (McLean.org, 2025). Research on family-based abuse in low-income urban households also reveals troubling patterns. Adolescents from these settings often experience both verbal and physical abuse, sometimes perpetrated by primary caregivers, including mothers, who traditionally serve as nurturers (Sabarre et al., 2021). Vulnerability is further intensified by socioeconomic disadvantages, cultural norms, and weak child protection systems, which limit access to reporting mechanisms and timely intervention (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2012). Many children do not report abuse due to fear, shame, or mistrust, and incidents may involve family members, school personnel, or community actors (Jimenez, 2019; UNICEF, 2012).

Despite DepEd's zero-tolerance policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012), persistent challenges remain. Across studies, several recurring issues emerge: insufficient training on procedural and legal aspects (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025; Peralta & Poja, 2025), weak interagency coordination and inadequate stakeholder support (Glariana, 2022; Evidor & Villacruz, 2025), limited detection and referral systems for identifying at-risk children (Glariana, 2022), low legal literacy and the lack of localized, accessible CPP materials, and cultural resistance that fuels mistrust of formal mechanisms (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025). Recent studies (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025; Glariana, 2022; Khan et al., 2025; Peralta & Poja, 2025) provide insights into the current state, strengths, and

challenges of CPP implementation within Philippine school contexts. For example, findings from the Tanauan City Division of Private Schools indicate relatively strong CPP implementation in areas such as policy dissemination, resource allocation, procedures, and evaluation mechanisms (Baronia, 2020). Despite awareness efforts, institutional and school-based child protection research remains limited (Roche, 2017), emphasizing the need for stronger prevention, intervention, and safe learning environments (UNESCO, 2024; Khan et al., 2025; Chitiyo & Pietrantonio, 2019).

Child Protection Policy (CPP): Legal Basis, Structures, and Implementation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child mandates protection from all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation while ensuring the right to education in a safe environment (UNICEF, 1989, Articles 19, 28, 34). In the Philippines, the 1987 Constitution reinforces the State's duty to protect children from abuse and exploitation (Art. XV, Sec. 3[2]), leading to the institutionalization of the Department of Education's Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012), which enforces zero tolerance for violence in schools. Implementation is operationalized through Child Protection Committees (CPCs), which handle policy formulation, monitoring, referral systems, and coordination with external agencies (DepEd, 2012).

Despite strong policy frameworks, studies show persistent implementation gaps, including inadequate training, weak interagency coordination, limited detection systems, low legal literacy, and cultural resistance (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025; Glariana, 2022; Peralta & Poja, 2025). Underreporting of abuse cases remains a critical concern, as reflected in discrepancies between official records and helpline reports (UNICEF EAPRO, 2014; Baronia, 2020; Bautista, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for stronger monitoring systems and policy evaluation (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Fuente, 2021), as well as continuous refinement to ensure effective school-based child protection.

Roles and Experiences of School Personnel (Teachers, School Heads, CPC Members). Local studies consistently report a high level of awareness and understanding of the CPP among private and public school teachers and school heads (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Cervancia et al., 2019; Peralta & Poja, 2025). In particular, educators generally demonstrate a clear grasp of the policy's goals, particularly its emphasis on preventing violence against children (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Peralta & Poja, 2025). Moreover, their engagement with evaluation metrics, including statistical measures such as mean and median, reflects an emerging culture of data-informed decision-making in child protection (Alombro et al., 2022; Bayucca, 2020; Fuente, 2021).

Schools also show compliance with DepEd directives, reflecting increasing institutional commitment to child protection (Alombro et al., 2022; Bayucca, 2020). However, challenges persist, including reputational risks for educators due to abuse allegations, media exposure, and social media amplification of unverified cases (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Bayucca, 2020; Fuente, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated detection of abuse due to home-based learning environments (Alombro et al., 2022).

Although awareness is generally high, gaps remain in procedural knowledge and legal understanding of CPP provisions (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Peralta & Poja, 2025). Studies emphasize that awareness does not always translate into consistent implementation, highlighting the need for continuous training and capacity building (Alombro et al., 2022). Consequently, researchers recommend strengthening institutional training programs and policy accessibility to bridge implementation gaps (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Baronia, 2020; Bayucca, 2020).

Guidance Counselors as CPP Implementers: Roles, Skills, Challenges, and Gaps. Guidance counselors play a key role in child protection through mandated reporting, prevention, and

student support services aligned with professional ethical standards (The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention - American School Counselor Association (ASCA), n.d.). However, studies consistently show a gap between their expected roles and actual preparedness, with many counselors reporting insufficient training in abuse detection, crisis intervention, and legal procedures (Usakli, 2012; Abrigo et al., 2024). Institutional support systems also significantly influence their effectiveness, emphasizing the need for structured capacity-building programs (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025).

Despite their central role, counselors' contributions to CPP implementation are often under-documented in research (Abrigo et al., 2024), and mental health-related responsibilities remain insufficiently integrated into CPP studies (Khan et al., 2025). System-level barriers, including weak data systems, limited government capacity, and organizational noncompliance, further hinder effective implementation (Bayucca, 2020; Cervancia et al., 2019).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

This theory explains child development and institutional behavior through interconnected environmental systems. In the context of CPP implementation, guidance counselors operate within the microsystem (direct interaction with students), mesosystem (coordination with parents, teachers, and administrators), exosystem (institutional policies and community services), and macrosystem (national laws and cultural values) (Psychology Notes HQ Editorial Staff, 2026). This framework highlights that effective child protection is shaped not only by individual counselor actions but also by broader institutional and societal structures, emphasizing the need for coordinated, multi-level efforts to ensure student safety and well-being.

Statement of the Problem. The Philippines has enacted several laws and policies to protect children from abuse, including Republic Act No. 7610 and the Department of Education's Child

Protection Policy (CPP). These frameworks establish the roles and responsibilities of school personnel in promoting safe and supportive learning environments. Guidance counselors and guidance personnel are involved in the implementation of the CPP.

However, the ways in which the registered guidance counselors and personnel understand and implement the CPP have not been extensively documented. There is limited information about the specific roles they perform, the challenges they face, the support they receive, and how they collaborate with other stakeholders in this process. To address this gap, this descriptive qualitative study attempts to describe the experiences of guidance counselors and guidance personnel in relation to the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in their schools. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following:

1. How do guidance counselors and personnel in Metro Manila City understand the Child Protection Policy (CPP)?
2. What specific roles and responsibilities do they carry out in relation to CPP implementation?
3. What challenges and facilitating factors shape their implementation of the CPP?
4. How do institutional culture, personal beliefs, and situational factors influence their implementation experiences?
5. How do other school personnel and external stakeholders (parents, agencies, community) influence their implementation experience?

METHOD

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the experiences and perspectives of guidance counselors and guidance personnel on the implementation of the Department of

Education's Child Protection Policy (CPP). The design enabled an in-depth exploration of how informants understood and navigated policy implementation within their school contexts. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes derived from informants' narratives.

Research Locale. The study was conducted in selected private educational institutions in Metro Manila, Philippines, where the CPP is actively implemented. Informants were guidance counselors and guidance personnel directly involved in student welfare services. Data collection was conducted entirely online, allowing informants to respond remotely from their respective workplaces or residences, thereby ensuring flexibility, accessibility, and convenience.

Research Instruments. Data were collected using a researcher-developed open-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument was structured around the study's objectives, focusing on informants' understanding of CPP, roles in its implementation, challenges encountered, and perceived opportunities. An informed consent section was included to ensure ethical compliance, and the tool was reviewed by a subject matter expert for content validity and clarity. Responses were automatically encoded and securely stored using Google Sheets and Google Docs, with no personally identifiable information collected.

Population Sampling. The study involved registered guidance counselors and guidance personnel employed in private educational institutions in Metro Manila (National Capital Region), Philippines. The informants were selected based on their professional roles in guidance and counseling and their awareness and experience related to the Child Protection Policy. The schools were covered by the said policy, which applies to both public and private schools (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). Eligible informants were required to have relevant professional experience in guidance and counseling and to have been aware of the CPP

for at least six (6) months prior to their participation in the study. The six-month criterion referred specifically to their awareness of the CPP, while their professional experience ranged from 5 to 18 years.

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to identify eligible informants. Data saturation determined the final sample size, which consisted of seven (7) informants, four (4) guidance counselors and three (3) guidance personnel from private educational institutions in Metro Manila. The specific employment designations of the guidance personnel were not collected as a separate demographic variable; hence, they are referred to collectively as guidance personnel in this study. All informants were female and aged 26–50 years. To ensure confidentiality, informants were assigned alphanumeric codes: GC1–GC4 for guidance counselors and GP1–GP3 for guidance personnel.

Analysis of Data. This study employed a qualitative data analysis approach using thematic analysis to systematically examine the responses of guidance counselors and personnel regarding the implementation of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in Metro Manila schools. Thematic analysis was selected due to its flexibility and its capacity to identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the analytical process, manual coding was initially employed to organize codes and develop themes. Memo writing and research journaling were likewise utilized to document analytical decisions, enhance reflexivity, and minimize potential researcher bias (Nowell et al., 2017).

Ensuring Trustworthiness. To ensure rigor in the qualitative findings, the study applied the four criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): Credibility was ensured via careful interpretation of informant responses and member checking with selected informants to validate the accuracy of findings. Transferability was supported through thick descriptions of the research context, including the roles of guidance counselors and the

specific setting of CPP implementation in Metro Manila, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar contexts.

Dependability was maintained through a transparent audit trail documenting all stages of data collection, coding, and theme development. Lastly, Confirmability was achieved through reflexive journaling and grounding all findings in direct informant quotations to minimize researcher bias and ensure that results accurately reflected informants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations. This were strictly observed throughout the study to ensure rigor, confidentiality, and respect for all informants. The Principal Investigator (PI), a master's student in Guidance and Counseling, conducted the study under the supervision of a research adviser and in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. The PI also completed several training courses related to child rights and protection, strengthening her competence in handling sensitive child protection-related topics in research. Informed consent was embedded in the Google Forms questionnaire, ensuring that informants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, and option to skip questions before proceeding, with approval secured from the St. Paul University Manila Research Ethics Committee, with reference code 2026-048-IGC-CELA. Confidentiality was strictly maintained through anonymized responses, exclusion of identifying information, and the use of coded identifiers, with all data securely stored in password-protected and encrypted files accessible only to the PI and retained for five years before secure deletion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study organized according to the Statement of the Problem. The results are presented through themes and categories that emerged from the thematic analysis of the informants' responses. This is followed by a discussion that interprets

the findings in relation to existing literature, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and the provisions of the DepEd Child Protection Policy (2012). This organization allows for a comprehensive understanding of the informants' awareness, roles, implementation experiences, challenges, and stakeholder interactions in relation to the implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

Understanding of the Child Protection Policy by Guidance Counselors and Personnel in Metro Manila City

Theme 1: Foundational Understanding of the CPP. Based on the statements of the guidance personnel, the Child Protection Policy (CPP) is understood as a comprehensive framework that is GP1 and GP2: "designed to ensure that all learners are protected from any form of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, and bullying within the school environment." While some personnel reported acquiring specific knowledge of CPP provisions through self-directed learning and independent research, GP4: "I only learned about its provisions through self-research." they nevertheless recognize their professional mandate as guidance personnel to assess reports of alleged abuse and to collaborate with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in addressing such concerns GP4: "This was implemented to ensure that students have a safe space in schools, holding educators, parents, and even students accountable in actions that may harm other learners."

Furthermore, based on the statements of the guidance counselors, the CPP is understood as GC1: "a comprehensive laws, policies and programs to safeguard the children across the country especially those below 18 from any abuse, exploitation and neglect while promoting their well-being. GC2 stated that "all educational institutions are mandated to address issues about abuses, bullying" within the school setting. In addition, even among counselors with limited initial knowledge of the policy, CPP is recognized as requiring schools to establish a Child Protection Committee, According to GC3, "I only know that it mandates

that all schools should have a CPP committee dedicated for its purposes and that it supposes zero-tolerance against bullying inside the school and other forms of exploitation.” within the school environment.

Theme 2: CPP Learned Through Professional Exposure

Guidance Counsellors’ Perspective. Informants demonstrated limited but developing awareness of the Child Protection Policy prior to assuming their current roles. Two Informants, GC1 and GC3, explicitly stated that they had no prior knowledge of CPP. GC1 simply answered, “No,” when asked about prior awareness, while GC3 similarly stated, “I know very little about it.”

Despite this limited background, Informants reported acquiring some knowledge through seminars, webinars, and academic exposure. GC1 shared that she learned about CPP through seminars, while GC2 explained that her awareness came “During MA class.” Likewise, GC3 described her understanding as introductory and informal, stating: “I am vaguely familiar with it. I have learned about it in the passing from some webinars on program development.”

Guidance Personnel Perspective. Informants generally reported having limited awareness of CPP prior to entering their professional roles. GP2 directly answered “No” when asked about prior awareness of the policy. Similarly, GP3 stated: “None. I encountered it during work.”

These findings suggest that guidance personnel often develop awareness of CPP through work exposure rather than formal pre-service preparation or systematic training. The findings further revealed that both guidance counselors and guidance personnel generally developed their awareness of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) through professional experiences, seminars, webinars, graduate studies, and self-directed learning rather than through formal pre-service preparation. This finding is consistent with previous studies that identified gaps in child protection training among school

personnel. Peralta and Poja (2025) and Evidor and Villacruz (2025) found that many CPP implementers possess general awareness of the policy but demonstrate limited procedural and legal knowledge.

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Guy-Evans, 2025), the development of CPP awareness can be understood within the microsystem and mesosystem, where interactions within professional environments, educational institutions, and professional development opportunities influence knowledge acquisition. Several informants reported being aware of CPP but remained uncertain regarding procedures, committee structures, and referral mechanisms. While previous studies primarily focused on awareness levels (Aguilar & Carbonell, 2024; Peralta & Poja, 2025), the present findings suggest that practical implementation competence may require more than awareness alone.

Roles and Responsibilities in Implementing the Child Protection Policy

Theme 3: No Formal Designation in CPP Implementation. Informants consistently reported the absence of formal assignments or official structures related to CPP implementation within their institutions. GC1 answered “No” when asked if she had a specific role in CPP implementation. In addition, GP1 stated “No”, when asked if she is directly involved. Meanwhile, GP4 explicitly reported having “None” or no formal designation within the CPP committee. These responses indicate that schools may lack clearly defined CPP committees, formal role assignments, or systematic dissemination of responsibilities among guidance counselors and guidance personnel.

Theme 4: Supportive Participation in CPP. The responses revealed that guidance counselors and personnel commonly function in supportive capacities within CPP implementation, although many are not formally designated as primary implementers.

Some Informants reported partial involvement in CPP-related structures while still emphasizing secondary roles. GC1 stated “if necessary, we refer them to right agency like DSWD.” While GP4 shared: “I was included in the short meeting done by DepEd SDO along with our discipline officer.”

Although not always formally designated, Informants described active involvement in student support and case management processes. GP2 identified her responsibilities as: “Case monitoring and documentation, learner support and intervention.” GP1 emphasized holistic programming and collaboration: “To create a program tailored with the needs of our students.”

Both guidance counselors and guidance personnel described their participation in CPP implementation through counseling, referrals, monitoring, documentation, student support, and collaboration with various stakeholders. However, many informants also reported lacking formal designation within Child Protection Committees or having unclear responsibilities related to CPP implementation. This finding supports the American School Counselor Association’s ethical standards, which identify counselors as providers of preventive, developmental, and referral services rather than disciplinary authorities (The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention - American School Counselor Association [ASCA], n.d.).

Within Bronfenbrenner’s framework (Guy-Evans, 2025), this reflects the operation of the mesosystem, where interactions among guidance offices, teachers, administrators, parents, and external agencies collectively influence child protection practices.

Although previous studies have identified the expected responsibilities of counselors and school personnel in CPP implementation (Abrigo et al., 2024; Glariana, 2022), the present study suggests that many implementers perform child protection functions without understanding their formal responsibilities.

This finding suggests that the intended role outlined in the DepEd CPP may not have been consistently operationalized or communicated within schools, leading to variations in role interpretation and implementation.

Challenges and Facilitating Factors in Implementing the Child Protection Policy: Guidance Counselors’ Perspectives

Theme 5: Institutional and Cultural Barriers in Child Protection Implementation. One prominent challenge identified was parental conservatism and concern for family reputation. GC1 explained that some families are “very conservative and protective family with their names like ‘kahihiyan thing’ so they tend to solve or tend to be passive to avoid scandals.” This suggests that concerns about social image and family reputation may discourage active participation in child protection interventions.

Stigma also emerged as a significant barrier to implementation. GC3 observed that “there is still stigma amongst the students and parents about the guidance office’s role.” She further noted that “some of the students are still reluctant to share due to fear that it would affect their grades.” These responses indicate that misconceptions regarding guidance services may hinder disclosure of child protection concerns and reduce students’ willingness to seek help.

Institutional limitations likewise influenced implementation experiences. GC3 stated, “Since the school have not explicitly made any committees around CPP and I, myself, have limited grasp on its provisions, I do not know how to answer this question.” This response suggests that inadequate institutional structures and limited policy orientation may contribute to uncertainty regarding CPP implementation.

Theme 6: Collaborative and Support-Oriented Practices. Despite these challenges, guidance counselors identified several factors that facilitate CPP implementation. GC1 emphasized the importance of teamwork, stating, “Though collaboration and cooperation.” Similarly, GC2

highlighted institutional commitment by noting, "In our institution, strict implementation of this mandate." These responses suggest that collaborative efforts and organizational support help strengthen child protection initiatives.

A positive school climate also emerged as a facilitating factor. GC3 shared that "the school promotes good morals, integrity, and openness." She further explained that "the students can be more at ease to share their struggles with whom they choose amongst the school adults." These findings indicate that supportive and trusting school environments may encourage disclosure, communication, and early intervention in child protection concerns.

Challenges and Facilitating Factors in Implementing the Child Protection Policy: Guidance Personnel Perspectives

Theme 7: Challenges in Decision-Making and Case Management. Parental cooperation emerged as one of the most frequently reported challenges. GP2 explained that "one of the most common challenges is parental cooperation." She further noted that "parents may be in denial, unresponsive, or unable to fully support recommended interventions."

GP4 reported that "some parents are very defensive and unfortunately delay or have an impact on the progress of the case." These kinds of responses indicate that both case complexity and parental resistance may hinder timely intervention and resolution.

Stigma surrounding guidance services was likewise identified as a challenge. GP1 shared that there is "stigma to visit the guidance office whenever a child experiencing violation to CPP." Another challenge involved uncertainty in handling sensitive cases. GP3 admitted that "there are many gray areas." She further explained her uncertainty regarding referral decisions, stating that she sometimes struggles with "whether to contact the barangay or DSWD officer or not."

Theme 8: Helpful Approaches that Strengthened CPP Implementation. A values-based approach emerged as one helpful practice. GP2 explained that in their school, "implementing the CPP is not seen merely as compliance with a policy, but as a moral responsibility." This perspective encourages school personnel to view child protection as part of their ethical commitment to learners.

Communication strategies also contributed to successful implementation. GP2 shared that "we shifted our approach from 'reporting misconduct' to expressing concern for the learner's well-being." This approach helped frame discussions with parents around support rather than punishment, thereby improving cooperation and engagement.

Community support was also viewed as beneficial. GP1 noted that "because our community is small, it easily to make engagement."

Moreover, collaboration among stakeholders further supported implementation efforts. GP3 reported that "it is easy to collaborate with the members and to set a meeting with parents." Finally, GP4 highlighted the importance of continuous learning, stating that "a thorough seminar from DepEd or maybe from our school administration can help." This reflects the perceived value of training and professional development in strengthening CPP implementation.

Challenges: Parents as Critical Influencers in CPP Implementation. The findings revealed that parents play a significant role in shaping the implementation experiences of both guidance counselors and guidance personnel. Informants consistently described challenges involving parental denial, defensiveness, reluctance to cooperate, and concerns regarding family reputation when child protection concerns were raised. In some cases, parents were perceived as minimizing disclosures made by children or resisting recommended interventions, creating difficulties for school personnel attempting to uphold child protection measures.

This finding supports previous literature emphasizing the influence of family and cultural factors on child protection outcomes. UNICEF (2012) noted that children often remain vulnerable when family environments discourage reporting or acknowledgment of abuse. Similarly, Jimenez (2019) observed that fear, shame, and concerns about family reputation may prevent families from openly addressing child protection issues. These cultural dynamics were reflected in the experiences of the informants, particularly when concerns about “kahihyan” or family image influenced parental responses to potential child protection cases.

Through Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, parental influence can be understood within the mesosystem, which encompasses interactions between the child’s family and school environments. A notable contribution of the present study is the identification of parental cooperation as one of the most influential factors affecting implementation outcomes. While previous studies have acknowledged stakeholder involvement in child protection (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025; Glariana, 2022), the present findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how parental responses can either facilitate or prevent the progress of the implementation process.

These findings suggest that despite the DepEd CPP emphasis on parent engagement, challenges remain in achieving meaningful parental cooperation, highlighting the need for stronger parent orientation and awareness initiatives to promote understanding of CPP and encourage collaborative child protection efforts between schools and families.

Challenges: Institutional and Procedural Barriers Continue to Challenge CPP Implementation. Beyond parental influences, both guidance counselors and guidance personnel identified institutional barriers that limited effective CPP implementation. Informants reported unclear role assignments, weak organizational structures, insufficient training, procedural uncertainty, and limited

support mechanisms. Some Informants indicated that CPP responsibilities were not clearly communicated within their schools, while others described uncertainty regarding reporting procedures and referral pathways.

These findings align with previous research identifying inadequate training, weak interagency coordination, limited legal literacy, and organizational constraints as recurring challenges in CPP implementation (Evidor & Villacruz, 2025; Glariana, 2022; Peralta & Poja, 2025). Similar concerns were raised by Cervancia et al. (2019), who reported institutional nonconformities that hinder effective child protection practices within schools.

From Bronfenbrenner’s perspective, these barriers are situated primarily within the exosystem, where institutional policies, administrative decisions, and external support systems indirectly influence the experiences of school personnel. Although guidance counselors and guidance personnel may not directly control these structures, their ability to implement CPP is shaped by the adequacy of institutional support and available resources.

An important emerging finding is the uncertainty surrounding referral decisions. Several informants expressed difficulty determining when disclosures or suspicions warranted referral to external agencies such as the DSWD or barangay authorities. Although existing literature recognizes the importance of referral systems (DepEd, 2012; Glariana, 2022), relatively little attention has been given to the decision-making uncertainty experienced by the informants. This suggests that future training initiatives should focus not only on policy awareness but also on practical case assessment and referral procedures.

The finding that institutional and procedural barriers continue to challenge CPP implementation may be viewed in relation to the DepEd Child Protection Policy (2012), which states under Section 7 that school heads shall ensure the establishment of effective child

protection policies and procedures and monitor compliance with these measures. However, several informants reported the absence of clearly designated CPP committees, lack of formal role assignments, limited dissemination of responsibilities, and insufficient awareness of CPP provisions within their institutions. These experiences suggest that while the policy provides clear expectations for the establishment and monitoring of child protection mechanisms, gaps in organizational structures, communication, and policy implementation may hinder the consistent and effective application of CPP in schools.

Opportunities: Collaboration and Supportive School Cultures Facilitate CPP Implementation.

Despite the challenges encountered, both guidance counselors and guidance personnel emphasized the importance of collaboration among school personnel, parents, and external agencies. Informants consistently identified teamwork, communication, and stakeholder cooperation as important factors supporting CPP implementation.

The study also highlights the influence of institutional ethos, including religious or values-based school environments, in shaping CPP implementation. Informants noted that such cultures promote compassion, restorative practices, and openness, which indirectly strengthen child protection efforts. This reflects macrosystem influences, where deeply held institutional values and belief systems shape how policies are interpreted and applied.

This finding is consistent with Galvizo (2022), who emphasized that child protection requires shared responsibility among school stakeholders. Similarly, Glariana (2022) highlighted the importance of interagency collaboration and proactive school environments in strengthening child protection.

Within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, these collaborative relationships reflect the functioning of the mesosystem, where interactions between different social environments contribute to child well-being.

A notable contribution of the present study is the finding that collaboration often functioned as a compensatory mechanism for organizational limitations. Even in schools where CPP structures appeared unclear or underdeveloped, informal cooperation among personnel enabled child protection efforts to continue. This finding extends previous research by highlighting the adaptive strategies employed by implementers in resource-constrained environments.

The finding that collaboration and supportive school cultures facilitate CPP implementation is consistent with the DepEd Child Protection Policy (2012), which emphasizes a whole-school approach to child protection and recognizes the shared responsibility of school personnel, parents, and other stakeholders in promoting the best interests of the child. These findings indicate that when schools promote teamwork, trust, and shared responsibility, they create conditions that are more conducive to the effective implementation of the Child Protection Policy.

Influence of Institutional Culture, Personal Beliefs, and Situational Factors on CPP Implementation Experiences

Analysis of the responses revealed that the implementation experiences of both guidance counselors and guidance personnel are influenced by institutional culture, organizational structures, and personal perspectives. Informants described how the presence or absence of formal structures, school leadership practices, cultural beliefs, and individual viewpoints shape their understanding of and involvement in CPP implementation.

Theme 9: Influence of Organizational Structures and Institutional Communication.

Several informants highlighted the influence of organizational structures and institutional communication. GC3 reported that "Our school has not been explicit in designating people for the CPP committee" and further noted that "No official meetings for designation or any kind have been offered or made known to me." She

also acknowledged that “I, myself, have limited grasp on its provisions.” These responses suggest that the absence of clear organizational arrangements and policy dissemination may affect awareness and participation in CPP-related activities.

Institutional hierarchy likewise emerged as an important influence on implementation experiences. GP3 explained that “Since the chair is the school principal, we only follow her advise,” indicating that decision-making is largely influenced by school leadership. She further stated, “Because I do not have the power to go against the principal,” suggesting that organizational authority and hierarchical structures may shape how CPP-related decisions are carried out within schools.

Theme 10: Influence of Personal Beliefs and Generational Perspectives. Personal beliefs and professional perspectives also influenced informants’ approaches to child protection concerns. GP3 shared that “I often have a different perspective compared to other committee members,” reflecting differences in interpretation and decision-making among school personnel. She further emphasized her child-centered perspective, stating, “For me, I always think that there is always a possibility of abuse. I mean statements of children claiming an abuse is happening should be always taken seriously.” However, she observed that some committee members hold different views, explaining that “Sometimes they will say that new generations of kids nowadays are really sensitive.” These findings suggest that personal beliefs and generational perspectives may affect how child protection concerns are understood and addressed.

Theme 11: Cultural Influences Within and Outside the School Environment. GC1 described some families as “very conservative and protective family with their names like ‘kahihyan thing’ so they tend to solve or tend to be passive to avoid scandals.” This indicates that cultural values related to family reputation and social stigma may influence responses to

child protection concerns and affect cooperation with intervention efforts.

In addition, school culture and institutional values were perceived to shape implementation practices. GP2 explained that “Our school promotes a values-centered and faith-oriented culture,” suggesting that institutional values influence how child protection is approached within the school community. Similarly, GP4 reflected that “I think working with a Catholic school may have an influence in approaching CPP cases. The sisters have a more understanding approach.” These responses indicate that faith-based and values-oriented school environments may contribute to more supportive and compassionate approaches to child protection.

The findings suggest that CPP implementation experiences are shaped not only by policy requirements but also by the interaction of organizational structures, institutional culture, leadership dynamics, personal beliefs, and broader cultural influences. These factors collectively influence how child protection concerns are interpreted, managed, and addressed within school settings.

Moreover, guidance personnel more frequently described the influence of school leadership, committee dynamics, and organizational culture on child protection decision-making. Some informants indicated that they deferred to principals or senior personnel even when holding different perspectives regarding potential child protection concerns. This observation is consistent with the findings of Bayucca (2020) and Cervancia et al. (2019), who identified organizational and systemic barriers affecting CPP implementation. However, the present study provides a more nuanced understanding by demonstrating how institutional hierarchy can directly influence referral decisions and intervention practices.

In addition, the findings indicated that guidance personnel generally reported more direct involvement in case conferences, monitoring,

documentation, intake procedures, and anti-bullying interventions than guidance counselors. Conversely, some guidance counselors reported limited participation due to institutional arrangements or because they primarily served adult learners in higher education settings. This finding contrasts with existing literature that often position guidance counselors as central actors in child protection implementation (Abrigo et al., 2024; The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention - American School Counselor Association [ASCA], n.d.)

From a theoretical perspective, the finding that institutional culture, organizational structures, and personal perspectives shape CPP implementation experiences supports Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that individuals are influenced by multiple interconnected systems. The influence of school leadership, committee dynamics, and relationships with colleagues reflects the microsystem and mesosystem, while organizational structures and school policies operate within the ecosystem. Likewise, cultural beliefs, religious values, and societal perspectives regarding child protection are reflected in the macrosystem. Taken together, these findings suggest that CPP implementation is shaped by the interaction of factors across different ecological systems rather than by individual actions alone.

While the DepEd CPP provides a formal framework for implementation, the manner in which it is carried out appears to be influenced by existing organizational hierarchies, school culture, and individual beliefs. Consequently, implementation experiences may vary across institutions depending on how school leadership, communication practices, and institutional values shape the application of CPP provisions in practice.

Influence of School Personnel and External Stakeholders on CPP Implementation Experiences

Theme 12: Stakeholder Collaboration and Engagement Influence CPP Implementation. The

responses revealed that the implementation experiences of guidance counselors and guidance personnel are significantly influenced by various stakeholders, including parents, school personnel, external agencies, and the community. Informants described how these stakeholders either facilitate or hinder the implementation of child protection measures within their institutions.

Parents emerged as one of the most influential stakeholders in CPP implementation. Several informants emphasized the importance of parental involvement in supporting interventions and addressing child protection concerns. GC3 shared, "I have worked with parents a lot," and explained that she had "spoken with them" regarding student concerns. However, parental engagement was not always positive. GP2 described that "one of the biggest challenges was parent engagement," noting that "the parent was defensive and felt that the school was labeling the child." Similarly, GP4 observed that "some parents are very defensive" These responses suggest that while parents are important partners in child protection efforts, parental resistance and defensiveness may affect the implementation of interventions.

School personnel also played a significant role in shaping CPP implementation experiences. GC3 emphasized the value of "collaborating with the admin and teachers to help the child," highlighting the importance of coordination among school stakeholders. Likewise, GP3 explained that "the perspectives of other committee members mainly influences the implementation," indicating that decisions regarding child protection are often shaped through interactions with colleagues and committee members. She further shared that "during these difficult situations I often engage in discussion with my supervisor (RGC) and colleagues," demonstrating the importance of professional consultation and support in managing child protection concerns.

External agencies were identified as important sources of assistance and intervention. GC1

stated, "We refer them to right agency like DSWD," while GC3 explained that she had "referred them and their children to specialists." These responses suggest that referrals to external organizations and professionals serve as important mechanisms for addressing cases that require specialized services. At the same time, GP3 highlighted the influence of these agencies on decision-making when she expressed uncertainty regarding "whether to contact the baranggay or dswd officer or not."

Lastly, the community was found to influence implementation experiences. GP1 noted that "because our community is small, it easy to make engagement," suggesting that the close-knit nature of the community facilitates communication and stakeholder participation in child protection efforts.

The finding that stakeholder collaboration and engagement influences CPP implementation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement in child protection efforts. Existing literature has highlighted the roles of parents, teachers, school administrators, and external agencies in creating safe and supportive environments for children and ensuring effective responses to child protection concerns (Abrigo et al., 2024; Bayucca, 2020; Cervancia et al., 2019).

Similar to these studies, informants in the present study described collaboration with parents, school personnel, specialists, and government agencies as essential components of CPP implementation. However, the findings also revealed that stakeholder influence is not always facilitative, as parental resistance, differing perspectives among school personnel, and uncertainty regarding referrals sometimes complicated implementation efforts. This suggests that stakeholder engagement may function both as a facilitating factor and a challenge in CPP implementation.

This finding reflects Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that individuals are influenced by interactions

within multiple interconnected systems. The involvement of parents, teachers, administrators, guidance personnel, external agencies, and community members demonstrates how child protection implementation is shaped by relationships across the child's microsystem and mesosystem.

Likewise, the finding is consistent with the DepEd Child Protection Policy (2012), which promotes a collaborative approach to child protection through the participation of various stakeholders, including parents, school personnel, and external agencies. The experiences shared by informants suggest that effective CPP implementation is strengthened when these stakeholders actively cooperate and engage in child protection efforts.

Chronosystem Reflections: Evolution of Child Protection Policy Implementation in Philippine Schools. The Chronosystem is also reflected in the broader development of child protection efforts within Philippine schools since the institutionalization of the CPP through DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012. As schools continue to adapt to changing educational contexts, increasing awareness of children's rights, and emerging child protection concerns, implementation practices likewise continue to evolve.

Conclusion. CPP implementation is influenced by both barriers and facilitating factors. Challenges such as parental resistance, stigma, procedural uncertainty, and institutional limitations may hinder implementation, while collaboration, supportive school cultures, stakeholder engagement, and continuous professional development contribute positively to implementation efforts.

Recommendation. Future researchers may use this study as a foundational reference for further research on child protection policy implementation, school counseling, and child rights in the Philippine context. Moreover, they may conduct more in-depth studies exploring the experiences of guidance counselors and

guidance personnel in other regions of the Philippines. Additional studies may also examine the perspectives of teachers, administrators, parents, and students regarding CPP implementation. Furthermore, future research may evaluate the effectiveness of existing CPP committees, referral systems, intervention programs, training initiatives, and institutional reforms across different educational settings.

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